

ACTS

1:1-15:35

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MEMPHIS

GRACE CHURCH

TELEIOS ACADEMY

The Greek word *Teleios* (τέλειος; pronounced: TELL-eye-OS) means, “mature” or “complete.” The Holy Spirit uses this word several times in the New Testament to describe the ultimate goal of the Christian life. For example:

- **Colossians 1:28** – “We proclaim [Jesus], admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man *complete* (Teleios) in Christ.”
- **Ephesians 4:13** – “...until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a *mature* (Teleios) man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”
- **Hebrews 5:14** – “But solid food is for the *mature* (Teleios), who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil”
- **Matthew 5:48** – “Therefore you are to be *perfect* (Teleios), as your heavenly Father is *perfect* (Teleios)”

God has ordained for His people mature in Christ through prayer-saturated immersion in His Word. To do so alongside God’s Spirit-filled people amplifies our opportunity to derive the maximum profit. Thus, Grace’s “Teleios Academy” bible studies could be used by individuals, they are designed to guide God’s people through God’s Word *together*. Our aim is to be more and more *Teleios* (mature) in Christ as a result.

May it be so!

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“For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints” (Hebrews 6:10).

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Acts 1-15

“The Beginnings of the New Testament Church”

Key Verse: Acts 1:8

The Gospel – From Jerusalem to Samaria

Acts 1:1-8:40

I. Introduction to Acts

Acts 1:1-5; (Luke 1:1-4)

II. Waiting in *Jerusalem*

Acts 1:6-26 (Luke 24)

III. Pentecost

Acts 2:1-47

IV. Growth and Persecution

Acts 3:1-4:31

V. More Growth and Increased Attack

Acts 4:32-6:7

VI. Stephen: Ministry and Martyrdom

Acts 6:8-8:3

VII. Persecution Leads to Expansion
(*Judea, Samaria*): Philip the Evangelist

Acts 8:4-40

Foundations for World Evangelism

Acts 9:1-12:25

VIII. The Conversion of Saul

Acts 9:1-31

IX. The Conversion of Cornelius

Acts 9:32-11:18

X. Greater Expansion and Opposition

Acts 11:19-12:25

XI. The First Missionary Journey I

Acts 13:1-52

XII. The First Missionary Journey II

Acts 14:1-28

XII. The Jerusalem Council

Acts 15:1-35

Introduction

"God still speaks through what he has spoken... Nothing is more necessary for the life, health and growth of Christians than that they should hear what the Spirit is saying to them through his ancient-yet ever modern-Word."

J. A. Motyer, J. R. W. Stott, editors. *The Bible Speaks Today Series*, 3

Author

Luke, "the beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14) and a Greek convert to Christianity, is generally credited with writing the Book of Acts as well as the Gospel known by his name. Luke went with the Apostle Paul on his second missionary journey and joined him at the end of the third missionary journey. He accompanied Paul to Rome and was with him during his two imprisonments there (See Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11). As you read Acts, look for the word "we," indicating Luke was with Paul.

Both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts begin with a greeting to "Theophilus." The name means "Friend of God," or "One who is loved by God." Theophilus may have been a high ranking Roman official, but no one knows for certain.

Purpose

According to the first two verses of the Gospel of Luke, his intent was "to compile an account of the things accomplished among us just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word." Luke further explains that plan in Acts 1:1-2: "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen" (See Luke 6:14-16).

The Book of Acts begins as Luke's Gospel ends—the resurrection and ascension of Christ (about 33 A.D). For the rest of Acts, Luke demonstrates that it is Christ, through the Holy Spirit, who is continuing to "do and teach" even after his resurrection. John

Stott cited Henry J. Cadbury, who said that Luke regarded the two books as "a single continuous work."

Robert L. Reymond adds, "Though Luke's second volume has been known as 'The Acts of the Apostles' since the late second century, I sincerely doubt that Luke himself would have named it so...This book is not a record of human greatness; it is an account of the geographic spread and growth of the divine Word, telling the story of the men involved only because and in so far as men are instrumental in the spread of that divine Word. If it is a book of "acts" at all, I think Luke intended his readers to see it as a record of the missionary activity and words of the exalted Christ through the creative power of his Spirit and his Word (1:1)" (Reymond, 31-32).

In fact, of the apostles, only the activities of Peter, John and Paul are recorded in Acts. The names of the other apostles are given in the first chapter and the death of James is mentioned briefly (Acts 1:13; 12:2).

Of Acts, Ray Stedman says it is " the book that reveals the power in the church. Whenever a church in our own century begins to lose its power, to turn dull and drab in its witness, it needs to rediscover the book of Acts. It is the story of the Holy Spirit's entering into a small group of believers, filling them with power and enthusiasm from on high—and exploding them like a shower of flaming embers around the world, igniting new fires and starting new churches. That is how the gospel spread like wildfire in the first century AD" (Stedman, 537-38).

Overview

F. F. Bruce says, "The extension of the good news in the power of the Spirit is the theme of Acts" (Bruce, 30).

The first twelve chapters of Acts describe the events surrounding the early days of the church. The emphasis is on how Christ began to fulfill the promise of Acts 1:8. His followers would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Twelve of them, called apostles, were men "who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (Luke 1:1-2; See also Acts 1:21-22). These early chapters focus attention on the Apostle Peter and his evangelistic ministry to the Jews. In chapters 9-12, Luke shows how Peter became convinced the Lord intended the Gospel to be preached to Gentiles as well.

Then he tells how the Lord brought about the conversion of Paul, who would carry out the plan that had been foretold by the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; Luke 2:28-32; Acts 13:44-48). From Acts 13 on, the Apostle Paul, missionary to the Gentiles, is the principal human figure. This does not mean Peter and the other apostles

stopped working to spread the Gospel, but that Luke's emphasis shifted to evangelism among the Gentiles.

Acts 13:1-21:18 records three missionary journeys, during which time the Apostle Paul planted churches and wrote letters to warn, exhort and encourage: Galatians, 1, 2 Thessalonians, 1, 2 Corinthians, and Romans. Chapter 15, which divides the first missionary journey from the other two, records the critically important Jerusalem Council in which Peter, Paul and James (the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church) played major roles.

The book concludes with the arrest of the Apostle Paul in Jerusalem, his trials before the Jewish Council and then before Felix, Festus and Agrippa. It traces his journey to Rome where he was imprisoned under house arrest (about 63 AD). During this first imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote "the Prison Letters": Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon.

Week 1

Acts 1:1-26

WEEK 1, DAY 1

ACTS 1:1-2

1. Ask the Lord to illumine His Word as you spend time with Him today. Then, read and meditate on Luke 1:1, Luke 24:51, Acts 1:1-2. What stood out to you in one of those verses?
2. Neither Luke nor Acts names the author. What links these two books together, implying they were written by the same person?
3. For what reason did Luke write his Gospel?
4. The book of Acts is often called "The Acts of the Apostles." What might be a better title according to Luke 1:1 and Acts 1:1-2, 8? Why?
5. What important event is recorded in both books? Give the verses.

WEEK 1, DAY 4

ACTS 1:9-14

1. Read Acts 1:9-14 like a lost person can't. Fellowship with God as you read.

2. Comparing Jesus' ascension with His return (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 1:7), what is:
 - a. The same?

 - b. Different?

3. Who were the “two men” in verse ten? (See Luke 24:4, John 20:12). What did they ask and say?

4. How are you spending your time as you wait for the Lord's certain return?

5. Compare the names of the apostles present in the upper room with what's found in Luke 6:13-16.
 - a. Who is missing and why?

 - b. Who else was in the room?

6. How did the believers spend their time?

7. What phrase describes their attitude? Give the verse.

8. Are you praying "continually/constantly" while you wait for the Lord's promises to be fulfilled?

Week 1

Bible Study Notes

Acts 1:1-26

ACTS 1:1-5

In the forty-day period following the resurrection, Jesus appeared to many, including the remaining eleven of twelve disciples (apostles) He had chosen (vv 1-3, 13; Luke 24). He ate with them and showed them His physical body with the nail prints in His hand and His sword-pierced side. Things He said and did brought them to remembrance of what He had said and done before. They were convinced (John 21:12; Acts 10:40,41). During that time Jesus continued to teach about the "Kingdom of God." R. Kent Hughes says, "Jesus' message from the very first was 'the good news of the kingdom of God'" (Hughes², 152; See Luke 4:43).

Just before His ascension, Jesus brought these eleven men together and commanded them to remain in Jerusalem until time for the Holy Spirit to come, which He had promised would happen. (vv 4-5; See also Isaiah 32:15, 44:3-5; Ezekiel 11:19-20, 36:25-27; John 16:5-15).

John Stott says, "It appears...that Jesus' two main topics of conversation between his resurrection and his ascension were the kingdom of God and the Spirit of God. It seems probable that he related them to each other, for certainly the prophets had often associated them" (Stott, 40).

Why wait? And, why in Jerusalem? Peterson says, "The apostles were to *wait* because Jesus' heavenly exaltation had to take place before the promised gift of the Spirit could be poured out (2:33). [Ed. note: See also John 16:7]. Jerusalem was especially associated with the promise of God to rule over his people and bless them through the kings of David's line (cf. 2 Samuel 7:1-29; 1 Kings 8:1-21; Psalm 78:67-71; 132:11-18). So the city of David became a focal point of predictions about the future of the nation as a whole (e.g. Isaiah 40:1-2; 65:18-25; Zechariah 8)." (Peterson,107).

Acts 1:6-8

The apostles knew the Old Testament prophecies of a divine kingdom (See Isaiah 24:23; Daniel 2:44, 7:13-14; Obadiah 21; Zechariah 14:9) and had heard Jesus' teaching about it. But, they wondered if the long-awaited kingdom would be restored to Israel immediately (vv 6,7).

Bruce says, "From the earliest times in Israel, God was acknowledged as king (cf. Ex. 15:18). His kingship is universal (Ps. 103:19), but is manifested most clearly where men and women recognize it in practice by doing his will. In Old Testament times his kingship was specially manifested on earth in the nation of Israel: to this nation he made known

his will and he called it into covenant relationship with himself (cf. Ps. 147:20)" (Bruce, 32).

According to Stott , "The mistake they made was to misunderstand both the nature of the kingdom and the relation between the kingdom and the spirit....they were expecting a political, and territorial kingdom...a national kingdom...and were expecting its immediate establishment." Instead, he says this kingdom would be spiritual, international and gradual (Stott, pp. 41-43).

Bruce continues, "At Christ's first coming the age to come invaded this present age; at his coming in glory the age to come will have altogether superseded this present age" (Bruce, 33). This theological concept of "already" and "not yet" was proposed by Princeton theologian Gerhardus Vos early in the 20th century, who believed that we live in the present age, the 'now', and await the 'age to come'.

Jesus' response contains both a statement and a promise. The statement: "It is not for you to know " (Acts 1:7). (See also Deut. 29:29; Matt. 24:6; Mark 13:32) God will keep His promises in His time and in His way. It is not our mission to figure out what God is going to do. Instead, the two-part promise of Acts 1:8 ("you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" and "you will be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth") identifies our mission and sets the stage for the rest of the book of Acts.

R. Kent Hughes says, "What a call — to be personal witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ! That is too much — it is too hard! And to demand that it be to the ends of the earth — impossible! That is why our Lord prefaced the statement with a promised provision of *power*" (Hughes¹, 19) [emphasis added]. Bruce adds, "As Jesus had been anointed at his baptism with the Holy Spirit and power, so his followers were now to be similarly anointed and enabled to carry on his work" (Bruce, 36).

Peterson says "The promise of the Spirit here specifically recalls Isaiah 32:15, which speaks of the desolation of Israel that continues until 'the Spirit is poured on us from on high'" [See also verses 12-14; Luke 24:49]. Continuing, he says, "The second element...'you will be my witnesses'...finds its closest parallel to Isaiah 43:10 (cf.43:12; 44:8). Isaiah envisages that the renewed people of God will be witnesses to the nations of the salvation of God when the new age arrives" (Peterson, 110-1112). Then, says Peterson, "There are three stages in the outworking of the 'new exodus' foretold by Isaiah: the dawn of salvation in Jerusalem, the reconstitution and reunification of Israel (signified here by in all Judea and Samaria), and the inclusion of the Gentiles within the people of God" (Peterson, 113) [See 1 Kings 12:1-21; Isaiah 11:10; 42:6,7; Isaiah 49:5-6].

Hughes says, "We are to be '*witnesses*' for Christ! This is the recurring message of Acts." He adds, "Our Lord has laid down in the clearest terms the mission for those who are to follow him. This is the mission of the church that would dare to call itself New Testament — the mandate of apostolic Christianity" (Hughes¹, 15).

The words "witness" and "power" are found numerous times in the Book of Acts. As you read, circle the word and keep a running total of occurrences.

Acts 1:9-11

Acts 1:9 says, " And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight." "These things" refers to Jesus' words of Acts 1:7-8. As soon as Jesus was no longer visible, two men (angels) appeared and stood next to the apostles. The angels told them, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Stott says, "'This same Jesus' [Ed note: the KJV, NIV add the word "same"] certainly indicates that his coming will be personal, the Eternal Son still possessing his glorified human nature and body. And 'in the same way' indicates that his coming will also be visible and glorious...Yet there will also be important differences between his going and his coming. Although his coming will be personal, it will not be private like his ascension. Only the eleven apostles saw him go, but when he comes 'every eye will see him'...And in place of a localized coming...it will be 'like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other' " (Stott, 50). [See Luke 17:24]

Wayne Grudem says, "Jesus often spoke about his return. 'You also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect' (Matthew 24:44)...Paul taught, '*The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God*' (1 Thessalonians 4:16)...The author of Hebrews wrote that Christ '*will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him* (Hebrews 9:28)' "(Grudem, 1092).

According to Grudem, these and other passages "predict a sudden return of Christ that will be dramatic and visible ('He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him,' Rev 1:7). These passages are far too explicit to allow the idea (once popular in liberal Protestant circles) that Christ himself will not return, but simply that the spirit of Christ, meaning an acceptance of his teaching and an imitation of his lifestyle of love, would increasingly return to the earth. It is not his teaching or his style of conduct, but '*the Lord himself*' who will descend from heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:16)" (Grudem, 1092).

But, Grudem asks rhetorically, "does this mean that we should not undertake long-term projects?...It is precisely for this reason that Jesus does not allow us to know the actual time of his return...To 'be ready' for Christ's return (Matthew 24:24) is to be faithfully obeying him in the present, actively engaged in whatever work he has called us to" (Grudem, 1093).

Stott says that the apostles had "committed two opposite errors, which both had to be corrected. First, they were hoping for political power (the restoration of the kingdom to Israel). Secondly, they were gazing up into the sky (preoccupied with the heavenly Jesus). Both were false fantasies. The first is the error of the politician, who dreams of establishing Utopia on earth. The second is the error of the pietist, who dreams only of heavenly bliss" (Stott, p. 51). He says the angels' message implied: "You have seen him go. You will see him come. But between that going and coming there must be another. The Spirit must come, and you must go - into the world for Christ" (Stott, 51).

Acts 1:12-14

Following God's instructions is just as important as living by His promises. This is true even when we don't know why (See Hebrews 11:8). Jesus said not to leave Jerusalem, so the eleven men returned there and waited. And while they waited, they prayed continually (vv. 12-14; See also 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

The eleven were joined by others, making a total of 120 in all (Acts 1:15). These others included Mary, the mother of Jesus, other women and the half brothers of Jesus.

According to Conrad Gempf, "The list of disciples is identical to the one in Luke 6:13-16, with the obvious omission of Judas Iscariot. The presence of *the women and the Lord's family* are important to Luke.

The Eleven and the women had been followers in the gospel accounts, but Jesus' family had been less enthusiastic (Mark 3:21-35; Luke 8:1-21, see also Luke 23:49, 24:10). Jesus' *brothers* included James, who, according to Paul, had seen the risen Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7) and who would become an important figure in the church during the period covered by Acts" (Gempf, 1070).

The *ESV Study Bible* says, "The **women** in the upper room likely included those who ministered to Jesus' followers (Luke 8:2-3), accompanied them from Galilee (Luke 23:55), and witnessed the crucifixion and empty tomb (Luke 23:49, 55-56; 24:2-11). Jesus had four **brothers**—James, Joses, Judas, and Simon (Mark 6:3). The main activity in the upper room was **prayer**. Jesus had told them 'to wait for the promise of the father' (Acts 1:4), but 'waiting' on God and prayer are closely related in several places in the OT, and therefore it is likely that they were praying constantly that the promised Spirit would descend" (ESV, 2081).

Hughes says, "In a word, the apostolic attitude that preceded the Holy Spirit's coming was *expectancy*. They stayed together because of one thing: they believed that the Holy Spirit was going to come upon them and they were going to receive promised power. They expected the infilling of the Holy Spirit. They had absolutely no doubt about

it. No wavering. No discussion." (Hughes¹, 24-25) (See also Numbers 23:19; Deuteronomy 15:6; Joshua 21:45; I Kings 8:20; Psalm 145:13).

With God, a promise made is a promise kept. Are you familiar with all the promises of scripture that are yet to be fulfilled? Are you praying continually/constantly and expectantly while you wait?

Acts 1:15-26

Acts 1:15 says 120 persons were present in the room. Is there a significance to that number? Gempf says, "This is the smallest number in Jewish tradition for a population that could have its own 'council.'" (Gempf, 1070). According to Matthew Henry, "Here was the beginning of the New Testament church; this hundred and twenty was the grain of mustard-seed that grew into a tree, the leaven that leavened the whole lump" (Henry, 1639; See Luke 13:18-21).

At this meeting, Peter stood up. Quoting Psalm 109:8, he declared that the eleven apostles needed to find a replacement for Judas. Peterson says, "The defection of Judas made it essential to find someone who would be true to his calling this time!" (Peterson, 128). The qualifications for such a man were that he had "accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection" (vv. 21-22). [Ed. note: Peterson states, "In his own distinctive way, Paul could qualify for apostleship because he had seen the risen Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8-9). Yet he could not count himself as 'one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us' " (Peterson, p. 126).

Peterson explains , "The desire to make up the number of the Twelve was presumably related to the fact that Jesus intended them to be leaders of a restored Israel (cf. Luke 22:14-30; Matthew 19:28). They could not be Messiah's witnesses unless they represented in their number the ideal of a reunited and renewed people of God, Israel in its fullness, not a remnant (cf. Jeremiah 31:1-34; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Revelation 21:12,14)...being a witness of the resurrection is the heart of the matter. Consequently, the resurrection assumes a central place in the apostolic preaching (e.g. Acts 2-24-36; 4:33; 13:30-37)...they could guarantee that it was the same Jesus who had led his disciples during his ministry that now led the Church as her exalted Lord" (Peterson, 126).

Two men were identified as qualified candidates: Joseph called Barsabbas and Matthias. After praying, the apostles cast lots and the lot fell to Matthias. Peterson says, "This was not a democratic election, with people casting votes. It was a traditional way of determining God's will in Judaism (cf. Leviticus 16:8; Numbers 26:55; Jonah

1:7-8...)...given the belief that 'the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord' (Proverbs 16:33). Even the fall of the dice is in the hands of the Sovereign Lord" (Peterson, 138).

Richards says, "This is the last report of determining God's will by casting lots. After the Spirit came, there was no need." (Richards, p. 708). Peterson agrees and says, "From Luke's later emphasis on the Spirit's role in giving wisdom, guidance, and direction, it would appear that the apostolic example on this occasion is not to be followed by Christians today" (Peterson, 129).

To whom or what do you depend for wisdom, guidance and direction in every circumstance of your life?

As we will see as we continue to journey through the Book of Acts, the early Christians learned to trust the Lord for everything. The words to this hymn describe the incredible trials and supreme joy found by those who followed the Lord Jesus Christ as he told them to do (Luke 9:23; 21:12-19).

Week 2

Acts 2:1-47

WEEK 2, DAY 1

ACTS 2:1-47

1. Read the Bible Study Notes for Week 1 (pp. 12-18)
2. Read and meditate on Acts 2. Make notes below of anything that stands out to you, or questions you have after reading the chapter.

WEEK 2, DAY 2

ACTS 2:1-13

1. Converse with God concerning what He has revealed in Acts 2:1-13.

2. On the Day of Pentecost, what did the believers hear and what did they see?

3. Scripturally, what is the symbolic significance of the following:
 - a. Wind? (See Ezekiel 37:9-10, 14; John 3:8)

 - b. Fire? (See Exodus 3:2,6; 19:17-19; Isaiah 4:5; Matthew 3:11)

4. What happened to the believers, and what did they do?

5. When the crowd gathered:
 - a. How did most of the people respond?

 - b. How did others react?

WEEK 2, DAY 3

ACTS 2:14-21

1. Prayerfully read Acts 2:14-21, and make a few brief notes below.

2. What do you think the importance is of “the eleven” standing with Peter? (See Acts 1:21,22)

3. To whom did Peter speak? Give the verse.

4. What powerful tool did Peter use to answer the crowd's question in verse 12?

5. Using Joel’s prophecy of the “Last Days,” Peter attributes the phenomena that they were seeing to the Holy Spirit (See v. 33).
 - a. On whom was the Holy Spirit poured?

 - b. Who prophesied?

6. Which verse is also quoted and further explained by the apostle Peter (Romans 10:9-13)? What does it mean to ‘Call upon the Name of the Lord?’ (see 4:12; Philippians 2:9-11).

WEEK 2, DAY 4

ACTS 2:22-36

1. Ask the Lord to reveal Himself to you as you read Acts 2:22-36.
2. According to Peter's gospel message, who (Give verses for your answers):
 - a. Witnessed Jesus' miracles, wonders and signs?
 - b. Planned His crucifixion?
 - c. Nailed Him to a cross?
 - d. Raised Him from the dead?
 - e. Prophesied His resurrection?
 - f. Saw the resurrected Jesus?
 - g. Gave Him the promise of the Holy Spirit?
 - h. Witnessed His pouring out the Holy Spirit on the believers?
3. How did Jesus fulfill David's prophecy? (Give the verse[s])
4. Comparing v. 36 with vv. 14 and 22, what did Peter want his audience to know?
5. What is the meaning of the two titles Peter attributes to Jesus? (See Psalm 2:2, 110:1; Joel 2:21; John 1:41; Acts 4:26; 10:38; Romans 10:13; Philippians 2:11)

WEEK 2, DAY 5

ACTS 2:37-41

1. Read Acts 2:37-41 with a prayer-filled heart.
2. What was the crowd's initial reaction to Peter's sermon? (Give the verse)
 - a. What does it mean, " they were pierced to the heart" (NASB), or "cut to the heart" (ESV or NIV)?
 - b. What in Peter's sermon would have especially pierced them to their hearts.
 - c. What did they ask?
 - d. What was Peter's answer?
3. Challenge: What did Peter mean by "in the name of Jesus Christ?" (See Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:31-33; Isaiah 9:6; Luke 2:11; Joel 2:32; Acts 4:12; 5:31; 10:43; John 1:11-12)
4. How do the following verses relate to Peter's exhortation in verse 40? How do they relate to your life?
 - a. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18
 - b. Romans 12:2, 9, 21
 - c. 1 Peter 1:13-16
 - d. Revelation 19:4-5
5. What was the result of Peter's sermon? (Give the verse)

Week 2

Bible Study Notes

Acts 2:1-47

ACTS 2:1-13

In New Testament times, Pentecost was a Jewish festival celebrated 50 days following the Feast of the Passover. The name, "Pentecost" is the Greek word for "fiftieth." Known as the "Feast of Weeks" in the Old Testament, its observance was commanded by the Lord following the exodus from Egypt (Leviticus 23:15-21; Deuteronomy 16:9-12). The purpose of the feast was to remember God's abundant provision. Generally, fifty days (the "Weeks") passed from Passover until the harvesting of wheat so the commemoration can be compared with our "Thanksgiving." It was also called "First Fruits" so the timing of this festival with the coming of the Holy Spirit was significant. R. Kent Hughes says, "It was also fitting because by the time of Christ Pentecost was considered the anniversary of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, and thus it provided a perfect opportunity to contrast the giving of the law with the giving of the Spirit" (Hughes, 30).

Calculating the number of days between Passover and Pentecost, we can see that the believers had been waiting ten days for the promised Holy Spirit to be sent (50 days minus 40 days between the resurrection and ascension).

"Suddenly," Luke writes, something supernatural happened! Actually, there were three somethings:

- *Wind*—Acts 2:2
- *Fire*—Acts 2:3, 19
- *Filling of the Holy Spirit*—Acts 2:4, 17, 18, 33, 38

First, according to Acts 2:2, "a noise *like* rushing wind" came from Heaven [emphasis added]. Peterson says, "In scripture, wind is an emblem for the Spirit or creative breath... of God (e.g., 2 Samuel 22:16; Psalm 33:6; Ezekiel 37:9-10; Jeremiah 3:8)" (Peterson, 132). (See also Genesis 2:7). The Hebrew, "*ruach*," and the Greek, "*pneuma*," both meaning "breath," have been used for the Holy Spirit in scripture.

Secondly, they saw "tongues as of fire" that seemed to land on them (v. 3) [emphasis added]. In the Old Testament, fire is a symbol of God's presence (Exodus 3:2-4, 13:21, 19:18, 24:17; Isaiah 66:15), sometimes specifically associated with purification or judgment (Isaiah 4:4; Jeremiah 7:20; Joel 2:30-31; Malachi 3:2-4, 4:1). John the Baptist had prophesied that when the Messiah came he would baptize Israel "with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16).

The noise was *not* a rushing wind and the tongues were *not* fire. However, Luke did not use a simile ("like," "as of") to describe what happened next: "All of them were filled

with the Holy Spirit" (v.4). This was the initial, permanent indwelling/abiding of the Spirit that Jesus had promised (See John 7:39; 14:16-17; 16:7-15; Acts 1:8; 9:17; Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; Colossians 1:27).

Bruce says, "The spiritual baptism foretold by John and promised afresh by the Lord [1:8] was now an accomplished fact. Being filled with the Spirit was an experience to be repeated on several occasions (cf. 4:8, 31), but the baptism in the Spirit which the believing community now experienced was an event which took place once for all" (Bruce, 51).

The Spirit was active in the Old Testament also, inspiring and enabling God's servants (Judges 13:25, 14:6; 2 Samuel 23:2; Isaiah 61:1-3). And the Holy Spirit inspired Peter's profound confession that "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16-17). But, this enabling came from without and was temporary (Judges 16:20). It was not until Pentecost that the Holy Spirit came permanently to indwell God's children (John 1:12; Romans 8:9). Then receiving his Spirit -- is not a simple paradigm that can be applied to others" (Peterson, 142). Out of the filling (or baptism) of the Holy Spirit came a miracle of speech ("enabled by the Spirit"). Hughes says, "In the Old Testament, inspired speech was regularly associated with the Spirit's coming upon God's servants, as in the case of Eldad and Medad (Numbers 11:26-29) and of Saul (1 Samuel 10:6-12)" (Hughes¹, 32)

Now, according to Hughes, "they spoke as clearly and powerfully as the OT prophets" (Hughes¹, 31). Even as this event was happening, Jews from all over the world were in Jerusalem for the Pentecost celebration. This number included those Jews whose ancestors had been scattered during the different dispersions, including those brought upon them by Assyria and Babylon (See 2 Kings 24:8-15; 2 Chronicles 36:15-30). Acts 2:9-11 names the widespread locations these Jews called their "native lands." These lands do not include all the known world of the time. However, they do remind us of the "Table of Nations" recorded in Genesis when, after the flood, God began to re-populate the earth through the three sons of Noah: Shem, Ham and Japheth (See Genesis 9:1; 10:1-31).

Suddenly, something amazing was going on and it got the attention of those outside the little group of believers. The news spread. A crowd gathered. As they came close, each of these Jews was able to hear and understand, in his own language, the disciples declaring the wonders of God (v. 8). This was amazing! Spurgeon says of the believers, "These men, far from being able to speak many languages, could not even speak one correctly. The Galilean dialect was a corruption of the true Jewish language, so that the Galileans were always the objects of sneers. So it was strange that they were able to speak in foreign languages" (Spurgeon, 248).

Stott says, "Ever since the early church fathers, commentators have seen the blessing of Pentecost as a deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel. At Babel human languages were confused and the nations were scattered; in Jerusalem the

language barrier was supernaturally overcome as a sign that the nations would now be gathered together in Christ, prefiguring the great day when the redeemed company will be 'drawn' from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Stott, 68; See Genesis 10:32-11:9; Revelation 5:9).

How did the onlookers respond? Some were confused and wondered what was happening. Others mocked and said the disciples were drunk! Peterson says, "This is a reminder that the miraculous is not self-authenticating, nor does it inevitably and uniformly convince. There must also be the preparation of the heart and the proclamation of the message if miracles are to accomplish their full purpose" (Peterson, 138).

Peterson continues, "Although a larger group than the Twelve appears to have received the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost, it was *Peter who soon stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd*" (Peterson, 139). As we saw in chapter one, it was important that the eleven testified to their agreement with what Peter was about to say. The importance of citing more than one witness can be traced to the Old Testament. God commanded that an event must be witnessed by two or more persons (Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15; See also Matthew 18:16).

ACTS 2:14-21

Peter spoke to those who seriously questioned and those who cynically mocked. What was happening was something Moses had wished for all the people (Numbers 11:29). What Moses had wished, the prophet, Joel, had predicted (Joel 2: 28-32).

Richards says, "Peter explains what has happened by quoting a prophecy which is being partially fulfilled. The fact that the ultimate fulfillment of O.T. prophecies was often foreshadowed by partial fulfillment was understood by Peter's listeners. The elements of the prophecy he emphasizes are (1) the pouring out of the Spirit, which takes place "before" (no time specified!) the Day of the Lord comes, and (2) during which 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' " (v. 21) (Richards, 709).

Hughes says, "The high point of the exalted structure of the Lord's Prayer [Ed. note: See Luke 11:13]...is the gift of the Holy Spirit, who came upon Jesus' disciples just as he promised...Believers no longer had to pray to receive the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:13). Nevertheless, we still pray for the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives: 'I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better' (Ephesians 1:17; cf. 3:14-21). In all our praying, the greatest gift is the fullness of the Holy Spirit" (Hughes², 424) [Emphasis added].

Peterson says, "Although the words '*and they will prophesy*' occur only in the first verse of the original oracle (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17), they are used again in Acts 2:18. This addition makes it abundantly clear that the Spirit has been poured out to enable all God's people to *prophesy* (cf. Numbers 11:29) --young and old, male and female" (Peterson, p. 141). The *NASB Study Bible* says, "At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was released throughout the entire world--to men, women, slaves, Jews, Gentiles. Now everyone can receive the Spirit. This was a revolutionary thought for first-century Jews" (NASB, 1889).

Peterson notes that "Seeing '*visions*' (*horaseis*) and dreaming '*dreams*' (*enyphnia*) were prophetic activities in the OT." He adds that "only a few people are specifically designated as prophets (11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10) though others are described as 'prophesying' (19:6; 21:9)" (Peterson, 142).

Stott says "Luther understood prophecy here as 'the knowledge of God through Christ which the Holy Spirit kindles and makes to burn through the word of the gospel...' So, Stott concludes, "it is this universal knowledge of God through Christ by the Spirit which is the foundation of the universal commission to witness (Acts 1:8). Because we know him, we must make him known" (Stott, 74).

The quotation from Joel in Acts 2:21 ends with "And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (See also Romans 10:10-13).

ACTS 2:22-36

Hughes says that Peter's sermon is, "perhaps, aside from our Lord's sermons, the greatest ever preached. " He calls it "the inaugural sermon of the age of grace" (Hughes¹, 37).

Richards notes that "Peter's sermon here and other sermons in Acts contain critical elements in common:

- Jesus is a historic Person 2:22
- Jesus was crucified and has risen 2:23-24
- All this was prophesied 2:25-35
- Jesus is God's Messiah 2:36
- All who turn and believe will be forgiven and given the Holy Spirit 2:37-38

These themes remain basic elements of the proclamation of the Gospel in our day" (Richards, 709) [See also Acts 3:13-26; 4:10-12; 5:30-32; 10:36-43; 13:23-41].

Bruce supports this assessment: "The early apostolic preaching regularly comprises four elements (not always in the same order): (1) the announcement that the age of fulfillment has arrived; (2) an account of the ministry, death, and triumph of Jesus; (3) citation of Old Testament scriptures whose fulfillment in these events proves Jesus to be the one to whom they pointed forward; (4) a call to repentance" (Bruce, 63).

Following Richards' outline, here is what Peter said:

Jesus is a historic person (Acts 2:22)

How many people had seen Jesus during his time on earth? How many had witnessed his "signs and miracles in addition to those to whom Peter spoke? Read the gospels! On the secular side, the Jewish historian, Josephus (37-c.100 AD), referenced Jesus twice and John the Baptist once in his *Antiquities of the Jews*. Most scholars also think his reference to "the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James" is also authentic. Josephus is most famous for his work, *The Great Roman-Jewish War* (67-70 AD).

Jesus was crucified and has risen (Acts 2:23-24)

From the beginning the "show stopper" for the Jews was the crucifixion of Jesus. It didn't fit with their theology. Wasn't the promised Messiah supposed to be a conquering king, restoring David's throne? How, then, could he die like a common criminal, especially if he was, as Peter said in verse 22, a man "attested" by God? Paul called it a "stumbling block" (1 Corinthians 1:23).

The answer is found in verse 23. God is sovereign in everything and He had a plan. This plan included handing Jesus over to be crucified. But the plan also included raising Him from the dead (verse 24). As Peter said, it was impossible for death to hold Jesus.

Gempf says, "By the term *God*, Peter and his audience meant the person whom we call 'the Father'. Although the disciples knew Jesus was to be worshipped, and applied OT words for the deity to Jesus (as probably in v. 21 above; cf 2:36, 38-39), the doctrine of the Trinity had not yet been put into words. Thus when Peter said that *Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God* he did not mean to deny that he was more than a mere mortal" (Gempf, 1072).

The NASB Study Bible says that Peter's sermon was "a public proclamation of the resurrection at a time when it could be verified by many witnesses...Jesus' resurrection was the ultimate sign that what he said about himself was true. Without the resurrection, we would have no reason to believe in Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:14)" (NASB, 1890) Gempf says, God's verdict is not seen in the cross, but in the resurrection...God's verdict was to vindicate Jesus" (Gempf, 1072).

All this was prophesied (Acts 2:25-35)

Peter now moves to showing that Jesus, who was crucified and then raised from the dead is the “Messiah” (Hebrew), “Christ” (Greek) prophesied in the Old Testament. Peterson says, “As the prophecy of Joel was used to interpret and explain the gift of the Spirit in vv. 16-21, so now a second OT citation is drawn into Peter’s argument to prepare for the claim that Jesus is the Christ (v. 36). Psalm 16 ...is not quoted to ‘prove’ the resurrection as a historical event – the apostles present themselves as witnesses in that particular respect (v. 32) – but to show how the resurrection testifies to Jesus’ messiahship” (Peterson, 147).

Peter also used the writings of David to show that David looked ahead to the time that Christ (Messiah) would reign on the throne of David forever. Peterson says, “The wording of Psalm 132 is recalled, reflecting the promise of God to establish the throne of David’s offspring forever (cf. 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:3-4, 35-37). But how would this happen? Would it be by one descendent of David after another occupying the throne in Jerusalem? After the Babylonian exile of the sixth century BC there were no more Davidic kings...Peter’s point is that only through resurrection from the dead could a son of David rule forever over God’s people” (Peterson, 149).

Peterson continues, “They [the apostles] were convinced that Jesus, unlike David, had been raised immediately from death, never to experience decay. By implication, he is the Messiah. But that declaration is held over until the dramatic climax of the message in v. 36” (Peterson, 150).

Psalm 110:1, which is quoted next, also has a Messianic interpretation. God will rule His people through His “anointed.” (See Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:16-21) Stott says, “as he has applied Psalm 16 to the Messiah’s resurrection, so he now applies Psalm 110 to the Messiah’s ascension” (Stott, 77).

Conclusion: Jesus is God’s Messiah (The Christ) (Acts 2:36)

In verse 36, Peter got to the heart of the matter: The One they had crucified was the Lord (master, ruler) and Christ (Messiah, savior). Peterson says, "The two titles given to Jesus relate back to the psalm citations in vv. 25-34 and the prior claim of Joel 2:32 that whoever calls on the name of 'the Lord' will be saved (v. 21). Jesus is the Lord on whom to call since he is the Messiah, resurrected by God in fulfillment of Psalm 16:8-11 and now exalted to his right hand in fulfillment of Psalm 110:1" (Peterson, 152). He is the "Lord Jesus Christ" (See Romans 10:9,10).

ACTS 2:37-41

Remorse is the recognition of the terribleness of one's own sin. Acts 2 uses the phrase "pierced to the heart" to describe the remorse experienced by people in the crowd who had heard this sermon. They asked Peter, "What shall we do?" (verse 37). In verse 38, He told them to:

1) **Repent**

Peterson says, "...the OT regularly shows that genuine sorrow for sin involves an alteration of attitude towards God that brings about a 'conversion' or reorientation of life...In Acts 2:38, repentance means a radical reorientation of life with respect to Jesus, expressing sorrow for having rejected the one accredited by God as Lord and Christ (cf. 2:22-36)...Repentance is a human responsibility – something we are commanded to do. But it is also the gift of God – repentance is possible only by God's enabling (cf. 3:26; 5:31; 11:18)" (Peterson, 154).

The *ESV Study Bible* says, "To repent , or 'change one's mind' in the OT called for a change in a person's attitude toward God that impacted one's actions and life choices..." (ESV, 1824). Of "repentance" (*metanoia*), Vines says, "this change of mind involves both a turning from sin and a turning to God. The parable of the Prodigal Son is an outstanding example of this" (Vines, 525) (See Luke 15:11-24).

2) **Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins**

What did Peter mean by "Be baptized ...for the forgiveness of your sins"? Spurgeon says, "Peter told them to change their minds entirely—to repudiate what they had done—then to confess their faith by baptism" (Spurgeon, 253). Baptism is a public testimony (confession) of faith in Christ.

What is the difference between this baptism and that of John the Baptist? John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare Israel for the coming of Christ. D. A. Carson says, "Unlike those who held themselves to be adequately related to God by virtue of their descent from Abraham (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8), John insisted that personal and individual repentance and faith were necessary. In this he resembled the Old Testament prophets who sought to call out a holy remnant from the descendants of Abraham..." (Carson, 145-46). Peterson says, "Like the Baptist, Peter calls upon his fellow Israelites to be baptized 'for the forgiveness of your sins'...(cf. Luke 3:3; Acts 22:16). But he does this with the certainty that such forgiveness is a present possibility because of the Messiah's death, resurrection, and ascension. In the apostolic preaching, the offer of forgiveness is directly linked with repentance toward God and faith in Jesus as the Christ (cf. 3:19-20;

5:31; 10:43; 13:38-39)...but is not a rite that can secure the blessings of salvation apart from genuine repentance” (Peterson, 155) [Emphasis added].

So, being baptized in (or believing in or calling on) “the name of Jesus” means we acknowledge that Jesus is both “Lord” and “Christ”. (See Acts 2:21, 2:36; Romans 10:9-13). By quoting Joel 2:32, both Peter and Paul show that the “LORD” of whom Joel spoke is Christ. LORD, or YAHWEH is the Old Testament name for God. Those who confess that “Jesus is Lord” affirm His deity and, therefore, his authority to save them and to rule over their lives (See John 1:1-12; 1 John 4:15; 5:1).

Regarding Christ’s deity, Wayne Grudem says, “Is it really essential to hold to the full deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit? Yes it is, for this teaching has implications for the very heart of the Christian faith. First, the atonement is at stake. If Jesus is merely a created being, and not fully God, then it is hard to see how he, a creature, could bear the full wrath of God against all our sins...And who but God himself is worthy of worship?” (Grudem, 247).

Herman Bavinck says, “In the confession of the Trinity throbs the heart of The Christian religion: every error results from, or upon deeper reflection may be traced to, a wrong view of this doctrine” (Bavinck, 281 quoted by Grudem, 248). For more information on the Trinity, read Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 226-261.

Concluding verse 38, Peter said if they would repent and be baptized they would “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” This seems to imply that the receiving of the indwelling Holy Spirit follows repentance and baptism. James M. Gray maintains that this command was unique to the preaching to the Jews. He says, “This is no longer so when the Gentiles are being approached (10:44-48). The Jews who had rejected Jesus of Nazareth must openly accept Him in order to receive the blessing...but baptism now follows the gift of the Spirit as a sign of it, rather than precedes it as a condition” (Gray, 347; emphasis added).

The Holy Spirit is fully God. He is a person, the third person of the Trinity. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) says, “In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son” (WM Chapter II, Part III). Romans 8:9 calls Him “the Spirit of Christ” (See also Acts 16:7). What is His role? He convicts of sin (John 16:8-11; Acts 7:51), gives the faith to believe (Ephesians 2:4-5,8-10), cleanses (1 Corinthians 6:11), regenerates (Romans 8:11) and then seals the believer in Christ, guaranteeing his salvation (Ephesians 1:13,14). He assures the believer he belongs to God through Christ (Romans 8:16).

The Holy Spirit then pours out God’s love in the believer’s heart (Romans 5:5; Galatians 4:5-6), counsels, directs and teaches (John 14:26, 16:13; Acts 13:2; 1

Corinthians 2:11-13; Ephesians 3:4,5), empowers for service (John 16:7; 1 Corinthians 2:4), sanctifies (makes him Christ-like) (2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). He causes the believer's life to bear spiritual fruit (Galatians 5:22, 23). He intercedes for Him when he doesn't know how to pray (Romans 8:26,27). For more information on the person and work of the Holy Spirit, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 634-49.

Acts 2:41 records that the Church went from 120 to 3,120 believers that day. According to Peterson, the population of Jerusalem was between 180,000 and 200,000. He points out that these believers would still be a minority, but “Nevertheless, it is extraordinary evidence of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, through the testimony of Christ’s witnesses (cf. John 16:8-11), that so many should have been brought to repentance and faith at one time” (Peterson, 159).

ACTS 2:42-47

Stott says, “The wind and the fire were abnormal, and probably the languages too; the new life and joy, fellowship and worship, freedom, boldness and power were not” (Stott, 61).

Jesus commanded and prayed that his disciples would be one so that the world might believe (John 13:34-35, 17:22-23). Stedman says, “When the Holy Spirit was poured out on them, He baptized them into one body. They became a living unit. They were no longer related only to the Lord; they were related also to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. They were the body of Christ...Through this body, the Spirit of God is active in the world today, carrying out his eternal plan” (Stedman, 542).

The believers’ new life in Christ involved engaging in four regular activities: 1) the apostles’ teaching, 2) fellowship, 3) “breaking of bread”, and 4) prayer (v. 42).

Hughes asks, “What did they teach? The epistles? The epistles had not been written yet. The Gospels? There were no written biographies of Christ at that time. What, then, did they teach? The Old Testament, the sayings of Jesus as they recalled them, the Sermon on the Mount, the final conversations in the Upper Room...” (Hughes¹, 47) He adds, “Being filled with the Spirit and being filled with God’s Word go together... Where the spirit reigns, a love for God’s Word reigns. Those early believers studied the Scriptures – God’s communication to them” (Hughes, 47).

Peterson says, “Apostolic teaching continued to be at the center of church life, later in Gentile contexts (e.g., 11:25; 18:11;19:9-10; 20:7-12, 20-21, 28-32; 28:30-31)” (Peterson, 160).

The word for “fellowship” in Acts 2:42 is “koinonia” and here, according to Hughes, is the first occurrence of the word in the New Testament (Hughes¹, 48). "Koinonia" means

“communion, fellowship, sharing in common”. Vines says it is translated “communion” in 1 Corinthians 10:16 and Philemon 6, but is most frequently translated “fellowship” (Vines, 233). Peterson references Acts 4:32, “where a similar statement about having ‘all things common’ (*hapanta koina*) is prefaced by the words ‘All the believers were one in heart and mind’. That relationship brought a certain sense of responsibility to one another” (Peterson, 161). This attitude of community is further expressed in verse 45 where “they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.”

Gempf says, “The believers displayed a generous attitude toward possessions...But there was no blind rush to ‘rid themselves of all their possessions’, as if personal property was in itself evil, instead *they gave as there was the need*” (Gempf, 1073). Peterson says, “It is important to note that the sharing of possessions was voluntary and occasional. Their needs were related to the physical and social environment in which they found themselves. Their progressive isolation from unbelieving Israel must have made the economic situation of many quite precarious. Here was no primitive form of ‘communism’ but a generous response to particular problems in their midst (cf. 4:34-35)” (Peterson, 163).

Hughes says, “Fellowship cost something in the early church, in contrast to our use of the word *fellowship* today. Fellowship is not just a sentimental feeling of oneness. It is not punch and cookies. It does not take place simply because we are in the church hall. Fellowship comes through *giving*. True fellowship costs!” (Hughes¹, 48-49).

Scholars differ as to whether “the breaking of bread” refers to common meals or to what became known as “the Lord’s Supper”. Some point out that Jews customarily began a meal by breaking a loaf of bread with the hands (See Luke 9:16; 22:19; 24:30; 35; Acts 27:35). In verse 46, Luke couples the phrases “breaking of bread from house to house” with “taking their meals together”. Peterson says “The reality of Christian fellowship was expressed from the earliest times in the ordinary activity of eating together. But these meals were doubtless given a special character by the fact that they were associated with teaching, prayer, and praise” (Peterson, 161).

Finally, they devoted themselves to “prayer”. Hughes and others agree that the text should be read, “the prayers” (Hughes¹, 50). Peterson says, “The plural form with the article in Greek suggests specific ‘prayers’ (KJV, NRSV, ESV) rather than to prayer in general (TNIV *to prayer*). In the context, this most obviously points to their continuing participation in the set times of prayer at the temple... However, since their eating together in households involved *praising* God (v. 47), they doubtless also prayed together in these groups, petitioning God about their own needs and the needs of others. Prayer was certainly a part of their community life (e.g., 4:31) and of apostolic leadership (e.g., 6:4)” (Peterson, 162). Hughes says that this verse suggests “specific prayers, probably both Jewish and Christian. The early believers suddenly saw the old

formal prayers through new eyes and also, in their new joy, created new prayers for praise – much as Mary did when she sang the Magnificat” (Hughes¹, 50; See Luke 1:46)

The teaching, fellowship and worship and prayer flowed over into evangelism as their joy became apparent to all around them.

"Believing as I do that the greatest need of the hour is a revived and joyful Church ... Unhappy Christians are, to say the least, a poor recommendation for the Christian Faith; and there can be little doubt but that the exuberant joy of the early Christians was one of the most potent factors in the spread of Christianity." – Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Spiritual Depression (1964).

From this passage, Hughes describes believers in “the church where the Spirit reigns”. They:

- Relate to the Word – Teaching
- Relate to each other – Koinonia
- Relate to God – Worship
- Relate to the World – Evangelism (Hughes, 45-51)

This first group of believers were regarded favorably by the people and “the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Gempf says, “This was a short-lived period of peace...about to change forever” (Gempf, 1073).

Week 3

Acts 3:1-4:31

WEEK 3, DAY 1

ACTS 3:1-4:31

1. Read the Bible Study Notes for Week 2 (pp. 28-39)
2. Read and meditate on Acts 3:1-4:31. Make notes below of anything that stands out to you, or questions you have after reading this section.

WEEK 3, DAY 2

ACTS 3:1-10

1. Read Acts 3:1-10, and converse with God as you do so.

2. Peter and John were on their way to the temple at the traditional hour. Since they were now continually praying with the church (2:42), what reasons could they have had for continuing the Jewish tradition (See Acts 1:8, 2:47, 5:42)?

3. The disciples encountered a lame man.
 - a. According to verse 2 and 4:22, how long had the man been lame?

 - b. What did the man think was the greatest need Peter and John could meet?

 - c. What much greater need did God, through Peter, supply?

4. Compare verse 6 with 2:38. What phrase is used in both and what is its significance?

5. What was the immediate, positive result of this healing miracle? (See also 4:21b)

WEEK 3, DAY 3

ACTS 3:11-26

1. Trust the Lord to minister to you as you read Acts 3:11-26.

2. Complete the comparison of the points in Peter's second sermon (Solomon's portico) with his first (Pentecost) as follows, and give the verses:
 - a. Who did Peter address:
 - i. 1st — Men of Judah and all who live in Jerusalem (2:14)
 - ii. 2nd —

 - b. To whom did Peter give credit for the miracles:
 - i. 1st — Jesus the Nazarene (2:22,33)
 - ii. 2nd —

 - c. What did Peter say the hearers had done to Jesus:
 - i. 1st — Disowned and delivered to be put to death (2:23,24)
 - ii. 2nd —

 - d. What did Peter say God had then done for Jesus:
 - i. 1st — Raised Him up again (2:24,32)
 - ii. 2nd —

(Day 3 continued on next page)

- e. What was Peter's evidence for his message:
 - i. 1st — "...we are all witnesses" (2:32)
 - ii. 2nd —
- f. What did Peter say the prophets had foretold about Jesus:
 - i. 1st — God would raise Him up and exalt Him to His own right hand (2:24-36)
 - ii. 2nd —
- g. What did Peter say God was calling upon his hearers to do:
 - i. 1st — Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins (2:38)
 - ii. 2nd —
- h. What did Peter say the result would be:
 - i. 1st — They would receive the Holy Spirit (2:38)
 - ii. 2nd —
- i. To whom did Peter say the promise was/is made:
 - i. 1st — Them, their children and all who are far off, as many as God calls to Himself (2:39,40)
 - ii. 2nd —
- j. What was the number of those who believed Peter's message:
 - i. 1st — about three thousand (2:41)
 - ii. 2nd (4:4) —

WEEK 3, DAY 4

ACTS 4:1-12

1. Read Acts 4:1-12, and note a few things you want to think and pray more about.

2. What two things had disturbed the religious leaders who arrested Peter and John (Give the verse)?

3. Luke records that the Council (Sanhedrin) included the high priest, Annas, and Caiaphas. (See John 18:12-27)
 - a. What in Peter's past is linked with these two high priests?

 - b. In light of that experience, how can Peter's boldness before the Council be explained?

4. The Psalm that Peter quoted (Psalm 118:22) was also quoted by Jesus. (See Matthew 21:33-46)
 - a. What parable had Jesus used to illustrate this prophecy?

 - b. Against whom had Jesus directed the prophecy? Give the verse.

5. How does verse 12 link "the name of Jesus Christ" (v 10) with His person and work?

WEEK 3, DAY 5

ACTS 4:13-22

1. Prayerfully read Acts 4:13-22. How did the Lord deal with you?
2. How did the Jewish leaders "recognize that Peter and John had been with Jesus" (v. 13)? (See also John 7:15, Mark 1:22, Romans 8:9,10)
3. Do your neighbors, coworkers and family recognize that you have "been with Jesus"? How?
4. How could these leaders recognize the man's healing had taken place and yet be hostile to Peter's sermon and testimony? (See Exodus 8:32, 10:1, Mark 2:16-17, Ephesians 2:1-3, Matthew 23:16-18)
5. The Council ordered Peter and John not to teach in the name of Jesus.
 - a. How did Peter and John answer (Give the verse)
 - b. What had God, in the person of Jesus, commanded them to do (Acts 1:8)?
 - c. What warning had Jesus given the disciples also and what promise (See Matthew 10:17-20)?

WEEK 3, DAY 6

ACTS 4:23-31

1. As you read Acts 4:23-31, pray for the Spirit to illumine your understanding.
2. Over what events, people and circumstances mentioned in these verses did the believers give praise to God for His sovereignty? Give the verses.
3. For what did they pray? Do you regularly pray a similar prayer?
4. In what way was their prayer answered? Give the verses.

Week 3

Bible Study Notes

Acts 3:1-4:31

ACTS 3:1-10

One afternoon, Peter and John went to the temple for the three o'clock prayer time ("the ninth hour"). There were three prayer times during the day and Jesus' disciples continued to participate in them [See notes for Acts 2; Luke 24:53]. Bruce says, "The apostles continued to live as observant Jews, attending the set services of worship in the Jewish temple" (Bruce, 77). God had arranged the circumstances so that a beggar was in their path as they approached the temple gate (the gate called "Beautiful"). Acts 3:2 says that the man "had been lame from his mother's womb." Matthew Henry notes, "Such piteous cases show us what we are all by nature spiritually: without strength, lame from our birth..." (Henry, 1645). It is no more possible for us to save ourselves from our sinful condition than it was for the lame man to heal himself.

The man asked them for money, "alms" (v. 3). That's what he thought he needed most. In response, Peter said "Look at us!" (v. 4). Naturally, the man looked because he expected to receive "something" from them (v.5). Little did he know what he was about to receive! When Peter said that he didn't have any money, the man must have been both confused and disappointed. Gempf says, "Having just read (2:44-47) about how the Christians sold their possessions to support any among them who had need, the readers' expectations, too, are raised. But instead of illustrating how generous the Christians were with their money, here Luke shows us the reason why material goods were regarded so casually. The Christians had something even better to share" (Gempf, 1073).

Peter now said, "In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" (v.6) As we learned in Acts 2, "The name of Jesus Christ represents his divine authority and continuing power to grant the blessings of salvation. The name in question is not 'Jesus' but 'the name which belongs to Jesus by virtue of his resurrection and glorification, i.e. Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36)...Healing does not take place because the right formula is pronounced but because Jesus is openly acknowledged as the only source of help and salvation" (Peterson, 169).

Bruce says, "The command to walk, given by Peter 'in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,' was accompanied by the power to walk, imparted by that same name...But, as Peter and John went on to point out, that power was not confined to bodily healing. On a memorable occasion in Capernaum, Jesus had cured a paralyzed man by commanding him to rise and walk, in very similar terms to those which Peter used now; and his word which enabled the paralytic to walk was designed to supply public confirmation of his authority to forgive sins as well as to heal the sick (Mark 2:10-11)" (Bruce, 78-79).

Being the scheduled time for prayer, the temple was full of people. A large crowd observed this miraculous event. They were “filled with wonder and amazement” because they had seen the man many times before - a helpless beggar – and saw that he was now walking and leaping (vv. 9-10). Richards says, “Onlookers may also have recognized fulfillment of a prophecy related to the coming of the Messianic age. ‘Then will the lame leap like a deer’ (Isaiah 35:6)” (Richards, 710).

Bruce reminds us about the following famous exchange between Thomas Aquinas and Pope Innocent II: Aquinas came to visit the pope, who was busy counting money. Innocent said, "You see, Thomas, the church can no longer say, 'Silver and gold have I none'." Thomas replied, "True, holy father. Neither can she now say, 'Rise and walk'." (Bruce, 77-78). Aquinas understood that the Church needs the power of the Holy Spirit, not possessions, if she is to carry out her mission to reach the world for Christ.

ACTS 3:11-26

Stott says, “Just as the Pentecost event had been the text for his first sermon, so the cripple’s healing became the text for the second. Both were mighty acts of the exalted Christ. Both were signs which proclaimed him Lord and Saviour. Both aroused the crowd’s amazement.” (Stott, 91). This sermon begins the same as the first: “Men of Israel” (v. 12; Acts 2:22). Peter was preaching again to the Jews. Richards says, “The themes are the same as are found in his sermon on Pentecost...It makes no difference in what context the Gospel is preached. The message is always essentially the same.” He adds, “Even as apostolic preaching centered on Jesus Christ, so does our faith and witness today” (Richards, 710).

Immediately, Peter disavows any personal credit (“power or piety”) for the miraculous healing the people had witnessed (v. 12). And, just as he had done at Pentecost, he quickly moved the people’s focus to Christ. Stott says, “The most remarkable feature of Peter’s second sermon, as of his first, is its Christ-centredness” (Stott, 92). Here was another opportunity to show the Jews who Jesus is – the significance of His *name*. He is the suffering Servant, delivered over to Pilate, now glorified by God (v. 13; Isaiah 52:13; John 18:38-40). He is the “Holy and Righteous One” they had disowned (v. 14; Isaiah 53:11; Mark 1:24). He is the “Prince of life” [NIV= "author"] they had put to death but whom God raised from the dead (v 15; Acts 2:24; Hebrews 2:10). And He is the One who brought about this miracle of healing through the man’s faith in His power and authority to do so “in His name” (v. 16).

In verses 17 and 18, Peter tells the crowd that they did what they did out of ignorance (See Luke 23:34). God, however, used their ignorance to work out His plan that had been foretold by the prophets. But ignorance is not an excuse. In the Old

Testament, unintentional sin still required a sin offering/guilt offering (See Numbers 15:27-31; Leviticus 4:2,3, 13, 22, 27; 5:17-19).

Therefore, in verse 19, Peter told them to repent and return to God. Bruce says, "...here is the proclamation of a divine amnesty, offering a free pardon to all who took part in Jesus' death, if only they acknowledge their error, confess their sin, and turn to God in repentance" (Bruce, 83).

If they did repent, Peter said, they would be blessed:

1. Their sins would be "wiped away" (*exaleipho*) (v. 19). This word, in Greek, means to "wash off." William Barclay gives an illustration: "Ancient writing was upon papyrus, and the ink used had no acid in it. It therefore did not bite into the papyrus as modern ink does; it simply lay upon the top of it. To erase the writing a man might take a wet sponge and simply wipe it away" (Barclay, p. 32). Stott says, "Just so, when God forgives our sins, he wipes the slate clean." (Stott, 93; See Isaiah 43:25).
2. They would also experience spiritual refreshment (v. 19; Hosea 6:3). Stott says, "God does not wipe away our sins without adding his refreshment for our spirits" (Stott, p. 93). These times of refreshment would come from the "presence of the Lord" (v.19). Bruce says, "...those times of refreshment and joy which the prophets had described as features of the new age would be sent to them by God" (Bruce, 84). John Gill says, "not in person, for this regards neither his first, nor his second coming...but here it regards his being sent, and his coming in the ministration of the word and by his Spirit, to the comfort of their souls."
3. In verses 20-21, Peter says Christ will return from heaven and all will be restored as the prophets had foretold long ago (v. 20-21; Isaiah 35:1-10, 65:17-25; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Luke 24:24-27; Romans 8:18-23; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-5). Henry says, "The sending of Christ to judge the world, at the end of time, will be a blessing to you" (Henry, 1647).

Bruce says, "But, in the general context of Acts, Peter's words mean this: the gospel blessings destined to flow from Jesus' death and resurrection must spread throughout the world; then, and not till then, will he return from the right hand of power" (Bruce, 85).

Peter's sermon continues with three prophecies from the Old Testament, all of which refer to Christ (vv. 22-26) that, according to Matthew Henry, tell the Jews what ground they had to expect these blessings if they were converted to Christ (Henry, 1647):

1. Christ is the one of whom the Prophet Moses spoke and to whom all must "give heed" or "be utterly destroyed" (v.22, 23; Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; John 1:20,21). Bruce says, "Did all the prophets, from earliest days, indeed speak of this time in which Peter and his hearers were now living? Yes, even Moses, first and greatest

of Israel's prophets, looked forward to the day of Christ" (Bruce, 86; See Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

2. Samuel and other prophets “foretold these days.” Stott states, “Although this is a very general statement, perhaps the chief reference is to God’s promise, which began with Samuel, to establish the kingdom of David” (Stott, 94; See 2 Samuel 7:12-16).
3. The Jews were “sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, And IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.” (v. 25; See Genesis 12:2,3, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14; Matthew 1:2-16). Stott calls this “a foundation promise of the Old Testament” (Stott, 94) [Ed. note: Observe the promise was made to their "fathers" [Ed note: "fathers" is plural: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and descendants; "SEED" is singular: Christ]

Peter says that it was to them, the Jews, that God “first” sent His Servant, Jesus Christ “to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways” (v. 26; Isaiah 49:5-6; Acts 1:8; John 1:11) Stott says that "He came first to “the physical descendants of Abraham as is several times emphasized by Paul. But later Paul argues, especially in his letters to the Romans and the Galatians, that the promised blessing is for all believers, including Gentiles who by faith have become Abraham’s spiritual children” (Stott, 94; See Romans 9:8; Galatians 3:8)

ACTS 4:1-12

Hughes says, “The Acts 2 experience of the apostles’ new life, rich teaching, satisfying *koinonia*, and joyful worship was expansive and expulsive—a rocket thrust that propelled them into a needy world. Acts 2 demanded Acts 3. Likewise, the healing power of Acts 3 led the early church toward another inevitable step in its growth. Having been infused with the power of the Spirit, moving out into the world with regenerative healing power, the church now experienced opposition – its first persecution (Acts 4)” (Hughes, 59). This was inevitable. After all, Jesus told his disciples they should expect to be persecuted (John 15:18-20; See also 2 Timothy 3:12).

Stott says, “The devil cannot endure the exaltation of Jesus Christ. So he stirred up the Sanhedrin to persecute the apostles” (Stott, 95).

Matthew Henry says, “We have here the powers of darkness appearing against them to put a stop to them. Let Christ’s servant be ever so resolute, Satan’s agents will be spiteful; and therefore, let Satan’s agents be ever so spiteful, Christ’s servants ought to be resolute” (Henry, 1648).

Peter and John were arrested but Luke records that “many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.” (v. 3-4). Stott says, “Luke assures his readers immediately that the opposition of men did not hinder the Word of God. The Sadducees could arrest the apostles, but not the gospel” (Stott, 96).

Bruce says, "It is noteworthy that the Sadducees--the party to which the chief priestly families belonged--are specially mentioned in this regard. They objected on principle to the doctrine of resurrection in itself, considering it to be a Pharisaic innovation, and they were greatly annoyed because the two apostles, by their insistence on the fact of Jesus' resurrection, were so publicly and cogently maintaining that doctrine" (Bruce, 89-90). Bruce also explains that "All the high priests from the reign of Herod to the outbreak of the war against Rome in A.D. 66 belonged to their party" (Bruce, 89). That would include both Annas and Caiaphas (See John 18:13, 24).

After spending the night in jail, the apostles were brought to face the Sanhedrin (“rulers and elders and scribes”, v. 5). Peterson says, “Luke thus indicates that the apostles were arraigned before the same court that tried and condemned Jesus. Indeed, here and in 5:17-42, the trial of Jesus is effectively reopened and the evidence about him is presented once more to the leaders of Israel and to Luke’s readers” (Peterson, 189; See Luke 22:66).

The NASB Life Application Study Bible says, “The religious leaders thought they had put an end to Jesus when they crucified Him. But their confidence was shaken when Peter told them Jesus was alive again and that this time they could not harm Him” (NASB, 1892). Now they wanted to know “by what power or in what name” Peter and John had healed the man and were preaching. Peter responded that it was “in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene” (v. 10; See also Acts 3:6; 3:16). Peterson says, Peter was “reminding them that it was the same Jesus whom they ‘*crucified but whom God raised from the dead*’” (Peterson, 191).

Hughes says, “This was the same mob that tried and condemned Christ. Most of us would be absolutely paralyzed. But what did Peter do? One thing is for sure – he did not run” (Hughes¹, 61). This was in marked contrast to the Peter who denied Jesus three times the evening of His arrest and trial (Luke 22:54-62).

Jesus had told his followers, “But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name’s sake. It will lead to opportunity for your testimony. So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute” (Luke 21:12-15).

Bruce says, "They now proved the truth of this assurance. In words inspired by the Holy Spirit, Peter made his reply" (Bruce, 92). Boldly standing before the Sanhedrin,

Peter continued to respond to their inquiry by referring to Psalm 118:22, which was, according to Bruce, "a well-known Old Testament text" (Bruce, 93). Jesus had quoted Psalm 118 to show His rejection by His own people but his exaltation by the Father (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; See also John 1:11-12):

“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone.”

Peter did not quote this Psalm verbatim but inserted “by you,” tying these Jewish leaders to the “builders” in the Old Testament passage. Matthew Henry says, “Scripture is a tried weapon in our spiritual conflicts: let us therefore stick to it” (Henry, 1649). Then, in the next verse (v. 12), Peter declared “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is *no other name* under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” [emphasis added].

The *NASB Life Application Study Bible* says, “Many people react negatively to the fact that there is no other name than that of Jesus to call on for salvation. Yet this is not something the church decided. It is the specific teaching of Jesus himself (John 14:6) ...” (NASB, 1894). And Bruce says “The founders of the great world-religions are not to be disparaged by followers of the Christian way. But of none of them can it be said that there is no saving health in anyone else; to one alone belongs the title: the Savior of the world” (Bruce, 94).

ACTS 4:13-22

Hughes says, “The fatal interrogation of Jesus on the eve of the crucifixion had made an unforgettable impression on the Sanhedrin. Though they would have liked to forget it, they simply could not. And now as the two apostles interacted with them, they could not help but be reminded of Jesus...when they talked, they were so much like Jesus that the presence of Christ right then and there could not be denied. Peter’s and John’s companionship with Jesus had transformed them. What the Sanhedrin did not perhaps understand was that the apostles were still companions of Jesus. They were indwelt with the Holy Spirit and with Christ (compare Romans 8:9-11)” (Hughes, 64).

Hughes continues, “We must spend time in God’s Word. The Bible is like a mirror set before us. The light of Christ reflects off the Word and into our faces, so that we shine forth Christ. We must remain in the Word – constantly learning, constantly being taught” (Hughes, 65). How much time do you spend in the Word each day/week?

The Sanhedrin decided they could not get away with punishing the two men. But, they considered it important to stop them from continuing to preach about Christ. They ordered them to stop preaching “in the name of Jesus” (v. 18). What was Peter’s and John’s response? “We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard” (vv.

19-20) [Ed note: "witnessed"]. Having warned the apostles, the Sanhedrin let them go, fearing the people who had no doubt regarding the miracle they had seen (vv. 21-22).

The NASB Life Application Study Bible says “Although the evidence was overwhelming and irrefutable (changed lives and a healed man), the religious leaders refused to believe in Christ and continued to try and suppress the truth...When minds are closed, even the clearest presentation of the facts can’t open them. But don’t give up either. Pray for those people and continue to spread the gospel” (NASB, 1894).

ACTS 4:23-31

Acts 4:23 says, “When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.” Stott says, “Here is the Christian *koinonia* in action” (Stott, 99). Matthew Henry says, “No advancement in gifts or usefulness should make us think ourselves above either the duties or the privileges of the communion of saints...Christ’s followers do best in company, provided it be in their own company.” (Henry, 1650).

Together, they prayed beginning, as all our prayers should, with praise: “Sovereign Lord” (NIV, ESV: *Despotes*). Bruce says, "They addressed God as Sovereign Lord, the Creator of all, in time-honored liturgical language derived from Hebrew scripture" (Bruce, p. 98). By this name, they were acknowledging that God is in control of all circumstances, including this one. *The NASB Life Application Study Bible* says, “God is the sovereign Lord of all events who rules history to fulfill his purpose. What his will determines, his power carries out. No army, government or council can stand in God’s way” (NASB, 1895) [Ed. note: See Ex. 33:12-13, Ps 51:1; 86:35 for examples of praying the attributes of God].

Then they brought their petition before Him. Quoting Psalm 2:1-2 they described the situation in which they found themselves. Bruce says, "This psalm, with its explicit reference to Yahweh's anointed one (Messiah), had been interpreted of the coming deliverer of David's line at least as early as the middle of the first century BC" (Bruce, 98). Like David, the believers were surrounded by opposition to God and “His Anointed One” [Christ/Messiah; See Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:17-20]. But, also like David, they recognized the plotting was in vain. Now they came to their specific requests: 1) recognizing that God’s purpose would prevail, they asked Him to “take note of their threats” – not eliminate, just take note; 2) they asked Him to enable them to witness boldly, and in conjunction with that request, that He would perform “signs and wonders” in the name of Jesus (vv. 29-30).

God answered their prayer. Verse 31 says, "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness." *The ESV Study Bible*

says, "The Holy Spirit's power did not come on them automatically, but in answer to their expectant, believing prayer" (ESV, 2089). It is important to note that being "filled with the Spirit" is not the same as being "indwelt with the Spirit." Bruce says of verse 31, "this was a fresh filling of the Spirit, it could not be called a fresh baptism" (Bruce, 100). All believers are indwelt with the Holy Spirit at conversion. And, the believer has all of Him all of the time. As Clyde Cranford says, "You do not have part of a person...Each of us has the Holy Spirit if he or she is a child of God (see Romans 8:9), but does the Spirit have us?" (Cranford, 302).

Week 4

Acts 4:32-6:7

WEEK 4, DAY 1

ACTS 4:32-6:7

1. Read the Notes for Week 3 (pp. 48-56)
2. Read and meditate on Acts 4:32-6:7. What stood out to you most?

WEEK 4, DAY 2

ACTS 4:32-37

1. Seek the Lord as you read Acts 4:32-37. How has the Lord stirred your heart through this passage?
2. What characteristics did the congregation at Jerusalem exhibit?
3. What was the source of the great power that the apostles had been promised (Acts 1:8) and now possessed (v. 33)?
4. What did the congregation possess in abundance? Give the verse. How was this evident (vv. 34-37)?
5. What are you sharing with fellow believers who have needs?

WEEK 4, DAY 3

ACTS 5:1-16

1. If anything grips you as you prayerfully read Acts 5:1-16, note it below.
2. Contrast the actions of Ananias and Sapphira with those of Joseph (Barnabas) (vv. 4:36-37).
3. To whom did Peter say Ananias and Sapphira lied and put to the test?
4. What was the couple's fate? What was the reaction of the church to these events?
5. What does Ananias and Sapphira's death say about God's view of sin?
6. What lessons from Ananias and Sapphira's death can an entire church learn about sin?

WEEK 4, DAY 4

ACTS 5:17-32

1. Worship God as you read Acts 5:17-32.

2. What sinful attitude did the high priest and the Sadducees exhibit toward the apostles?
 - a. Looking back at vv. 12-16, what were some of the reasons for this attitude?

 - b. What did this attitude cause them to do? Is there a principle here? (See Genesis 4:5-8, 37:8, 20; 1 Samuel 18:6-11; Matthew 5:21,22.)

3. What happened during the night?
 - c. What instructions did the angel give the apostles?

 - d. What did the angel mean by " the whole message of this Life"?

4. What was the Council's complaint when the apostles were brought before them again?

5. In response, what did the apostles say they must do? (Give the verse)

6. What did the apostles do next? Give the verses.

7. Pause, ponder and pray about what it would look like for our community/city to be "filled with the teaching of Jesus."

WEEK 4, DAY 5

ACTS 5:33-42

1. Acts 5:33-42 is the Word of God. Deal with Him in it, then make a note or two to help you remember what He impressed on your heart.

2. Based upon what the Council members intended to do with the apostles:
 - a. What is the meaning of the phrase, "they were cut to the quick?"

 - b. What had Peter said that brought about this reaction? (5:29-32)

3. Who was Gamaliel, and why was the Council willing to listen to him? (See also Acts 22:3)

4. What was Gamaliel's advice? His reason?

5. Read Matthew 5:10-12. How could the apostles rejoice at suffering shame? (v. 41) Have you suffered shame or other persecution for His name? Did you rejoice?

6. What effect did the Council's punishment and orders have on the apostles' ministry? Give the verse.

7. Ponder and pray over the contrasts in v. 39 regarding walking in the Spirit vs. fighting against God.

WEEK 4, DAY 6

ACTS 6:1-7

1. Commune with the Lord as you read Acts 6:1-7. Thank Him for your church, and pray for its unity.
2. The growth of the church had led to persecution from without. What new problem did they have from within the church?
3. What do you think was the underlying cause of the problem? Does this problem exist in the church today? Give examples.
4. What work should the apostles be doing rather than "serving tables"? Why?
5. What qualifications, and/or gifts, did the apostles specify for those who would be put in charge of this task?
6. In what ways has God gifted you have for service in His church? (See Romans 12:3-8) Are you using them? Have you offered to use them?
7. What is the connection between the apostles' statements in vv. 2-4 and what Luke records in v. 7?

Week 4

Bible Study Notes

Acts 4:32-6:7

ACTS 4:32-37

Verse 32a says, “And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul.” They came from all over the world, and while they had different backgrounds, languages and cultures. Luke says they were united. (See John 13:34,35; 17:22,23).

Hughes says, “If we are true believers, we share a fundamental unity in the core of our beings...This does not mean these believers saw everything eye to eye. It is wrong to suppose, as sadly some do, that when believers dwell in unity they will carry the same Bible, read the same books, promote the same styles, educate their children the same way, have the same likes and dislikes—that they will become Christian clones...One of the wonders of Christ is that he honors our individuality while bringing us into unity” (Hughes¹, 69).

Peterson says, “the OT looks forward to the time when God will give his people ‘singleness of heart and action (Jeremiah 32:39) and ‘a new heart’ and ‘a new spirit’ (Ezekiel 36:26; cf. vv. 34-35 below on the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 10:16). Acts 2:42-47 suggests that such a renewal began to take place when the gospel was preached and the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost” (Peterson, 204).

And, these people, united in Christ, were willing to share what they had with one another (v.32). Stott says, “Perhaps the most important phrase is that no-one claimed his possessions as his own. Although in fact and in law they continued to own their goods, yet in heart and mind they cultivated an attitude so radical that they thought of their possessions as being available to help their needy sisters and brothers” (Stott, 107).

Verse 33 says, "And with great *power* the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all" [emphasis added]. According to Hughes, “The root for the Greek word translated “power” is the origin of our English word *dynamite*” (Hughes, p. 70). Stedman describes a "shower of flaming embers" that spread the gospel "like wildfire" (Stedman, 538; See notes for Acts 1:1-26).

Henry says, “Christ poured out abundance of *grace upon them*. There were evident fruits of this grace in all they said and did. Some think it includes the favour they were in with the people. Everyone saw a beauty and excellency in them, and respected them” (Henry, 1651).

Peterson says, “A significant link is now drawn between the specific ministry of the apostles and the general effect on the church...the remarkable point about this verse is the implication that it was the powerful preaching of the gospel that motivated the earliest Christians to such generosity, not specifically preaching about money or impassioned exhortations from leaders to share possessions! The gospel message

about God’s grace in Christ inspired a culture of self-giving in love (cf. 2 Corinthians 8-9)” (Peterson, 205).

According to verses 34,35, "For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need." Who were the needy of the congregation? Many were experiencing economic hardship because of their decision to follow Christ.

Peterson says, “it cannot be argued that the particular way in which they expressed their generosity is prescriptive. Later passages illustrate other practices (e.g., 6:1-4; 11:27-30; 16:15, 34; 20:33-35), but the common factor is a generous spirit providing appropriate care for the needs of others in the church” (Peterson, 203). Continuing, Peterson says, “The biblical ideal that there should be no needy persons among God’s people was realized in the Jerusalem church” (Peterson, 205). (See Deuteronomy 15:4). He suggests the expression “laid it at the apostles’ feet” refers to some formal transfer to a common fund, administered by the apostles for the benefit of the needy” (Peterson, 205). During the time they followed Jesus on earth, the apostles kept money dedicated for use to help the poor (See John 12:6)

Gempf says, “ As in chapter 2, what is important here is not to whom the possessions really belonged, but rather the believers’ attitude toward them...it is clear that the selling of goods had to do with *need* and was not a formal condition of membership” (Gempf, 1075).

In verses 36 and 37, Luke presents one man as an example of the love and care exhibited by the believers toward those in the fellowship who were in need (See John 13:34-35). While Joseph was his actual name, the apostles had given him an appropriate nickname: Barnabas, which means "Son of Encouragement". This tells us something of his character. From this passage, we also learn that he was from Cyprus, and was from the tribe of Levi. Hughes says encouragement was his “spiritual gift” (Hughes, 72). He continues, “Barnabas was a sparkling example of all the sterling qualities of the early church – unity, grace, power, caring --- especially caring” (Hughes, 75). We will read more about Barnabas later.

Richards says, “May the values displayed in the early Jerusalem church shape all our attitudes toward wealth and others” (Richards, 712).

ACTS 5:1-11

Regarding this point in Luke's narrative, Gray observes, "But there is mildew in every garden" (Gray, 347).

Satan uses multiple tactics to attack the Church. We have seen how he attempted to thwart the spread of the gospel through increasing opposition from the outside. Now, he developed a plan of attack from within the church.

Ananias and Sapphira, a married couple in the church, also sold some land. However, before bringing the money to the apostles, they decided to hold some back (vv. 1-2). Perhaps they wanted to appear as generous as Barnabas. Their sin was not that they held some of the money back, but that they claimed to give all of it. However, Peter knew the truth. Confronting Ananias, the apostle accused him of lying. Who had put him up to it? *The ESV Study Bible* says, "Satan was the instigator... 'filling' their hearts just as the Spirit had 'filled' the community for witness" (ESV, p.2089). The verb "filled" is the same one found in Ephesians 5:18 where Paul tells believers to be filled with the Spirit. To whom did Ananias lie? Verse 3 says he lied to the Holy Spirit. In verse 4, Gray says, "the Holy Spirit is identified as God" (Gray, 347).

The ESV Study Bible also notes, "Lying is characteristic of Satan (see John 8:44) and exactly opposite the character of God, who cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; Proverbs 30:5; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:10)" (ESV, 2090; See also Genesis 3:2-4).

Bruce says, "The desire to gain a higher reputation than is one's due for generosity or some other virtue is not so uncommon that anyone can afford to adopt a self-righteous attitude toward Ananias. In a situation where those who followed Barnabas' example received high commendation within the group, the social pressure on others to do the same, or rather to appear to do the same must have been considerable" (Bruce, 105).

Hughes says, "(Ananias) feigned a deeper spiritual commitment than he had. We share Ananias' sin not when others think we are more spiritual than we are, but when we try to make others think we are more spiritual than we are" (Hughes, 77). According to Peterson, "He was seeking human praise rather than the praise of God (cf. John 12:43)" (Peterson, 210).

When he heard Peter's words, Ananias dropped dead and was carried out by young men (presumably strong enough to carry him). Hughes says, "The first recorded burial in the Christian community was that of a hypocrite! Tragic!" (Hughes, 77).

Everyone who heard what happened experienced "great fear" (vv.5-6). *The ESV Study Bible* says, "fear in response to a manifestation of God's presence involves both reverent awe and a healthy fear of God's displeasure" (ESV, 2090).

About three hours later, Sapphira came in. Under questioning by Peter, she maintained the lie that the price of the land was what they had reported. When Peter asked why she put the Holy Spirit (“Spirit of the Lord”) to the test, she died also and was carried out by, presumably, the same young men. This also resulted in great fear among the whole “church” as well as others who had heard the story (vv. 7-11). Incidentally, this is the first time the Greek word, “Ekklesia,” (church) is used in Acts.

Peterson says, “The idea of putting God to the test is prominent in the stories of Israel’s wandering in the desert (e.g., Exodus 17:2; Numbers 14:22; Deuteronomy 6:16; 33:8). In practice it meant provoking God to judge, by misrepresenting him, disobeying his commands, or refusing to believe his promises” (Peterson, 212; See 15:10).

Hughes asks, “Why was God so severe? Because this was a pivotal time in church history. The way Ananias and Sapphira attempted to reach their goals was so dramatically opposed to the whole thrust of the Gospel that to allow it to go unchallenged would have set the entire mission of the Church off course...We know it [spiritual pretense] has poisoned the life of the Church throughout its history” (Hughes, 78-79). Peterson agrees and adds, “Luke represents these events as unique acts of divine judgment, manifesting the awesome presence of God at this critical stage in the life of the early church” (Peterson, 213).

Bruce says, “The story of Ananias is to the book of Acts what the story of Achan is to the book of Joshua. In both narratives an act of deceit interrupts the victorious progress of the people of God” (Bruce, 102; See Joshua 7). The Bible contains other examples of God’s severe chastening: Leviticus 10; 1 Corinthians 11:30-32.

Richards says, “Believers who mask their real motives by public piety should take warning from Ananias and Sapphira. God’s decisive response to their deceit may not be repeated today. But God’s attitude toward hypocrisy in the church has been clearly revealed!” (Richards, 713). According to Bruce, “The incident shows, too, that even in the earliest days the church was not a society of perfect people” (Bruce, 104).

Are you trying to convince others you are more committed to Christ and His Church than you really are?

ACTS 5:12-16

In Acts 4:30, the believers had asked God to continue to stretch out His hand to heal and to perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of Jesus. And this is what was happening! (v. 12). The apostles were gaining the respect of non-believers even though the latter were afraid to be seen with them. (v. 13). Richards says, “only conversion to Christ gives an onlooker courage to stand beside the believer when such association means persecution” (Richards, 713).

Verses 14-16 give us details of all that was occurring. More believers were being added. The sick were being placed so Peter's shadow might fall on them and heal them. People from other cities brought their sick/afflicted and those with unclean spirits for healing. And all were being healed.

[Note: The passage says, "They were all being healed" (v. 16). Gempf says, "God...is willing to meet their expectations in order to take them further. In that regard, people with superstitious expectations about God's power, such as the woman who touched Jesus' cloak in Luke 8:43-48, receive what they earnestly desire and more" (Gempf, 1075).

ACTS 5:17-25

As we have seen before and will see again in Acts, growth is followed by persecution which is followed by more growth.

Jealous of the attention the apostles were getting, the High priest and Sadducees had them put in jail (vv. 17-18). But, during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates and freed them. The angel instructed them to return to the temple to speak "the whole message of life" (vv. 19,20). Regarding the phrase "the whole message of life" Richards says, "In the N.T. new 'life' and 'salvation' are used interchangeably. The essence of God's saving work is not seen in the forgiveness of sins, though this is vital, but in the infusion of His own life, which makes a human being a child of God spiritually" (Richards, 713). Hughes says, "There is some divine humor here, too, because the Sadducees did not believe in angels." He continues, "In Acts 5 the angelic liberation was not only meant to free them, but to encourage them---and us! The apostles now knew that God could deliver them from the world's clutches anytime, anywhere!" (Hughes, 85; See Exodus 14:1-30; 2 Kings 19:32-35; Daniel 3; Daniel 6:1-28; Acts 12:6-10; 16:26-30).

At daybreak, they did exactly as the angel had told them, entering the temple and beginning to teach (v.21).

That morning, when the High Priest and the council sent for the apostles, the officers couldn't find them. They reported that the gates were locked and guarded but there was "no one inside" (vv. 22-23). When the captain of temple guard and the High Priest received this report they were perplexed and wondered what would come of it. About that same time someone told them the apostles were teaching the people in the temple (vv. 24-25).

ACTS 5:26-32

Verse 26 says that the captain and officers brought them back to the Sanhedrin but “without violence.” They were too afraid of the people. The apostles stood before the High Priest to answer why they continued teaching “in this name” (v. 27). Contrary to the orders of the Sanhedrin, they were filling Jerusalem with their teaching and bringing His blood on them! (vv. 26-28) Hughes says, “The truth is, they were the ones who said “Crucify him!” (Matthew 27:25)...Such fear and denial are trademarks of modern enemies of Christ as well” (Hughes, 88).

Together, Peter and the apostles answered, “we must obey God rather than men.” But they didn’t stop there, adding “The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree” (vv. 29, 30). They would not stop proclaiming Christ, nor would they back down from reminding the Jewish leaders of their part in His death. Continuing with the same message as before, they said Jesus is the one God has exalted to the right hand as a Prince and Savior to grant repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. Again they said they had witnessed all of this along with the Holy Spirit, who is given by God “to those who obey Him” (vv. 31-32).

ACTS 5:33-42

At these words the Council was “cut to the quick.” They wanted to kill them but Gamaliel, a greatly respected Pharisee, intervened. Gamaliel was the grandson of the famous and venerated Rabbi Hillel. He was also the teacher of Saul of Tarsus, who would become the Apostle Paul (Acts 22:3). Now, Gamaliel advised caution (vv. 33-35). Gamaliel reminded them of two men, Theudas and Judas of Galilee, who “claimed to be somebody.” Both had attracted a following but after they had died it “came to nothing.” So Gamaliel suggested they leave the men alone. He argued that if it is not from God it would fail, and if from God it wouldn’t be possible to defeat them. And in that case, they would find themselves fighting against God (vv. 31-39). [Ed note: The Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote about Judas of Galilee who led a revolt against Rome in 6 AD. His followers were called “Zealots” and were an extremist group. Among Jesus’ disciples Judas Iscariot is believed to have been a Zealot as was Simon the Zealot (See Matthew 10:4; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13)].

Taking his advice, the council flogged them, ordered them not to speak in Jesus’ name, and released them. The usual punishment was 39 strokes with the whip. The prescribed punishment was 40 strokes (Deuteronomy 25:3). But, the religious leaders reduced it by one to make sure the number of strokes was not exceeded by mistake, thereby breaking the law (See 2 Corinthians 11:24). Thirty-nine strokes could kill and

sometimes did. This was the first time the apostles had been physically abused but it would not be the last. In spite of this torturous experience, they rejoiced at being worthy to suffer shame for Jesus' name (See Matthew 5:10-12; Luke 6:22-23). And did they cease preaching Jesus as the Christ? Luke tells us they continued preaching in the temple and house to house (vv. 40-42).

Peterson says that it is at this point Luke introduces the word “evangelizing” (*evangelizomenoi*) to “describe more fully the nature of the teaching in which they were engaged” (Peterson, 228).

Henry says, “What was the subject matter of their preaching: *They preached Jesus Christ. They did not preach themselves, but Christ.* This was the preaching that gave most offence to the priests, but they would not alter their subject to please them. It ought to be the constant business of gospel ministers to preach Christ; *Christ, and him crucified; Christ, and him glorified*” (Henry, 1656).

Hughes says, “Regardless of how hostile and oppressive our surroundings, no matter how philistine the workplace, how callous the students, how neurotic our neighbors, we are meant to share Christ by life and word” (Hughes¹, 87).

Philippians 1:29 says, “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”

ACTS 6:1-7

As chapter 6 opens, the church is being blessed and is multiplying. Peterson sees “a clear link between the increase in the number of disciples in 6:1 and the activity described in 5:42. Church growth continued because the apostles persisted in their daily ministry of public proclamation and teaching about Jesus. For the first time in Acts, those who believed are described as *disciples*...Disciples are no longer simply those who followed Jesus in the course of his earthly ministry, but those who become ‘obedient to the faith’ (6:7), signifying obedience to the apostolic pattern of belief and lifestyle” (Peterson, 229,30).

Hughes says, “Again and again a church has warded off a frontal attack only to be subverted from within” (Hughes¹, 93). But now, according to Gray, “The flesh was asserting itself. Verse 1 carries us back to the close of chapter 4, and we see that the charity which led to hypocrisy there, led to ‘murmuring’ here” (Gray, 348).

The church was experiencing “growing pains.” In the caring for widows among the membership, a complaint rose that Greek widows were being overlooked in the “daily serving of food” (v. 1). Both groups were actually Jewish. According to Hughes, “Jerusalem had a large minority of Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jews—Jews who,

though they spoke no Hebrew because they had lived abroad for centuries, returned to Jerusalem because it was their holy city. Many of these Jews had returned so they could spend their final days in Jerusalem...as a result there was an abundance of Greek-speaking women who had outlived their husbands...Resentful, the Aramaic-speaking Jews discriminated against the Hellenistic Jews, whom the Pharisees held in utter contempt, considering them second-class Israelites...Then came Pentecost...However, conversion (wonderful as it was) did not erase all their prejudices” (Hughes¹, 94). [Ed. note: These Hellenistic Jews would have been descendants of Jews dispersed during the various captivities. See 2 Kings 24:10-15; 1 Chronicles 5:26]

Peterson says, “it is likely that these two groups brought differences of outlook and attitude with them into the community of Christian disciples...Christians in every age and social context need to be aware of the threat that cultural and racial differences can pose to their unity in Christ” (Peterson, 231).

Peterson continues, "This probably also involved a challenge to the leadership of the apostles. Not long after the Israelites were redeemed from Egypt, complaints about their situation and the leadership of Moses and Aaron arose (e.g., Exodus 16:2-12; Numbers 11:1; 17:5, 10). As in Acts 6, there was concern in Exodus 16 about the adequate provision of food. Since the apostles seem to have administered the community resources at this stage (cf. 4:34-37; 5:2), complaints about the daily distribution of food were thus also a challenge to their leadership. At the deepest level, however, such grumbling is condemned in Scripture because it is seen as a complaint against God’s gracious and providential care for His people (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:10-11; Philippians 2:14-15; 1 Peter 4:9)” (Peterson, 231-32).

Richards says, “Every church will have dissension. Not its existence, but how we deal with it, is the measure of our spirituality” (Richards, 714). We will see dissension again in Chapter 15.

The Twelve called a meeting of all the disciples. Telling the church they shouldn't neglect the word of God to "serve tables," the apostles proposed a solution. The church should choose seven men of "good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" to carry out this work. Then the Twelve could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word (vv. 2-4).

Gempf says, “the word used here for ‘table’ has two special meanings: the dining table and also a money-changer’s table (Mark 11:15; the same word is used in the sense of ‘bank’ in Luke 19:23)...Although the passage mentions food, the distribution may well have been in form of money for food...it was money which the apostles received towards this aid. Such an interpretation would also fit better with the gifts required of the Seven: as well as being *full of the Spirit*, they would need *wisdom* in their management roles” (Gempf, 1077; See also Vines, 615).

The congregation agreed with this proposal and chose Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch (Syria). They brought them before the apostles who laid hands on them, commissioning them for this work (vv. 5,6).

Every one of these men had a Greek name although it is not to be assumed that all were Hellenistic Jews. After all, three apostles had Greek names: Andrew, Philip and Bartholomew. What is certain is that the congregation made an effort to create an atmosphere of fairness and goodwill.

Were these seven men the first deacons? *The ESV Study Bible* says, “Interpreters differ... On the one hand, the noun ‘deacon’ (Greek *diakonos*) does not occur here. On the other hand, the corresponding verb (Greek *diakoneo*, “to serve, help, render assistance”) is used in 6:2, and this same verb is used of those who serve as deacons in 1 Timothy 3:10,13. However, this is a common verb for ‘service.’ It could well be these men were called to deal with this issue and any like it” (ESV, 2092). Incidentally, The word is also used in this passage to designate the work of the apostles.

Richards suggests the following lesson from this experience in the early church: “Don’t blame. Deal with the problem openly. Make it a matter of prayer. Challenge the church to work out its own solution. Focus on selecting godly people who are known and trusted by the community to take responsibility” (Richards, 714).

Stott says, “A vital principle is illustrated in this incident, which is of urgent importance to the church today. It is that God calls all his people to ministry, that he calls different people to different ministries, and that those called to ‘prayer and the ministry of the word’ must on no account allow themselves to be distracted from their priorities” (Stott, 122).

Hughes maintains, “if the apostles had agreed to personally run the food program, others might have hesitated to perform the slightest ministry without apostolic direction, and that would have fostered the overdependence we sometimes see today, with followers afraid to tie their shoes without getting permission from the pastor. Delegation is at the heart of developing followers” (Hughes¹, 95). He continues, “Not only were the widows given good care, but two of the greatest New Testament saints came to full maturity and power under their new responsibilities...” [Ed note: Stephen and Philip, of whom we will read in Acts 7, 8 and 21] “By divinely directed delegation the apostles not only freed others to grow in their service to God, but they freed themselves for prayer, preparation, and powerful preaching. Thus the spiritual ministry of the church was enhanced” (Hughes¹, 96).

Peterson says, Many churches today could learn from the creative way in which this issue was handled.” He quotes Longnecker (1981; 331), “The early church seems to have been prepared to adjust its procedures, alter its organizational structure, and

develop new posts of responsibility in response to existing needs and for the sake of the ongoing proclamation of the Word of God” (Peterson, 233).

How do you respond when you know of problems in the church? How can you be part of the solution? What gifts (abilities) has the Lord given you? In what service can you use your gift(s) so your pastors can devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word? Have you offered to do it?

Finally, in what F. F. Bruce describes as a "progress report," Luke tells us that God's word kept spreading, the number of disciples increased in Jerusalem and many Jewish priests believed (v.7). He says, "Six such reports appear at intervals throughout Acts and serve to punctuate the history" (Bruce, 123; See also 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:33). The NIV begins the sentence with "So," the ESV with "And." Stott says, "But of course! The word cannot spread when the ministry of the word is neglected" (Stott, 123).

Week 5

Acts 6:8-8:3

WEEK 5, DAY 1

ACTS 6:8-8:3

1. Read the Bible Study Notes for Week 4 (pp. 66-76).
2. Read and meditate on Acts 6:8-8:3. Make notes below in light of what stands out to you from this section.

WEEK 5, DAY 2

ACTS 6:8-15

1. Meditate on Acts 6:8-15, and summarize this passage in a few sentences.
2. How was Stephen able to do signs and wonders?
3. Compare v 10 with 6:3. How was Stephen able to prevail in arguments brought by the men from the synagogue?
4. How well can you articulate/"argue" or defend your beliefs about Christ?
5. Based upon the charges brought against Stephen by these Jews, what did they consider to be holy? (See also Luke 24:44) (Give verses)
6. Read Matthew 26: 59-61, 65. List any similarities you find between Stephen's charges and trial before the Council and Jesus' hearing before the high priest.
7. What does it mean that the Council saw Stephen's face "like the face of an angel?" (See Exodus 34:29).
8. When tempted to respond against false accusations, how does a Christian discern whether to keep silent or speak?

WEEK 5, DAY 3

ACTS 7:1-3

1. Pray that you will realize God is speaking to you as you read Acts 7: 1-3.
2. What did the high priest (Caiaphas) ask Stephen?
3. Specifically what "things" was Caiaphas referring to? (See vv 13,14)
4. Instead of answering these charges directly, what did Stephen begin to do?
5. What was the source of his arguments?
6. Are you familiar enough with Scripture that you could concisely explain the thread of the Gospel that runs from Genesis to Revelation? If not, do you have a plan to strengthen this need?
7. With which patriarch and in what place did Stephen begin his recitation of the work of "the God of glory?"

WEEK 5, DAY 4

ACTS 7:4-19

1. Read Acts 7:4-19. Write out a brief prayer in light of this passage.
2. After being called by God out of Mesopotamia, where did Abraham settle first? Give the verse.
3. To what country did God have him move? (See also Genesis 12:5)
4. What did God promise to Abraham and his descendants even when he had no child? (See also Genesis 13: 14-17, 17: 8)
5. What did God say would happen before this promise would be fulfilled and how long would it last? (v. 6; See also Genesis 15:13-14).
6. Did it happen as God said? Trace the work of the Sovereign God in making a nation (Israel) for His Name (vv. 8-19; See also Exodus 12:37,41).

WEEK 5, DAY 5

ACTS 7:20-43

1. Read Acts 7:20-43. If you learned anything new, list it out below.
2. What is the significance of the fact that Stephen devoted a large portion of his sermon (vv. 20-39) to God's work through Moses? (See 6:11-14).
3. In verse 39, how did the forefathers of Stephen's audience treat Moses?
4. What did the name "Moses" come to represent? (v. 38; See also Luke 24:27, 44; John 1:45; Acts 28:23)
5. How would Stephen's preaching about Jesus have threatened the teachings of the Jewish leaders? (See Matthew 5:17-20)

WEEK 5, DAY 6

ACTS 7:40-8:3

1. Prayerfully read Acts 7: 40-8:3.
2. What had the tabernacle and, later, the temple represented to the Jewish people? (Exodus 25:8-9; Deut 12:5-7, 1 Kings 8: 12-13, 18-20 [See also v. 27]).
3. Quoting Isaiah 66:1, what did Stephen say about God's dwelling place?
4. Compare vv. 51-54 with 5:30-33. What similar charge did Peter and Stephen make against the Council?
5. Compare Stephen's spirit with those of:
 - a. His persecutors
 - b. Jesus (Matthew 5:44; Luke 23:34)
6. Ponder and pray over Stephen's response in verse 60.
7. Describe the aftermath of Stephen's death (8:1-3).

Week 5

Bible Study Notes

Acts 6:8-8:3

ACTS 6:8-7:60

STEPHEN, THE FIRST MARTYR

Tertullian (160-225 AD), an early Christian author from Carthage (currently in Tunisia), famously said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church" (Apologeticus, Chapter 50). The word "martyr" is first used here in Acts and means "one who witnesses by his death" (See Vines, 395, 680). Richards says, "It was applied to those who testified to the reality and significance of their faith by suffering death rather than deny Jesus" (Richards, 714).

ACTS 6:8-15

Stephen was chosen to minister to the needy of the church because he was "full of Spirit and wisdom" (6:3). Peterson says he "uses that Spirit and wisdom not just to organize charity but in speaking (6:10) and he performs wonders and signs as the apostles have been doing (2:43; 5:12; 6:8)" (Peterson, p. 237). This he did with "grace and power" (v. 8). Hughes states, "On that last day of his life, Stephen lived as Christ lived...Grace not only pays for our sins -- it changes us. Oh, to be like Stephen -- 'full of God's grace' !" (Hughes¹, 102,3).

Stott says, "Certainly 'grace' seems to indicate a gracious, Christ-like character, while his 'power' was seen in the *great wonders and miraculous signs* which he did *among the people* (8b). So far signs and wonders have been credited by Luke only to Jesus (2:22) and the apostles 2:43; 5:12); now for the first time others are said to perform them" (Stott, 126). But, according to Peterson, "It was not, however, the working of miracles that provoked opposition, but Stephen's teaching" (Peterson, 239).

In verse 9, we see that Stephen was preaching in one of several synagogues in Jerusalem. This synagogue was attended by men from lands to which Jews had been dispersed during their history. According to Bruce, "Many Jews who were taken captive to Rome at the time of Pompey's conquest of Judaea (63 BC) were subsequently emancipated and thenceforth had the status of freedmen" (Bruce, p. 125). Those who came to the "Synagogue of the Freedmen" were Hellenistic Jews. Bruce says, "The

mention of Silicia raises the possibility that this was the synagogue attended by Saul, otherwise called Paul, whose native Tarsus was the principal city of Silicia" (Bruce, p. 125). These men argued with Stephen but were unable to "cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking" (v. 10). Luke does not record what Stephen was saying, but Bruce says, "The nature of his arguments may be inferred from the charges brought against him (vv. 13-14) and from his reply (7:2-53)" (Bruce, 125).

Since the Freedmen could not argue convincingly against Stephen's teaching, they found false witnesses who were willing to lie before the council. Stott says, "thwarted in open debate, Stephen's opponents started a smear campaign against him, for when arguments fail, mud has often seemed an excellent substitute" (Stott, 127). These men claimed that Stephen spoke blasphemously against 1) Moses and 2) God. According to them, Stephen said Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the temple and change customs Moses gave them (vv.11-15). Does all this sound familiar? (See Matthew 26: 59-61, 65; Mark 14:55-58).

Peterson says, "To speak blasphemous words against Moses is to speak against the law and the customs handed down by Moses. To speak blasphemous words against God is to speak against the temple" (Peterson, 241). According to Stott, "nothing was more sacred to the Jews, and nothing more precious, than their temple and their law. The temple was 'the holy place', the sanctuary of God's presence, and the law was 'holy scripture', the revelation of God's mind and will" (Stott, 128).

Bruce adds that the charge regarding the temple "was all the deadlier because it was one which would infuriate the people of Jerusalem. Any threat, real or imagined, to the temple was not only an offense to their religious feelings; it was also a threat to their livelihood. The economic life of the city and its residents depended on the temple" (Bruce, 126). The Apostle Paul would run into the same thing in Ephesus, during his third missionary journey (Acts 19:23-34).

How would you react to such dangerous opposition? Looking at Stephen, the Council saw that his face was "like the face of an angel" (v 15). Stott maintains, "It is surely significant that the Council, gazing at the prisoner in the dock, should see his face shining like an angel's, for this is exactly what happened to Moses' face when he came down from Mount Sinai with the law. Was it not God's deliberate purpose to give the same radiant face to Stephen when he was accused of opposing the law as he had given to Moses when he received the law? In this way God was showing that both Moses' ministry of the law and Stephen's interpretation of it had his approval. Indeed God's blessing on Stephen is evident throughout. The grace and power of his ministry (8), his irresistible wisdom (10) and his shining face (13) were all tokens that the favour of God rested upon him" (Stott, 129).

ACTS 7:1-50

Caiaphas was the high priest until 36 A.D. and, therefore, was president of the Sanhedrin at this trial as he was at the trial of Jesus. Now, he asked Stephen if the charges against him were true (7:1). To address the charge that he blasphemed the temple ("this holy place") and spoke against the law, Stephen turned to the Old Testament (vv. 2-50). Stott says, "What he did was not just to rehearse the salient features of the Old Testament story, with which the Sanhedrin were as familiar as he, but to do so in such a way as to draw lessons from it which they had never learned or even noticed...For Old Testament Scripture itself confirmed his teaching about the temple and the law, especially by predicting the Messiah, whereas by rejecting him it was they who disregarded the law, not he. Stephen's mind had evidently soaked up the Old Testament, for his speech is like a patchwork of allusions to it" (Stott, 130). How much have you "soaked up" God's Word, the Bible, so that you can explain the thread of the Gospel that runs from Genesis to Revelation? Hughes says that Stephen was "speaking as Christ would speak." "As he stood tall before the Council, he brought the theology of Christ down hard on the three great pillars of popular Judaism: the land, the law, and the temple -- three false bases for confidence before God." Hughes calls these "sacred cows" (Hughes¹, 104).

Bruce says, "A major theme of the speech is its insistence that the presence of God is not restricted to any one land or to any material building. God revealed Himself to Abraham long before Abraham settled in the holy land; he was with Joseph in Egypt; he gave his law to the people of Israel through Moses when they were wanderers in a wilderness. The people of God similarly should not be restricted to any one locality. Stephen's historical survey reviews the history of the nation from the call of Abraham to the building of Solomon's temple. His outline of the patriarchal age (vv. 2-8) and of Israel in Egypt (vv. 9-19) provides an introduction to his central themes; his account of Moses' early days (vv. 20-29), the call of Moses (vv. 30-34), and the wilderness wanderings (vv. 35-43) provides an indirect answer to the charge of speaking against Moses and a more direct answer to the charge of speaking against God; his contrast between the wilderness tent and the Jerusalem temple (vv. 44-50) replies particularly to the charge of speaking against the temple...Those who are obedient to the heavenly vision, Stephen seems to suggest, will always live loose to any particular earthly spot, will always be ready to get out and go wherever God may guide" (Bruce, 130-134).

On the subject of David's desire to build a temple in Jerusalem (vv. 46-50), Bruce adds, "Nathan soon ascertained the mind of God more clearly, and went back to David with the message that God desired no house of cedar from him; instead, he would himself establish David's house--his dynasty-- in perpetuity. Nathan went on to tell David his son and successor would build a house for the "name" of God. But Stephen

evidently did not consider that the building of Solomon's temple was the fulfillment of this promise. It is plain that many early Christians interpreted the accompanying promise, that this son of David would have his throne established forever, as fulfilled in Christ...It was in Christ, too, they believed, that the promise of a new house, built for the name of God, was truly fulfilled." (Bruce, 148). "Stephen quotes the opening words of Isaiah 66...There the prophet goes on to say in Yahweh's name, almost immediately after the passage quoted by Stephen: "But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word" (Isa. 66:2b). This well described the character of the people of God, who constitute his true temple (cf. Isa. 57:15)" (Bruce, 150).

Bruce concludes, "Stephen's speech thus resolves itself into a great defence [sic] of the doctrine of the Church Invisible, based on a broad survey of the history of the people of God" (Bruce, 151).

According to Stott, "What Stephen did was to pick out four major epochs of Israel's history, dominated by four major characters [Ed. note: Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David]...The connecting feature of these four epochs is that in none of them was God's presence limited to any particular place. On the contrary, the God of the Old Testament was the living God, a God on the move and on the march, who was always calling his people out to fresh adventures, and always accompanying and directing them as they went" (Stott, 130-131). Stott continues, "It is evident then from Scripture itself that God's presence cannot be localized, and that no building can confine him or inhibit his activity. If he has any home on earth, it is with his people that he lives. He has pledged himself by a solemn covenant to be their God. Therefore, according to his covenant promise, wherever they are, there he is also" (Stott, 139).

In verse 38, Stephen said Moses "received living words to pass on to us" (NIV). According to Peterson, "Stephen identifies the law of Moses as *living words of God* (*logia zonta*; cf. Rom 3:2) and thus begins to answer the charge that he speaks words of blasphemy against that law (cf. 6:11; 13-14). At the same time, he implies that the true people of God would obey the law of God and prepares for the challenge that Israel has characteristically not done so (7:51-53)...Acts indicates from the beginning that the true Israel now consists of those who acknowledge Jesus as Messiah and Lord and come to him to receive salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Peterson, 258).

Stott concludes, "His main theme was positive, that Jesus the Messiah had come to replace the temple and fulfill the law" (Stott, 141). Furthermore, Stott says, "Stephen's teaching, misunderstood as blasphemy against the temple and the law, was that Jesus (as he himself had claimed) was the fulfillment of both. Already in the Old Testament God was tied to his people, wherever they were, not to buildings. So now Jesus is ready to accompany his people wherever they go. When soon Paul and Barnabas set out into the unknown on the first missionary journey, they will find (as Abraham, Joseph and Moses had found before them) that God is with them...God has bound himself to his church

(promising that he will never leave it) and to his word (promising that it will never pass away). But God's church means people not buildings, and God's word means Scripture not tradition" (Stott, 143).

ACTS 7:51-60

Now Stephen applied his message to his audience. He said these men were stiff-necked and resisting the Holy Spirit as their fathers had; they had persecuted the prophets, those who foretold the coming of the "Righteous One" and these men who betrayed and murdered Him had not kept the law. Bruce says, 'stiffnecked,' was a complaint as old as the wilderness wanderings--a complaint made by God himself (Ex. 33:5)" (Bruce, 152). Furthermore, according to Bruce, "The fathers had all along resisted the plan of God, the very purpose for which he had made them a nation and called them into a covenant relationship with himself; their descendants now repudiated the one in whom the divine plan and purpose were to be consummated" (Bruce, 152,3).

When the Jews heard that they were "cut to the quick" (See Acts 5:33). But Bruce says, "Stephen remained calm, fully controlled as before by the Spirit of God" (Bruce, 154). Hughes says, "Stephen's sermon was his death warrant, but he was standing tall. He had lived like Christ, he had spoken like Christ, and now he would die like Christ" (Hughes, 106).

Luke records that Stephen had one final witness to offer: "But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (vv. 54-56).

Bruce says, "This is the only New Testament occurrence of the phrase "the Son of Man" outside the Gospels. Apart from this instance, it is found only on the lips of Jesus. It has its Old Testament roots in Dan. 7:13-14, where a human figure ("one like a son of man"...) is seen coming to the enthroned Ancient of Days "with the clouds of heaven" to receive universal dominion from him" (Bruce, 154).

Stephen saw the "Son of Man" standing. This is interesting. Why was Jesus standing rather than sitting? (See Hebrews 1:3b) Commentators differ on interpretation.

According to Bruce, Huw Pari Owen believes Stephen foresaw Christ's second coming (the Parousia) and that Christ is standing in preparation for it. But Bruce says, "Most probably Stephen's words should be taken closely along with Jesus' promise 'everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God' (Luke 12:8)...That is to say, Jesus stands up as witness or advocate in Stephen's defense" (Bruce, 156). Stott agrees with Bruce's statement,

"Stephen has been confessing Christ before men, and now he sees Christ confessing his servant before God" (Stott, 141).

Peterson also wonders and presents similar possibilities but a different conclusion: "This posture has been variously interpreted. It could symbolize Jesus' readiness to welcome Stephen as a persecuted prophet, soon to enter his presence. Perhaps the vision serves as 'assurance of Jesus' supportive witness in the heavenly court' (cf. Luke 12:8). Perhaps it implies a personal coming to the martyr at the time of his death, as at the end he will come to all. At this particular point in the narrative, however, it is more likely to be a way of asserting the readiness of the Son of Man to act in judgment against those who deny him (cf. Is 3:13, where standing is the posture for judgment)" (Peterson, 267). When the Jews heard Stephen's words, they yelled, covered their ears and rushed at him. Driving him out of the city they began to stone him, laying their robes at the feet of Saul (vv.57-58). Peterson says, "Luke does not record any formal verdict or sentence from the high priest, giving the impression that this was a mob lynching" (Peterson, 268). As they stoned him, Stephen called on the Lord and said "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (v. 59). Bruce points out that these words remind us of the words of Christ on the cross. However, he says, "whereas Jesus committed his spirit to God, Stephen committed his to Jesus--eloquent evidence for the rapid emergence of a high christology in the church" (Bruce, 160).

Falling on his knees, Stephen cried out "Lord don't hold this sin against them" and then fell asleep (v. 60). Bruce says, "Stephen had learned his lesson in the school of him who, when he was being fixed to the cross, prayed, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34)" (Bruce, 160). What have you learned from Jesus that you can imitate this week?

Hughes says, "Death reveals who we really are." To make his point, he cites the French philosopher, Voltaire, an atheist who said, "In twenty years Christianity will be no more. My single hand shall destroy the edifice it took twelve apostles to rear." However, on his deathbed Voltaire cried, "I am abandoned by God and man! I give you half of what I am worth if you will give me six months' life. Then I shall go to hell and you will go with me. O Christ! O Jesus Christ." Hughes contrasts Voltaire's last words with those of John Wesley, who said, "The best of all is, God is with us. The best of all is, God is with us. The best of all is, God is with us" and of Adoniram Judson, missionary to Burma, who said "I go with the gladness of a boy bounding away from school, I feel so strong in Christ" (Hughes¹, 108).

*Jesus, the very thought of thee
with sweetness fills the breast;
but sweeter far thy face to see,
and in thy presence rest.*

*O hope of every contrite heart,
O joy of all the meek,
to those who fall, how kind thou art!
How good to those who seek!*

*But what to those who find? Ah, this
nor tongue nor pen can show;
the love of Jesus, what it is,
none but his loved ones know.*

*Jesus, our only joy be thou,
as thou our prize wilt be;
Jesus, be thou our glory now,
and through eternity.*

*— Attr. Bernard of Clairvaux, 12th C.
(Jesu dulcis memoria)*

Translated from Latin by Edward Caswall

Peterson says, "Thus, the leaders of Israel fulfill Stephens's accusation against them (7:51-52), resisting the Holy Spirit speaking through Stephen and showing themselves again to be children of those who rejected and killed the prophets" (Peterson, p. 269).

ACTS 8:1-3

Acts 8:1a says, "Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death." According to Peterson, "This was the first mention of Saul in the narrative of Acts (cf. Paul's recollection of the event in 22:20)" (Peterson, 268).

According to verses 2-3, Saul was not only in "hearty agreement" with the murder of Stephen, but zealously sought out believers to put in prison. But Gempf says, "Interestingly, it also numbers Saul as among those about whom Stephen prays do not hold this sin against them..."The great persecution (this episode is the first time that Acts uses the word) and scattering throughout Judea and Samaria that it caused is the backdrop for the chapters that follow. Saul's actions in this persecution are confirmed from his own letters (1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13, 23; Phil. 3:6; 1 Tim. 1:13). Saul went house to house looking for Christians, which suggests that they no longer met openly in the temple (5:42)" (Gempf, 1078). Verse 3 says, "Paul began ravaging the church." Stott points out that "The verb *lumaino* expresses a brutal and sadistic cruelty" (Stott, 145; See Acts 22:20).

Hughes says, "Following the church through Acts is like following a wounded deer through a forest. Drops of blood mark the trail" (Hughes, 109) Stott says, "The church was shocked, even stunned, by the martyrdom of Stephen and by the violent opposition which followed. But, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see how God's providence used Stephen's testimony, in word and deed, through life and death, to promote the church's mission" (Stott, 143).

"but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8)

According to Richards, "The first persecution had positive results, as persecutions often have throughout church history. The scattered believers preached ("gossiped") Christ, and the Gospel message spread" (Richards, 715).

Week 6

Acts 8:4-40

WEEK 6, DAY 1

ACTS 8:4-40

1. Read the Bible Study Notes for Week 5 (pp. 86-94)
2. Read and meditate on Acts 8:4-40. Use the space below to make any notes that will help you deal with God in this passage.

WEEK 6, DAY 2

ACTS 8:4-8

1. Read Acts 8:4-8 a couple times, focusing on different words each time.

2. What were positive consequences of the "great persecution" of the church in Jerusalem? (See also 8:1-3; 11:19-21)

3. What circumstances may cause you to have a new "audience" to preach the gospel?

4. Philip went to a city in Samaria and preached to them about Christ.
 - a. Why was this unusual? (John 4:9)

 - b. How was it in keeping with God's plan? (1:8)

 - c. What had the Samaritans, like the Jews, long been expecting? (John 4:25)

5. Like the apostles and Stephen, what was Philip able to do? For what purpose? (See also Acts 2:43; 6:8)

WEEK 6, DAY 3

ACTS 8:9-13

1. Thank God you have His Word. Ask Him to minister to you as you read Acts 8:9-13.
2. What term is given twice for the acts that Simon performed? What had God said about such practices? (Deuteronomy 18:9-14, Malachi 3:5)
3. Of what other sin had Simon been guilty? (v. 10; 12:22; Isaiah 42:8)
4. What did Philip preach? What was the response?
5. What was the sign of their belief?
6. After Simon's profession of belief, what does verse 10 implicitly indicate was taking place between he and Philip?

WEEK 6, DAY 4

ACTS 8:14-17

1. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength as you read Acts 8:14-17.

2. What did the apostles do when they learned that Samaria had received the word of God? Why?

3. What two things did Peter and John do for the new believers?
 - a.

 - b.

4. Why was the apostle's action necessary? Give the verse. Discuss with your small group the language here of "the Spirit falling and being received" and the Spirit's indwelling of every believer.

5. What was the result?

6. Why do you think the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen on any of them before Peter and John came from Jerusalem? (v. 16) How does this compare with the Pentecost experience of Acts 2?

7. How do the activities of Peter and John demonstrate their belief that the Samaritans were also included in God's plan? (See also 8:25)

WEEK 6, DAY 6

ACTS 8:25-40

1. While reading Acts 8:25-40, be sure to talk with God about what's there.
2. What did the angel of the Lord say to Philip? What did Philip do? Give the verse.
3. What is the significance of Philip's being led by the Spirit to witness to the Ethiopian eunuch? (See Isaiah 56:3-4; Matthew 28:19,20, Acts 1:8)
4. Why did the eunuch not understand this passage from Isaiah?
5. Would you be able to preach the gospel from any Biblical passage about which someone had a question? Where (or which passage) would you begin?
6. Compare Acts 8:32-36 with Acts 2:16-23 and Luke 24:25-27. What do they have in common?
7. In what ways did the Holy Spirit work in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. Give the verse(s).

Week 6

Bible Study Notes

Acts 8:4-40

ACTS 8:4-8

Immediately upon Stephen's death (that day), a great persecution began against the Christians in Jerusalem. Like the previous diasporas in their history, they were forced to leave their homes. Herschel Hobbs says, "for sometime the Christians were 'at ease in Zion,' contented to confine their activity to Jerusalem ...God worked in the circumstances for good, however, in that the persecution thrust Christians out into the harvest field" (See Romans 8:28).

Verse 4 says that the disciples were "scattered," and as they went they "preached" the word. The word used here for "scattered" is *diasparentes*, from which the word "diaspora" (dispersion) is derived. Stott says, "We are very familiar with the Jewish diaspora, which had led to the propagation of Judaism; this was the beginning of the Dispersion of the New Israel, which led to the dissemination of the gospel" (Stott, p. 145). Bruce says, "As the old Israel had its dispersion among the Gentiles, so must the new people of God be dispersed" (Bruce, 163; See 2 Kings 18:11-12; 24:8-17; James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1).

Stott continues, "What is plain is that the devil (who lurks behind all persecution of the church) over-reached himself. His attack had the opposite effect to what he intended...An instructive modern parallel is what happened in 1949 in China when the National Government was defeated by the Communists. Six hundred and thirty-seven China Inland Mission missionaries were obliged to leave. It seemed a total disaster. Yet within four years 286 of them had been redeployed in South-East Asia and Japan, while the national Christians in China, even under severe persecution, began to multiply..." (Stott, 146). The believers were preaching the gospel as they went. Peterson says, "Preached may be an unfortunate translation if it is always taken to mean 'giving a sermon'. Speaking the word of the Lord can take many forms, though it has the element of proclamation because it is a declaration of what God has said and done." He adds, "Here and in 11:19-21 Luke implicitly challenges his readers about their own involvement in this great work of God." (Peterson, 279) What circumstances may cause you to have a new audience to whom you could "preach" the Gospel? Philip went to Samaria. He is not to be confused with the Apostle. Bruce says that he, "like Stephen, was one of the seven almoners appointed to manage the daily administration of the communal fund" (Bruce, 164). (See Acts 6:1-6) Proclaiming Christ, he also performed "signs" just as the apostles had done in Jerusalem. Peterson says, "Although the signs and miracles performed by Philip are a significant factor in capturing the attention of the Samaritans...it is clearly his proclamation of the gospel that converts them and brings them to baptism" (Peterson, p. 280). He adds, "In Acts, signs and wonders establish the credentials of a prophet before all the people and authenticate or verify the prophet's message by actually conveying a partial realization of the salvation proclaimed" (Peterson, 281; Ed. note: lame walking, blind seeing).

ACTS 8:9-13

A sorcerer named Simon also lived in the city where Philip was preaching. Peterson says, "Popular opinion accepted what Simon apparently claimed for himself...The Samaritans were gripped by his magic and by his idolatrous claim to be in some sense 'a divine man'. They were therefore caught up with a strange syncretism of Hellenistic-pagan and Samaritan-Jewish beliefs. [Ed. note: "Syncretism" = the combination of different forms of belief or practice].

Then Philip came along proclaiming the good news. The verb used by Luke is *evangelizomai*. It is used five times in this chapter: 8:4, 12, 25, 35, 40. Peterson says, "The kingdom of God was the focus of Jesus' teaching (e.g., Luke 4:43; 6:20; 7:28; 8:1, 10; 11:1), and, in the course of his public ministry, he sent his disciples to preach the same message (Luke 9:2; 10:9-11). After Pentecost, the apostolic preaching became more explicitly Christological, as the role of the crucified and resurrected Christ in the fulfillment of God's kingdom plans was more clearly understood. However, the kingdom remains the theological context in which to understand and proclaim Christ in Acts (See note for Acts 1:3 note, 1:6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31)" (Peterson, 283).

According to verse 12 many believed, both men and women. Peterson says, "Here again Luke makes the point that women shared equally with men in this new community, with respect to its blessings (1:14; 5:14) **and** its suffering (8:3; 9:2). [emphasis added] Luke records that "even Simon himself believed" (v. 13). But Stott says, "New Testament language does not always distinguish between believing and professing to believe" (Stott, 149). According to Peterson, "Luke highlights two worrying aspects of his behaviour" (Peterson, 285). Simon followed Philip everywhere and was constantly impressed ("amazed") at the signs and wonders Philip performed. Bruce says, "Like the magicians of Egypt in the presence of Moses, he recognized that the messenger of the true God had access to a source of power that outstripped his own...Jesus, himself, we are told in John 2:23-24, attached little value to the faith that rests on miracles alone" (Bruce, 167; See Exodus 8:16-19). Trenchard says, "His baptism is the classic example of the outward sign wrongly applied to one whose profession of faith was not genuine" (Trenchard, 1283).

ACTS 8:14-17

In response to the news of Philip's evangelizing, the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria (v. 14). Interestingly, John had once wanted to call fire down from heaven to consume an unreceptive Samaritan city (Luke 9:51-56). Stott says, "Now his desire is to see the Samaritans saved, not destroyed" (Stott, 150). Peterson says, "Peter

and John were sent for positive reasons, to verify the surprising news that Samaria had accepted the word of God" (Peterson, 285). Continuing, Peterson notes that "the effect on Peter and John is that they become convinced that the Samaritans are truly included in the messianic salvation" (Peterson, 285). According to verses 15 and 16 the apostles prayed that the new believers "might receive the Holy Spirit." (v. 15) But why had the Holy Spirit not yet "fallen upon any of them?" (v. 16). Contrast verse 16 with Acts 2:38-39. What was different about Samaria? Was it because Philip was not an apostle? Peterson supplies the answer: "Luke later makes it clear that the Spirit can be given when the person baptizing is not an apostle (9:17-18)" (Peterson, 286). Citing Marshall, Peterson says that the best explanation is that "God himself withheld the Spirit until the coming of Peter and John, 'in order that the Samaritans might be seen to be fully incorporated into the community of Jerusalem Christians who had received the Spirit at Pentecost'" (Peterson, 287).

Stott explains that "the hostility between Jews and Samaritans had lasted a thousand years. it began with the break-up of the monarchy in the tenth century BC when ten tribes defected, making Samaria their capital, and only two tribes remained loyal to Jerusalem. It became steadily worse when Samaria was captured by Assyria in 722 BC, thousands of its inhabitants were deported, and the country was re-populated by foreigners. In the sixth century BC, when the Jews returned to their land, they refused the help of the Samaritans in the rebuilding of the temple. Not till the fourth century BC, however, did the Samaritan schism harden, with the building of their rival temple on Mount Gerizim and their repudiation of all Old Testament Scripture except the Pentateuch [ed. note: The first five books of the Bible]. The Samaritans were despised by the Jews as hybrids in both race and religion, as both heretics and schismatics." (Stott, 147) (See also John 4:1-43) Hughes also notes that "A popular prayer in those days said, '...and, Lord, do not remember the Samaritans in the resurrection'" (Hughes, 111).

Peterson says, "The delay in the sending of the Spirit put the Samaritans somewhat in the position of the Jewish disciples before Pentecost. They had a genuine faith in the risen Lord, but had not yet received the promised Holy Spirit....These were unique events in salvation history, not the normal pattern of initiation known to Luke" (Peterson, 287).

Stott also says that "what happened in Samaria must be judged abnormal." Unfortunately, some have used this passage as a "proof-text" to support their belief in what Stott calls a "two-stage Christian initiation" where the second stage involves "the laying-on of hands with prayer" (Stott, 152). However, Stott maintains, "It is always dangerous to isolate any passage of Scripture, and always wise to interpret Scripture by Scripture. What, then, is the general teaching of Scripture about receiving the Spirit? According to Peter's first sermon, forgiveness bestows on everyone whom he calls, and who repents, believes and is baptized (Acts 2:38-39)" (Stott, 156). Trenchard says, "The normative experience was clearly the reception of the Holy Spirit when men and women believed (Acts 10:44; 19:2; Ephesians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 12:13) and nothing is elsewhere known of any apostolic 'gift' by which the Spirit was bestowed. This is the

exception, and must be explained as such" (Trenchard, 1282-83). So, why was the gift of the Spirit delayed in the case of the Samaritans? According to Stott, "The most natural explanation...is that this was the first occasion on which the gospel had been proclaimed not only outside Jerusalem but inside Samaria...As we saw earlier, the Samaritan schism had lasted for centuries...The gospel had been welcomed by the Samaritans, but would the Samaritans be welcomed by the Jews?"

Bruce says, "Luke presents the Samaritan mission as the first important advance in the Christian mission." He quotes Ehrhardt, who says, "the new Israel of the Church of Jesus Christ had succeeded in bringing the whole kingdom of David under the sway of his Son's sceptre..." (Bruce, 170). See 1 Kings 11:4-12:33 for the history of the division of David's kingdom.

ACTS 8:18-24

Impressed with Philip's and the apostles' power, Simon now offered Peter and John money in exchange for the authority (power) to be able to confer the Holy Spirit on others.

This request brought a quick response from Peter. Telling Simon that his heart was not right before God, Peter offered him the chance to repent (v. 23).

Peterson says, "The magician's characteristic interest appears in Simon's desire to connect the possession of the Spirit to a specific ritual without reference to dispositions such as faith. Doubtless he also saw this power as a way of regaining his hold over the Samaritans, even as a way of gaining a share in the leadership of the movement" (Peterson, 288).

Hughes observes, "He actually thought he could buy the authority to bestow spiritual power on others (undoubtedly for a price). We may laugh at Simon for being so ignorant, but many Christians have believed exactly this. In church history it is called 'simony,' after this very man...We could, no doubt, point to much of the same today but should mainly check our own hearts...anytime we seek spiritual power or abilities to put ourselves forward we make the same error. Preaching to gain recognition or status is simony. Serving with an eye to advancement in the church's power structure is simony. Seeking spiritual gifts for the promotion of oneself is simony. Even seeking to be godly so others will think we are godly is a type of simony" (Hughes¹, 114).

Peterson adds, "Whenever religion is used to make its leaders seem great and powerful, and whenever religion becomes a commodity by serving the interests of those who have or want money, it has become corrupt." After all, Peterson points out, Peter and John "would never take money for what they had to offer" (Peterson, 288). As a result, Peterson says that "Simon is showing himself to have no part or share in the

gospel and its blessings. He appears to be unconverted, a pretender...He does not understand the grace of God and has not yielded his heart to God's rule" (Peterson, 289). Simon's response to Peter in verse 24 seems to support further the contention by most commentators that Simon was unconverted. Peterson says, "his desire seems to be to escape the consequences of his sin rather than to amend his life" (Peterson, 290). And Trenchard adds that Simon's reply "shows that he still thought in terms of magic powers and of 'influence', having no desire to draw near to God personally as a repentant sinner" (Trenchard, 1283).

Hughes asks, "What do we learn from all this? We learn that the gospel has astonishing effects! God can use a layman like Philip to influence a whole culture for Christ...We learn too that spiritual power cannot be bought. The pursuit of God, not power, is what counts. Philip's

ACTS 8:25-40

While Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in Samaritan villages along the way, Philip had another assignment from the Lord. Hughes says, "Philip's ministry began as a lay-deacon humbly doling out the widow's portions in the Jerusalem church. But it soared to unimagined heights when persecution hit..." (Hughes¹, 117; See Luke 16:10).

Now, an "angel of the Lord" instructed him to "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (vv. 25,26) So what did Philip do? He "got up and went." Hughes, reminding us that Philip was said to be "full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3), says, "Being in touch with the Holy Spirit, Philip was open to the Spirit's direction." (Hughes¹, 118). By divine plan, he encountered an Ethiopian eunuch on the desert road. This eunuch was an important man in the court of Ethiopia, a country on the edge of the known world. This country was not the present-day Ethiopia but was farther south, a part of Sudan today. In the Old Testament it was called Cush. Cush was the son of Ham, the son of Noah (See Genesis 10). Peterson says, "Cush is specified as one of the lands from which the Lord will 'reclaim the remnant that is left of his people' when the Messiah stands 'as a banner for the peoples' and the nations 'rally to him' (cf. Psalm 68:3; Zephaniah 3:9-10)" (Peterson, 293).

The eunuch had been to Jerusalem and was probably, like Cornelius, a "god-fearer" (v 27; See Acts 10:2). The term "god-fearer" was used to describe those who were not Jews (or Jewish proselytes), but who worshipped the one true God. Some, like Hughes, believe that the eunuch was a full proselyte, but others disagree because of the scriptural regulations (See Deuteronomy 23:1). Peterson says, "Perhaps the promise of Isaiah 56:3-5, about eunuchs finding an honoured place among the renewed people of

God, is particularly in Luke's mind as he records this story. At the same time, it is true that Philip makes contact with a representative of peoples at 'the ends of the earth' (1:8)" (Peterson, 291). And Trenchard comments, "The story illustrates the great principle: 'He that seeketh findeth' " (Trenchard, 1283; See Matthew 7:7).

Sitting in his chariot, the eunuch was reading from the Jewish Scriptures. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Philip approached the eunuch and heard him reading aloud (a common practice at the time) from the book of Isaiah. Peterson says, "It is a measure of his enthusiasm and wealth that he possessed his own copy of a biblical book" (Peterson, 294; v. 28).

Now Philip took this opportunity to ask the eunuch if he understood what he was reading. The eunuch replied that he needed help in interpreting the passage and invited Philip to join him. Calvin says, "the reading of Scripture bears fruit with such a few people today, because scarcely one in a hundred is to be found who gladly submits himself to teaching" (Calvin, 247). Trenchard states, "The meaning of Scripture is not always self-evident, even to the earnest seeker, and God provides those, who, having been taught themselves, are able to guide others" (Trenchard, 1283). According to Stott , "The fact is that God has given us two gifts, first the Scriptures and secondly teachers to open up, explain, expound and apply the scriptures" (Stott, 160-61).

What was the eunuch reading?

*He was led as a sheep to slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He does not open His mouth.
In humiliation His judgment was taken away;
Who will relate His generation?
For His life is removed from the earth — Isaiah 53:7-8*

This quotation is from the last of the four "Servant Songs" (Isaiah 52:13-53:12; See also Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9).

The eunuch wondered to whom the passage was referring. Who was "He?" According to Peterson , "Various views about the interpretation of the Suffering Servant were held by Jews in NT times" (Peterson, 296). Trenchard says, "The Jewish rabbis (especially of later date) sometimes thought in terms of suffering Israel..." (Trenchard, 1283).

Stott agrees, saying, "there is no evidence that anyone in first-century Judaism was expecting a suffering rather than a triumphant Messiah. No, it was Jesus who applied Isaiah 53 to himself, and understood his death in the light of it. It was, therefore, from him that the early Christians learned to read Isaiah 53 in this way" (Stott, 161). Peterson says, "Jesus is the key to unlock the meaning of the OT (Luke 24:25-27; 44-47) and passages such as the one being read by the Ethiopian cannot be satisfactorily

understood apart from their fulfillment in him." He adds, "Given Jesus' application of this prophecy to his impending suffering (specifically Isaiah 53:12 in Luke 22:37), it is not surprising to read that Philip used it to proclaim the gospel to the Ethiopian" (Peterson, 294). Hughes says, "The principle here is clear: all of us are called to be in touch with the Spirit and with the gospel. All of us should be able to explain Christ from the Scriptures. Unfortunately, too few can do so" (Hughes¹, 121).

Verse 35 says, "*Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from **this** Scripture he preached Jesus to him*" [emphasis added].

Peterson continues, "The passage continues to be a powerful testimony to the person and work of Jesus and an effective means of evangelism. It begins with the claim that the Servant's suffering and exaltation will benefit many nations (52:13-15). It continues with the amazing story of his rejection and suffering, claiming that this punishment by God was 'for our transgressions' (53:1-6). Then comes the portion that the Ethiopian was reading, with its focus on the Servant's willingness to suffer and experience injustice (53:7-9). The passage concludes with a further statement of God's intention to make his life 'an offering for sin', to 'justify many', and to 'bear their iniquities' (53:10-12). The thoughtful reader may indeed ask, *who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?* There is no one else in history, apart from Jesus of Nazareth, to whom these words can truly be applied" (Peterson, 296).

Verse 37 is not found in the earliest manuscripts. Peterson says it "was presumably added because copyists felt that the Ethiopian would not have been baptized without such a confession" (Peterson, 297). Stott agrees, saying that the words "were probably inserted into the text by a scribe who felt certain that Philip, before baptizing the Ethiopian would have made sure that he had believed in his heart, in contrast to Simon..." (Stott, 162).

So, after verse 35, the next two verses of Chapter 8 should be read this way: "As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized? And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him" (vv. 36, 38). Peterson observes that the eunuch's question "presumes the passage of time and some instruction from Philip about the way to turn to Christ and receive the benefits of his death and resurrection through baptism." He also notes that the eunuch "takes the initiative at this point, signifying a real work of God in his heart" (Peterson, 296). Assuming the eunuch was a proselyte, Hughes observes that "the Ethiopian knew that baptism was the expected external symbol for a Gentile's repentance and conversion. Maybe Philip even ended his explanation of the gospel with an appeal for baptism like Peter did at Pentecost." (Hughes¹, 122).

Once they came out of the water, Philip is "snatched away, "preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea. He is not mentioned again until Acts 21:8-9. On his part, the Ethiopian eunuch went away "rejoicing" (vv. 39-40). Irenaeus, an early

church father (2nd century AD), said the eunuch was the first missionary to the Ethiopians. (Hughes¹, 122; Bruce, 178) How sensitive are you to "chance meetings" that may offer opportunities to share the Gospel? Would you be willing, like Philip, to leave a profitable ministry to seek one lost soul in the desert if the Lord sends you there? (See Luke 15:4) Hughes says, "Divine appointments await us if we are obedient to God's leading. That was Philip's experience, and it can be ours" (Hughes, 120).

Week 7

Acts 9:1-31

WEEK 7, DAY 1

ACTS 9:1-31

1. Read the Bible Study Notes for Week 6 (pp. 104-112).
2. Read and meditate on Acts 9:1-31.

WEEK 7, DAY 2

ACTS 9:1-9

1. Believingly read Acts 9:1-9.
2. In these verses, how does Saul show that he was an enemy of Christ and, therefore, an enemy of God?
(See also 7:58, 22:4,19; 26:9-11)
3. What did Saul see on the road to Damascus? What did he hear?
4. How did Saul address the voice and what did he ask?
5. What was the response, and what was Saul told to do?
6. What, in his own words (Gal. 1:15-16a), brought about Saul's conversion? (See also Eph. 2:8,9)
7. What qualified Saul (Paul) to be an apostle of Christ? (See 1:22; 22:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:7-9; Galatians 1:11-12)

WEEK 7, DAY 3

ACTS 9:10-16

1. Read Acts 9:10-16. Make notes on things in the text that you need to consider more.
2. In Ananias's vision, what did the Lord tell him to do?
3. What did the Lord tell him that Saul was doing? Give the verse.
4. What was Ananias' response? (See also v. 21). Why?
5. How did the Lord answer Ananias' initial hesitation?
6. What did the Lord tell Ananias that Saul would experience for His name's sake? Give the verse.

WEEK 7, DAY 4

ACTS 9:17-21

1. With dependence on the Holy Spirit, read Acts 9:17-21.
2. What is the significance of the way Ananias addressed Saul in v. 17?
3. What did Ananias confirm to Saul about his experience on the road to Damascus?
4. After he received the Holy Spirit and was baptized, what did Saul proclaim that demonstrated his radical conversion? (See John 19:7)
5. What features of Saul's conversion experience described in this chapter are different from yours? What are the same?

WEEK 7, DAY 5

ACTS 9:22-25

1. Depending on God for proper understanding and application, read Acts 9:22-25.
2. What was the initial reaction of those who heard Saul proclaiming Jesus?
3. What did God enable Saul to do in Damascus?
4. After "many days" of preaching what happened to this former persecutor of the church?
5. What did Saul's disciples do? (See also 2 Cor. 11:32,33)

WEEK 7, DAY 6

ACTS 9:26-31

1. Day Six: Read Acts 9:26-31 along with Galatians 1:11-19

2. According to Paul's own account in Galatians:
 - a. What was the period of time (the "many days" of v. 23) that elapsed before Saul returned to Jerusalem?

 - b. In addition to Damascus, where did Saul go during this period of time?

3. Why did the disciples in Jerusalem not welcome Saul at first? Give the verse.

4. Who brought Saul to the apostles?
 - a. What does verse 36 tell us about this man? (4:36)

 - b. What three points did he make in defending Saul?

5. What did Saul do in Jerusalem and what were the consequences?

6. Compare v. 31 with 8:1:

7. How had the church changed geographically as a result of the long persecution?

8. What characteristics of the church are now described?

Week 7

Bible Study Notes

Acts 9:1-31

ACTS 9:1-9

Jewish priests were permitted by Rome to have extradition rights over Jews living outside Judea. Obtaining that authority in letters from the Sanhedrin, Saul intended to go to Damascus to bring back any believers who lived there. Luke has already mentioned Saul three times (7:58; 8:1; 8:3). Now, according to Stott, Saul was "still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples (9:1)." (Stott, 168) But as Calvin notes, the "cruel wolf" was to be "turned into a sheep" and assume "the character of a shepherd" (Calvin, 256). Hughes says, "The Hound of Heaven was tracking him down just as surely as the persecutor was tracking down God's saints" (Hughes, 127).

About 150 miles separates Jerusalem from Damascus so the trip took about a week. As the journey was drawing to a close, something amazing happened! Saul's experience is recorded three times in Acts, twice in his own words (9:1-19; 22:3-16; 26:2-18). Paul also describes it in Galatians 1:13-16; 1 Corinthians 9:1, 15:8-10; Philippians 3:4-11; and 1 Timothy 1:12-16.

Stott says, "at about noon (22:6), suddenly it happened: *a light from heaven flashed around him* (v. 3), brighter than the midday sun (26:13). It was such an overwhelming experience that it both blinded him (8-9) and knocked him over. He *fell to the ground* (v. 4), 'prostrate at the feet of his conqueror'...Then *a voice* addressed him personally and directly (in Aramaic, 26:14): '*Saul, Saul,...why do you persecute me?*' And in answer to Saul's enquiry about the speaker's identity, the voice continued: '*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting*' (5)" (Stott, 170). According to Hughes, "At least two things burst on Saul's conscience. First, Jesus Christ was alive! Verse 17 of our text, as well as 1 Corinthians 15:8, indicates that Saul actually saw Christ. (See also Acts 9:17; 26:16; 1 Corinthians 9:1). Later he would present this vision as part of his apostolic credentials. Everything in Saul's life had opposed this, but now he knew Christ was alive" (Hughes, 128).

According to Stott, "Since he realized that he was talking to Jesus, and that he had risen from the dead, it [his response *Kyrios* - "Lord"] must already have begun to acquire the theological overtones which it was later to have in Paul's letters" (Stott, 173). Peterson says that the question, "Why do you persecute me," would challenge [Saul's] whole belief system and pattern of life. So many of his later insights can be traced back to the Damascus-road event or the outworking of that event in his experience...The risen Lord viewed the persecution of his disciples as an attack on himself, clearly identifying himself with the church (cf. Lk. 10:16; Mt. 25:40)" (Peterson, 304; See also John 13:20).

The Lord instructed the blinded Saul to rise and go into Damascus. He obeyed, being led by his companions. Stott says, "He who had expected to enter Damascus in the fullness of his pride and prowess, as a self-confident opponent of Christ, was actually led into it, humbled and blinded, a captive of the very Christ he had opposed...The light

he saw was the glory of Christ, and the voice he heard was the voice of Christ. Christ had interrupted his headlong career of persecution and had turned him round to face in the opposite direction" (Stott, 170).

According to Paul's account in Acts 26:14, Jesus also said to him, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." A "goad" is a pointed rod used to prod an animal along. The animal often kicks it to no avail. Hughes believes, "These goads included Stephen who prayed for his murderers...and the men and women who bravely refused to deny their Lord...[Saul] knew something was wrong but was unwilling to examine himself or repent" (Hughes¹, 127). Reymond says that Romans 7:7-25, "suggests that God had prepared him subjectively for this encounter by previously bringing him under deep conviction of his sin and convincing him of his impotence regarding true and full obedience to the law of God" (Reymond, 59). Stott adds that Paul and Jesus were contemporaries, "pretty close in age to one another...Saul will have heard reports of Jesus' teaching and miracles, character and claims, together with the persistent rumour from many witnesses that he had been raised from death and seen" (Stott, 171-2).

According to Reymond, "Only the Damascus encounter with Christ was powerful enough to cause the young Jewish rabbi to reconsider the death of Jesus; only his meeting with the risen Christ was sufficient to demonstrate that God had vindicated the claims and work of the One he was opposing. Humanly speaking, Paul was immune to the Gospel...he was sure that no evidence could overturn the verdict of the cross; that is, that Christ died the death of a criminal..." (Reymond, 64).

Stott says, "One can but magnify the grace of God that he should have had mercy on such a rabid bigot as Saul of Tarsus, and indeed on such proud, rebellious and wayward creatures as ourselves" (Stott, 173).

Now, Saul fasted and prayed for three days. Trenchard says, "Perhaps the three days' rest was necessary so that Saul might recover from the shock and meditate on the meaning of the celestial encounter before receiving further messages" (Trenchard, 1284).

ACTS 9:10-17

Hughes says, "The hunted do not usually minister to the hunter...But this is exactly what happened in Saul's case" (Hughes¹, 130). Ananias, a disciple in Damascus, would have been one of the people Saul intended to round up and take to Jerusalem in chains. In a vision, the Lord told Ananias to seek out Saul to minister to him by the laying on of his hands. (vv. 10-12) Understandably, Ananias was doubtful! He had heard of Saul and knew why he had come to Damascus (vv. 13,14). Having expressed his reservations about Saul, Ananias was reassured by the Lord, saying "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of

Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake" (vv. 15,16). Ananias did just as the Lord commanded (v. 17).

Peterson points out that it was "By means of a double vision, with very specific directions, the Lord brings Saul and Ananias together. This reassures both parties of God's will in the situation. A double vision in Acts 10 similarly indicates God's intention that Peter and Cornelius should meet...With this vision, Saul has been assured in advance that he is to be healed by the disciple of Christ whom God will send" (Peterson, 306-7; Acts 9:10-12; 10:1-17).

Gempf says, "Ananias's placing of his hands on Saul was a gesture expressing recognition and confirmation of God's acceptance and Christian unity, as was the greeting, *Brother Saul*" (Gempf, 1080).

Trenchard asks, "Why was Ananias of Damascus chosen to convey Saul's commission (cf. 22:14-16) instead of the apostles in Jerusalem? (a) as a Jewish Christian...Ananias was an unimpeachable witness to the truth of Saul's call and apostleship, (b) It was fitting that Saul, the leading persecutor of the disciples, should be received into the fellowship by one of the despised Nazarenes in Damascus...(c) An ecclesiastical reason becomes clear as we read Gal. 1:15-2:10, for it had to be made quite clear that Paul's apostleship was not received from men, but directly from the Lord" (Trenchard, 1284).

Ananias is, according to Hughes, "one of the obscure heroes of the Church. We never hear from him again" (Hughes¹, 131) [Ed. note: except in 22:16 where Paul recounts his experience].

ACTS 9:18-20

Hughes says, "The physical scales falling to the ground mirrored Saul's spiritual transformation--all things had become new. The eyes of Saul's heart had been enlightened" (Hughes¹, 131,32; v. 18). He spent "several days with the disciples who were at Damascus" (v.19). Stott says, "He knew that he now belonged to the very company which he had previously been trying to destroy, and he showed this plainly by beginning to *preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God* (v.20)" (Stott, 176).

Gempf says, "It is interesting that despite the order *Gentiles...kings and...people of Israel* in v. 15 above, Paul first of all began to *preach in the synagogues*. This was to be the pattern throughout his missionary career: to the Jew first and then the Gentile (see 13:46)" (Gempf, 1080). And what did he proclaim to them? That Jesus is "The Son of God" (v. 20) Bruce says, "The proclamation of Jesus as the Son of God represents an advance on the way in which his messiahship has been proclaimed thus far in Acts...A. E. Harvey finds three aspects of sonship implicit in the ascription of the title to Jesus: his

perfect obedience to God, his being the ultimate revealer of God, and his being the authorized agent of God" (Bruce, 190).

According to Hughes, "Saul was now a mighty hunter for God! Instead of exhaling threats and murder, he helped men and women find life in Jesus Christ. Instead of incarceration, he brought liberation. What a miracle!" (Hughes¹, 132).

ACTS 9:21-25

According to Peterson, "When Luke says that Saul *grew more and more powerful*, the term he uses (*enedynamouto*) suggests the empowerment of the Spirit (cf. Jgs. 6:34; 1 Chr. 12:18; Eph. 6:10; Phil. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:17). The way in which that empowerment was experienced is indicated by what follows. Saul baffled ...the Jews (NASB: "confounded"), throwing them into confusion as Stephen did with his God-given wisdom (Acts 6:10)" (Peterson, 313,14). Trenchard says, "The Jews soon perceived the danger of the witness of an outstanding theologian turned renegade, and persecution was the natural result" (Trenchard, 1285).

Stott says, "Luke goes on to describe how he left the city after many days had gone by (23a). It is an intentionally vague time reference, but we know from Galatians 1:17-18 that these 'many days' actually lasted three years, and that during this period Saul was in Arabia" (Stott, 176). Some believe Saul went there to preach; others that he went to commune with God. *The NASB Study Bible* says that, "It is unclear whether his three-year stay occurred between verses 22 and 23 or between verses 25 and 26...Regardless...there was a period of at least three years between Paul's conversion (9:3-6) and his trip to Jerusalem (9:26)" (NASB, 1908).

ACTS 9:26-31

Three years after his conversion, according to Galatians 1:17-19, Saul finally traveled to Jerusalem. Gempf says, "Although by the time Paul came to Jerusalem he had been a Christian for some time, the apostles, like Ananias before them, found it difficult to believe. It was not until Barnabas ('the Son of Encouragement'), whom we first met in 4:36, took responsibility for him that the disciples were prepared to accept this former persecutor of the church" (Gempf, 1081). Peterson says, "Even believers who have seen the power of God at work in their own lives can doubt God's ability to change others" (Peterson, 316). But, Bruce notes, "When Saul desperately needed a true friend in Damascus, Ananias played that part to him; now, when he stood in equal need of one in Jerusalem, he found a friend in Barnabas" (Bruce, 193). Bruce continues, "When Luke says that Barnabas brought Saul 'to the apostles,' the narrative of Gal. 1:18-20 compels

us to interpret this as a generalizing plural. According to Paul's own solemn affirmation, the only leaders of the Jerusalem church whom he met on that occasion were Peter (Cephas) and James the Lord's brother (whom Paul calls an apostle, although he would not have satisfied Luke's conditions for that designation)" (Bruce, 193; See Acts 1:21-26).

Now, according to Bruce, Luke "describes Saul, during his Jerusalem visit, as taking up the work which Stephen had laid down at his death, by engaging in debates with the Hellenists" (Bruce, 195; v. 29; Acts 6:9). This activity resulted in their trying to kill him and he was warned by Jesus (Acts 22:17-18) to leave the city immediately. Now began the suffering foretold by the Lord (v. 16; See also 2 Cor. 11:23-29).

Stott says, "Thus the story of Saul's conversion in Acts 9 begins with him leaving Jerusalem with an official mandate from the high priest to arrest fugitive Christians, and ends with him leaving Jerusalem as a fugitive Christian himself. Saul the persecutor has become Saul the persecuted." Yet, says Stott, "the world's opposition did not impede the spread of the gospel or the growth of the church. On the contrary..." (Stott, 179).

Week 8

Acts 9:32-11:18

WEEK 8, DAY 1

ACTS 9:32-11:18

1. Read the study notes for Week 7 (pp. 122-127)
2. Read and meditate on Acts 9:32-11:18.

WEEK 8, DAY 2

ACTS 9:32-43

1. Steep your soul in Acts 9:32-43.
2. Find Lydda and Joppa on a Bible map. In what country was Peter, and in what direction from Jerusalem was he traveling?
3. What are the similarities between Peter's encounter with Aeneas and Jesus' miracle in Mark 2:10-12?
4. To whom did Peter give credit for the healing?
5. What are the similarities between Peter's raising Tabitha from the dead and Jesus' raising Jairus' daughter? (Mark 5:40-42)
6. What were the fruits of the miracles that Peter performed?

WEEK 8, DAY 3

ACTS 10:1-16

1. Pray over Acts 10:1-16. Write a few thoughts of whatever is most outstanding to you about this text.
2. What do these verses say about Cornelius?
3. Was he a proselyte (convert to Judaism) or a God-fearing Gentile? (See v. 28a)
4. In Cornelius's vision, what did the angel of God tell him to do? How did he respond?
5. In Peter's trance, what did the voice from heaven tell him to do and how did he respond? Why? (See Leviticus 20:26-26)
6. How did the voice respond to Peter's objection?
7. Why was this whole scene repeated a second and even a third time?

WEEK 8, DAY 4

ACTS 10:17-29

1. Simmer on Acts 10:17-29, dealing with God as you read.
2. What was Peter's initial response to the vision he had seen?
3. What did God immediately provide in answer to Peter's questions?
4. What did Peter do in response to the Spirit's instructions?
5. What had Cornelius done in anticipation of Paul's visit?
6. What did Peter say to the people as he entered the house? What did he ask Cornelius?

WEEK 8, DAY 5

ACTS 10:30-43

1. Capture a couple things to pray about as you read Acts 10:30-43, and write them down.
2. How does Cornelius describe the angel that appeared to him? Compare this description with that of the "men" in Acts 1:10 and Luke 24:4.
3. After hearing Cornelius's account of God's revelation to him and his response of faith, what understanding and acceptance did Peter now confess?
4. Restate in your own words the gospel as presented by Peter to this group.

WEEK 8, DAY 6

ACTS 10:44-11:18

1. Resolve to respond to God as reading Acts 10:44-11:18 is used by His Spirit to prompt you.
2. What happened to convince Peter and the Jewish believers who accompanied him, that everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ receives forgiveness of sins—both Jew and Gentile?
3. What did Peter do next to show full acceptance of these Gentiles into the body of believers?
4. What was the reaction of the Jerusalem Christians and how did Peter respond?
5. How did the people respond to Peter's account of the events and his conclusion? (v. 17)
6. What is the significance of these events to Gentiles? How do you respond?

Week 8

Bible Study Notes

Acts 9:32-11:18

ACTS 9:32-43

Following the conversion of Saul, we are told that the churches in "all Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace"(9:31). At this point, Luke turns his attention from Saul and back to the Apostle Peter who was traveling "through all those regions," stopping to visit the believers in Lydda (v.32). Peterson says these believers were "Jewish Christians who either came from Jerusalem because of the persecution (8:1) or turned to Christ because of the preaching of Philip, when he journeyed from Azotus to Caesarea (8:40)" (Peterson, 320).

Lydda/Diospolis (Greco-Latin) was a town about 11 miles southeast of Joppa and was on the route Peter was taking from Jerusalem. Its Hebrew name was Lod, and it was a town of the tribe of Benjamin (1 Chronicles 8:12; Ezra 2:33; Nehemiah 7:37; 11:35). By Peter's time, however, it was largely pagan. Here, in Lydda, and later in Joppa, Peter performed two miracles which, according to Stott, "followed *the example of Jesus*", were "performed by *the power of Jesus*," were "signs of *the salvation of Jesus*" and "redounded to *the glory of Jesus*" (Stott, 183).

In the first miracle, Peter healed a paralytic named Aeneas. The Gospel of Mark records that Jesus had healed the paralytic in Capernaum by saying, "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home" (Mark 2:11). Peter knew he did not have the power or authority in himself to heal Aeneas. So he said, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed" (v.34). Aeneas was healed and Luke records that "all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord." (v. 35). Calvin comments that the word "all" does not mean that 100% of the inhabitants "turned to the Lord," but that "When scripture mentions all, it is not embracing, to a man, the whole of whatever it is describing, but uses 'all' for many, for the majority, or for a crowd of people. The meaning is therefore that, since there was a small number of believers in that place, a church was gathered together from a large part of the populace" (Calvin, 277).

*"How lost was my condition
Till JESUS made me whole!
There is but one Physician
Can cure a sin-sick soul."
— John Newton (1779)*

Among the disciples in Joppa was a woman named Tabitha (Gk: Dorcas). Luke records she "continually" performed "deeds of kindness and charity" (v. 36). Peterson says that "there is no doubt that Luke wishes to highlight the importance of Dorcas and her ministry to the needy...Once again, generosity surfaces in the narrative of Acts as a sign of the Spirit's work in those who turn to Christ (cf. 2:44-45; 4:32-27)" (Peterson,

322). *The NASB Study Bible* says, "God uses great preachers like Peter and Paul, but he also uses those who have gifts of kindness like Dorcas" (NASB, 1911).

Tabitha became ill and died. The stage was now set for Peter's second miracle, which parallels one performed by Jesus (Matthew 9:18–26; Mark 5:21–43; Luke 8:40–56). Peter was still in Lydda when the disciples from Joppa sent for him (v.38). Once Peter arrived in the upper chamber where Dorcas lay dead, he sent everyone out of the room. According to Peterson, "Somewhat like Jesus in Luke 8:51-56, Peter *sent them all out of the room...* [but] whereas Jesus took the little girl by the hand and commanded her to get up, Peter *got down on his knees and prayed*" (Peterson, 322). Stott adds that this was "a detail which must have come from Peter, since nobody else was present" (Stott, 183). Peter then commanded Tabitha to "get up," which she did. Again, the news traveled in Joppa and many "believed in the Lord" (vv. 40-42).

"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die" (John 11:25).

Peterson says, "Luke ends this story on a strange note: Peter *stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon...* Tanners were considered unclean by more scrupulous Jews because of their contact with the hides of dead animals. Peter was apparently not troubled by such concerns, but he would soon have difficulty taking the more radical step of visiting a Gentile household...He would need a series of revelations from God to move him in that direction" (Peterson, 323).

Hughes comments, "All this taken together had a wonderfully softening effect on Peter's prejudice. He was doing Christ's work away from Jerusalem and in the midst of the defiling grit of Gentile culture." (Hughes, 143).

ACTS 10:1-8

Calvin says that "Luke now passes on to a memorable story, viz. that God regarded a man, uncircumcised and a foreigner, worthy of a unique honour before all the Jews; because He both appoints His angel to go to him, and brings Peter to Caesarea for his sake, to ground him in the Gospel" (Calvin, 283).

Cornelius was a centurion, a leader of 100 Roman soldiers called the "Italian cohort." They were stationed in Caesarea, the administrative capital of the Roman province of Judea. At that time, according to Calvin, the Italians "had generally no more religious scruples than wild beasts, and their devotion to integrity was like that of brigands" (Calvin, 283). But, Cornelius was different. He feared God, gave many alms to the *Jewish* people, and prayed to God continually (v.12). The term "god-fearer" was used to describe those who were not Jews (or Jewish proselytes, therefore, uncircumcised), but who worshipped the one true God.

Stott says, "It is difficult for us to grasp the impassable gulf which yawned in those days between the Jews on one hand and the Gentiles (including even the 'God-fearers') on the other. Not that the Old Testament itself countenanced such a divide. On the contrary, alongside its oracles against the hostile nations, it affirmed that God had a purpose for them. [See Ps. 2:7-8; 22:27-28; Is. 2:1ff; 42:6; 49:6; Joel 2:28ff]. By choosing and blessing one family, he intended to bless all the families of the earth...The tragedy was that Israel twisted the doctrine of election into one of favoritism, became filled with racial pride and hatred, despised Gentiles as 'dogs', and developed traditions which kept them apart. No orthodox Jew would ever enter the home of a Gentile, even a God-fearer, or invite such into his home (see verse 28)." (Stott, 185)

At three o'clock in the afternoon, a time for prayer among the Jews, Cornelius saw a vision. In this vision, an angel of God called him by name. In response to the question, "What is it, Lord?" the angel told him to send men to Joppa to find Simon Peter and bring him back. With military promptness, Cornelius obeyed the instructions received from heaven (vv. 3-8)." (Trenchard, 1286) Stott says, "The angel did not preach the gospel to the centurion; that privilege was to be entrusted to the apostle Peter" (Stott, 186).

ACTS 10:9-16

The next day about noon, just as Cornelius's men were approaching Joppa, Peter went up on the roof of Simon's house to pray. Peter's reaction to the vision shows that the sheet held both clean and unclean animals, according to Jewish dietary laws (Lev. 11:20-25). And, Peter protested that he had never eaten anything "unholy and unclean" (v. 14). Hughes says, "His protest was understandable in the light of his upbringing. Any serious Jew would have reacted in the same way" (Hughes, 145). In reply, a voice said, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (v. 15). This happened three times before the sheet was taken up into the sky (v. 16). According to Gempf, "Peter was no stranger to triple repetition (Jn. 13:38; 21:15-17)" (Gempf, 1082). Peterson adds that "Peter must acknowledge God's right to determine what is clean and to redefine boundaries for the gospel era. The message was so important that it was given *three times*" (Peterson, 330).

What was the aim of the vision? Calvin says, "I think that it is shown to Peter, in a general way, that the distinction, which God had formerly imposed is now removed. But, just as He had made a division between the animals, so, having chosen one people for Himself, He used to regard all the nations as unclean and common. The distinction between the animals having now been removed, He teaches, as a consequence, that men are no longer divided as they used to be, and that a Jew is no different from a Greek" (Calvin, 293; See Deuteronomy 7:3; Galatians 3:28). Peterson adds, "The clean and unclean provisions of the law were temporary, designed to keep Israel a holy and

distinct people, until the time when Jews and Gentiles could receive the forgiveness of sins and sanctification on the same basis, through faith in Christ (Acts 20:32; 26:17-18; cf. 15:9, 'having cleansed their hearts by faith')" (Peterson, 330). Bruce suggests, "Perhaps, as he thought about the vision, he remembered hearing similar words on an earlier occasion, though he had not then grasped their import. No doubt he was present when his Master, in a debate with Pharisees and scribes, insisted that it is not what goes into someone's stomach that conveys defilement, but what comes out of one's heart (Mark 7:14-19a)...it was not until later, as a result of his experience on the roof at Joppa, that Peter appreciated this. It may well be to Peter that we owe the comment appended by the evangelist to Jesus' pronouncement on this subject, 'Thus he declared all foods clean' (Mark 7:19b)" (Bruce, 206).

Hughes says, "The four corners of the sheet in the vision correspond to the four points of the compass---north, south, east, and west. The sheet's contents indicate the swarming millions that populate the earth" (Hughes, 145). Jesus had told his disciples that they would make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:19), but they must have thought that it included making them Jews first" (Gempf, 1082).

ACTS 10:17-29

Peter left for Caesarea with some other believers. After spending the night somewhere, they arrived in Caesarea the following day. Luke records that "Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends" (v. 24). According to Hughes, "They did not know it, but they were about to have the first-ever cross-cultural home Bible study" (Hughes, 150).

As Peter entered his home, Cornelius "worshipped him." This was "Treating Peter as an angelic messenger," according to Peterson, pointing out that in Revelation 19:10 and 22:8-9, "even an angel resists such homage" (Peterson, 333). *The NASB Study Bible* says, "This act of worship could have caused Peter to become arrogant. After all, a Roman centurion was bowing before him. Instead, Peter pointed Cornelius to Christ" (NASB, 1913).

Peter's introductory words to the assembled group could have insulted them: "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner..." (v. 27). But, Calvin says, "he could not have made a better opening to his speech. For he announces that those who had previously been regarded as unclean have now been given the gift of purity, so that there may now be mutual communication between them and the saints. Moreover it must be realized that his observation that it is unlawful for Jews to approach Gentiles, had its source, not so much in the Law, as in an observance of the fathers. God had certainly forbidden them to entangle themselves in marriages or contracts (Deut. 7:3), but at the same time they were never debarred from eating or transacting the ordinary affairs of life" (Calvin, 303).

ACTS 10:30-43

Bruce observes that "Never had a preacher of the gospel a more promising audience---as promising in its way as Philip's one-man audience on the Gaza road when he was invited to expound the Isaianic prophecy of the suffering Servant (8:30-35)" (Bruce, 210). Hughes adds, "Peter was prepared, the people were prepared, and the Holy Spirit was in control from beginning to end" (Hughes, 151).

As Peter begins his sermon, he tells the audience the truth he has so recently learned from the Lord. That truth, Calvin says, is that "Cornelius was a Gentile, yet God hears his prayers, thinks him worthy of the light of the Gospel, appoints an angel specially to him. From these things Peter grasps that all who lead godly and blameless lives are pleasing to God, without any respect of persons. For previously he never used to give it a thought that the grace of God can reach to others, for he was obsessed by this prejudice, that the Jews alone are loved by God, as they alone had been chosen out of all the nations" (Calvin, 306); vv. 34-35). Stott says, "The emphasis is that Cornelius' Gentile nationality was acceptable so that he had no need to become a Jew, not that his own righteousness was adequate so that he had no need to become a Christian. For God is not indifferent of religions but indifferent of nations" (Stott, 190).

Peter begins, according to Peterson, by reminding his Gentile audience that God "sent the message of the gospel to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all...The overall perspective of Luke-Acts is that the messianic lordship of Jesus, which brings peace to the Jewish people in fulfillment of scriptural promises, applies to all peoples, for they are invited to share with Israel in this messianic peace" (Peterson, 336).

Peter reviews the events of Jesus' life and ministry (vv. 36-39). Gempf says, "...more details about Jesus' life and ministry are presented in this speech than in any other speech in Acts" (Gempf, 1082). Next, Peter states that he and the other apostles are "witnesses of all the things He did" (v. 39). Bruce says, "Luke, the only one of the four evangelists who records the risen Lord's eating with his disciples (Luke 24:41-43), regarded this as among the most convincing of the many tokens of his bodily resurrection" (Bruce, 215).

Next, Peter spoke briefly of Christ's death (v. 40). This was followed, according to Trenchard, by "the typical *kerygma* declaration...**but God raised him...on the third day and caused him to be seen**---not publicly, but to the body of **witnesses** to which Peter belonged" (Trenchard, 1287; vv.40-41).

Stott says, "The life, death and resurrection of Jesus were more than significant events; they also constituted the gospel, which *he commanded us* (the apostles again) *to preach*, in the first instance *to the people*, i.e. the Jews. But the scope of the gospel was

universal. So the apostles were also to proclaim him as 'Lord of all' (36), as judge of all and as Savior of all who believe. They were *to testify that* he would return on the judgment day, *since he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead* (42; cf. 17:31). All will be included; none can escape. Yet we need not fear the judgment of Christ, since he is also the one who bestows salvation. Long before the apostles began to testify to him as Saviour, *all the prophets* did so in the Old Testament, and still do through their written words..." (Stott, 191).

ACTS 10:44-11:18

Luke records that even while Peter was still preaching, the Holy Spirit "fell on all who were listening to the message." Bruce calls this the "Pentecost of the Gentile world." He adds, "This event was not so much a second Pentecost, standing alongside the first, as the participation of Gentile believers in the experience of the first Pentecost. What was involved was later summed up by Paul: 'in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks (1 Cor. 12:13)" (Bruce, 216).

As at Pentecost, these believers began to speak in tongues, praising God. Calvin maintains, "God now confirms by a new miracle that the teaching of His Gospel is shared by the Gentiles equally with the Jews" (Calvin, 317; vv. 44-46). Bruce points out "On the day of Pentecost (2:37-41) the sequence of initiation into the new community was conviction of sin, repentance and faith, baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and the reception of the Spirit. Here the reception of the Spirit comes first. There is no explicit mention of faith in the immediate context, but it is certainly implied; it is suggested more definitely in 11:17, where Peter's words "when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ" clearly mean that the Gentiles received the Spirit when they believed, while in 15:7-9 Peter expressly links the Gentiles' reception of the Spirit with their believing and having their hearts cleansed by faith" (Bruce, 217).

In regards to baptism, Stott says, "Peter was quick to draw the inevitable deduction...How could the sign be denied to those who had already received the reality signified?" (Stott, 192). And so, the Gentile believers were baptized after which Peter remained with them a few days (v. 48).

The story does not end here. Upon returning to Jerusalem, Peter found that he had a lot to answer for. The news had spread throughout Judea and "circumcised believers" criticized him for eating in the house of "uncircumcised men" (vv. 1-3). Gempf says that they were "unsure about whether Gentiles could become Christians without also becoming Jews" (Gempf, 1083) [Ed. note: being circumcised, observing Jewish tradition].

In verses 4-17, Luke records that Peter proceeded to defend himself by reciting all the events that had occurred from beginning to end. He concluded by saying "who was I

to think that I could stand in God's way?" (v. 17). Calvin says that "we must note that we resist God not only by openly opposing Him, but also by our inactivity, if we do not carry out what belongs to our calling. For here Peter says that he could not have denied baptism and the fellowship of the brethren to the Gentiles without being an enemy to God" (Calvin, 325). In what way are you actively or passively "standing in God's way"? Hughes challenges us: "Do we see those around us as potential heirs of grace? Do we view those who are different from us and who do things we do not approve of as candidates for the kingdom?" (Hughes¹, 147).

Peter's critics had nothing more to say. As Bruce notes, "God had acted, and had clearly shown his will...Their objections ceased, their praise began" (Bruce, 223; v. 18).

*In Christ there is no East or West,
In Him no South or North;
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth.*

*Join hands, then, brothers of the faith,
Whatever your race may be!
Who serves my Father as a son
Is surely kin to me.*

Week 9

Acts 11:19-12:25

WEEK 9, DAY 1

ACTS 11:19-12:25

1. Read the study notes for Week 8 (pp. 136-143)
2. Read and meditate on Acts 11:19-12:25. Make notes that will serve you well by listing out what you want to especially focus on in your study of this section well this week.

WEEK 9, DAY 2

ACTS 11:19-26

1. Linger in prayer-filled contemplation as the Spirit leads in your reading of Acts 11:19-26.
2. Find Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch on a Bible map. What had caused the church to be scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (cf 8:1) and now to these places?
3. What was different about the preaching of the gospel in Antioch?
4. What was the response among the Greeks? Who is given the credit for this? Give the verse.
5. Whom did the Jerusalem church send to Antioch?
 - a. What did he witness there and how did he use his gifts?
 - b. Whom did he bring to Antioch and what did they both do? For how long? Give the verses.
6. What were believers called for the first time in Antioch? Give the verse.
7. Ponder and pray over the significance of “the hand of the Lord” being with *you*.

WEEK 9, DAY 3

ACTS 11:27-30

1. Commune with the One Who inspired Acts 11:27-30.

2. What spiritual gift (Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Rom. 12:6-8) did the men who came from Jerusalem to Antioch possess?

3. What spiritual gift(s) do you have?

4. How are you using your gifts(s) for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7) and the building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12)?

5. What did Agabus, by the Spirit, predict?
 - a. How did the church members respond?

 - b. What determined how much each of the disciples contributed?

WEEK 9, DAY 5

ACTS 12:11-16

1. Fellowship with God is the greatest possible blessing to man. Do that as you read Acts 12:11-16.

2. After the angel left Peter and he 'came to himself', what did he realize about his rescue? Give the verse.

3. What part had Peter, himself, played?

4. When he went to Mary's home where the disciple's were praying:
 - a. How did the servant girl identify Peter?

 - b. Why did she not let Peter in immediately?

 - c. How did the disciples react to servant girl's announcement?

 - d. Why should they have been neither skeptical nor amazed that it was Peter at the door?

5. Can you think of a time you were surprised that God answered prayer or the way in which He answered it?

WEEK 9, DAY 6

ACTS 12:17-25

1. What if God met you powerfully as you read what He recorded in Acts 12:17-25? Ask Him to do that. Go for it!

2. Compare v. 17 with v. 11. What is emphasized about Peter's escape?

3. To whom does Peter tell his listeners to report 'these things'? Who is this 'James'? (15:13; 21:18; Gal 1:19,2:9)

4. When did the prison guards realize that Peter had escaped?
 - a. What happened to them?

 - b. What happened to Herod? (vv. 20-23)

5. What does Peter's escape illustrate about the plans of kings and men (vv. 3,6,11) versus the plans of God? (vv. 11,24; Psalm 2,37; Isaiah 8:9-15; 14:24-37)

Week 9

Bible Study Notes

Acts 11:19-12:25

ACTS 11:19-26

In Chapter 11, Luke records that "the word" (*logos*) continued to be spread by those who were "scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen." (v. 19; Notice the parallel with 8:1). Peterson says that "the word is a central 'character' in Acts, which Luke presents as 'the powerful force that is able to conquer the world' " (Peterson, 350).

According to Calvin, "For just as the seed is scattered in order to bring forth a harvest, so the result of their flight and dispersion was that the Gospel, which had previously been confined within the walls of a single city, as if in a barn, was spread even to far distant regions...And, in this way, according to the prophecy of Isaiah, 'destruction overflowed into righteousness' (Isa. 10:22). If so many believers had not been driven out of Jerusalem, Cyprus would have heard nothing about Christ, Phoenicia would have heard nothing, and what is more Italy and Spain, which were even farther away, would have heard nothing" (Calvin, 327). But, they were driven out because no plan of God's can be thwarted (Job 42:2). And, this is not the first time God has used intended harm for good (Genesis 50:20; Acts 2:23-24).

Calvin continues: "although they were snatched almost out of the midst of death, yet they do not hesitate to carry out their duty to God, even in the midst of danger. From that we gather for what purpose and to what extent Christians are permitted to avoid persecution, viz. to devote the rest of their lives being active in extending the glory of God" (Calvin, 328).

While some of those of the "Christian diaspora" spoke to Jews only, others ("men of Cyprus and Cyrene") came to Antioch and preached Jesus to Greeks also [Ed note: literally, *Hellenists*, those who lived by Greek customs and culture] . (Bruce, 224).

Peterson says, "This is the first detailed account of evangelism by ordinary believers (cf. 8:4). Previous accounts involved apostles or prophetic leaders such as Stephen or Philip" (Peterson, 352). But, "the hand of the Lord was with them" (v. 21) and many were saved. Calvin points out that "this verse warns us that whatever work and effort ministers of God put out on teaching, it will be useless and ineffectual unless God blesses their efforts from heaven. For our task is to plant and water, as Paul teaches, but the increase comes from God alone (1 Cor. 3:6) (Calvin, 329).

Just as it happened with the Samaritans, the church at Jerusalem heard what was happening and sent Barnabas to Antioch (v. 22). Barnabas, whose name means "Son of Encouragement," was the perfect choice for the job. When he arrived he observed the presence of the "grace of God". Rejoicing, he proved true to his name, encouraging "them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord" (v. 23). Stott says, "It was an

exhortation both to perseverance and to whole-heartedness" (Stott, 204). According to Peterson, "His ability to discern the grace of God at work in others gave him a generous and encouraging spirit. This enabled him to facilitate the ministry of Saul in Jerusalem when others were suspicious of his intentions (9:26-29), and of John Mark when he had previously abandoned his missionary partners (15:36-39)" (Peterson, 355). Luke describes him here as " a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" and then adds, "And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord" (v. 24).

Now, Peterson says, "Barnabas apparently recognized his own inadequacy to cope with the demands of a growing church and the need to bring another gifted apologist, evangelist, and teacher into the situation (cf. 13:1)" (Peterson, 355). According to Stott, it had been seven or eight years since Saul had been in Jerusalem (9:28-30). "What he had been doing meanwhile we do not know, although in his letter to the Galatians he seems to indicate that he was preaching in Syria and Cilicia" (Stott, 204).

Peterson adds, "Luke regularly shows the importance of teaching as an essential aspect of evangelism (e.g., 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 13:16-41) and as a vital means of growing a church to maturity and keeping believers faithful to the Lord (e.g., 14:21-22; 18:11, 24-28; 19:8-10; 20:17-35)" (Peterson, 356). And Stott says, "They must have taught about Christ, making sure that the converts knew both the facts and the significance of his life, death, resurrection, exaltation, Spirit-gift, present reign and future coming" (Stott, 205).

And so, as Peterson says, "In Antioch we meet the first church that is made up of Jewish and Gentile believers together" (Peterson, 351). Bruce suggests the pagans of Antioch would ask one another, "'Who are these people?... 'Oh, these are the people who are always talking about *Christos*, the Christ-people, the Christians'" (Bruce, 228). Calvin adds "when they began, openly, to be called what they really were, the use of the name was of great value in making the glory of Christ plain, because in this way the whole of religion was being referred to Christ alone" (Calvin, 332).

ACTS 11:27-30

"The gift of prophecy in the apostolic church was like the gift of tongues in that it was exercised under the inspiration of God; it differed from it in that it was expressed in the speaker's ordinary language" (Bruce 229). Here in Acts, Peterson says, is "the first reference to *prophets* (*prophetai*) as a distinct group. The expectation from 2:17-18 is that all believers under the New Covenant would 'prophesy' (propheteusousin) and so share to some extent in the prophetic role (cf. 19:6). However, it is clear that some of the early Christians were especially gifted in prediction (cf. 21:4, 9, 10-11), and others in exhorting and strengthening believers in their discipleship (cf. 15:30-32)" (Peterson, 357). Among prophets who came down from Jerusalem to the new church in Antioch was a

man named Agabus. He announced that a great famine would occur throughout the Roman Empire. In fact, such a hard time occurred between 45 and 48 AD, during the reign of the Roman emperor, Claudius (41-54 AD). Judea was hit particularly hard, especially the Christians living there, many of whom had been disowned by their families (vv. 27-28).

A relief fund was established: "The various members of the church appear to have allocated a fixed sum out of their income or property as a contribution to this fund, much as Paul was to advise the Corinthian Christians to do when he was organizing a later relief fund for Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4)" (Bruce, 231). "Once again, Luke suggests a parallel with the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem. The language recalls the loving care and generosity mentioned in 2:44; 4:32-37; 6:1. It was not a pooling of capital for use whenever needed, but a giving 'in proportion as any prospered'...Acts does not commend any one method of giving, but sets before readers several different examples of generosity and practical care for one another" (Peterson, 358; v. 29).

And so, Barnabas and Saul set out for Jerusalem to deliver the contribution from the Antioch church (v. 30). Stott says, "The church of Jerusalem had sent Barnabas to Antioch; now the church of Antioch sent Barnabas, with Saul, back to Jerusalem. This famine relief anticipated the collection which Paul was later to organize, in which the affluent Greek churches of Macedonia and Achaia contributed to the needs of the impoverished churches of Judea [2 Cor. 8-9]...it was a symbol of Gentile-Jewish solidarity in Christ, for 'if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings', [Paul] wrote, 'they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings' " (Stott, 206-7; See Romans 15:27 NIV).

ACTS 12:1-10

Satan is always trying to thwart God's work. His tool here, Herod Agrippa (10 BC-44 AD), was the grandson of Herod the Great (73/4 BC-4 BC). Brought up in Rome, Agrippa was well acquainted with future emperors Gaius (Caligula), Tiberius, and Claudius. Because of these friendships, Agrippa became governor, then king, of various lands -- first Southern Syria, later Galilee and Peraea and finally Judea. Rome's domination of Judea was never popular so whoever ruled there was always anxious to appease the Jews. Herod was no exception.

Luke records that Herod "laid hands on some who belonged to the church..."(v. 1). According to Bruce, "The 'members of the church' whom he singled out for attack were apostles. It is evidence of a change in the attitude of the people of Jerusalem toward the apostles, who had not been molested in the persecution that followed Stephen's death, that Agrippa should now make them his principal targets" (Bruce, 233; See 8:1).

The first of the apostles to die was James, the brother of John (and son of Zebedee) (v. 2).

Seeing the positive reaction of the Jews to James' death, Herod had Peter arrested. This occurred during the Passover ("days of Unleavened Bread"). In prison, Peter was surrounded by four guards 24 hours a day. At each watch of 4 hours, Peter was chained to two soldiers, while two others stood guard at the door. Gempf says, "Careful precautions had been taken, perhaps because the authorities had trouble containing Peter in the past (5:22-24)" (Gempf, 1084). Since it was unlawful to execute Peter during Passover, Herod intended to kill him immediately after.

While Peter was in the prison, the believers in Jerusalem were praying for him as Herod was planning to have him executed the next morning (v. 6). God, however, had another plan (See Proverbs 19:21).

Trenchard asks, "Why did the Lord allow James to be beheaded while He intervened miraculously to deliver Peter? The answer is found in the mystery itself, for we cannot possibly investigate the reasons which determine the lifespan of God's servants on earth, but we can be sure that God was glorified both in the martyrdom of James---the first martyr among the apostles---and in the deliverance of Peter (cf. Mt. 20:20-23)" (Trenchard, 1288).

Verse 6 tells us that Peter was sleeping. Trenchard says, "Peter had denied his Lord at that very time of the year, but in this case he slept soundly on what seemed to be his last night on earth (cf. 1 Pet. 5:7)" (Trenchard, 1288).

Calvin says, "God could have hurried Peter out in a single moment, but one after the other He overcomes various difficulties, so that the glory of the miracle might be greater...He accommodates His method of acting to our capacity, and the progress of our faith. If Peter had been suddenly swept from prison into the house where the brethren were gathered together, one single simple delivery would have been recognized, but in fact we now see, as if with our own eyes, that he was liberated more than ten times" (Calvin, 341).

Charles Wesley apparently saw, in this episode, a picture of those who have been rescued from the bondage of sin:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

— Charles Wesley, Psalms and Hymns, 1738.

ACTS 12:11-16

Once he realized he was really free and not dreaming, Peter recognized that his deliverance was from the Lord (v. 11). His first act was to go to the home of Mary where he could be certain to find a group of believers (v. 12). Stott says it may have been the principal meeting place in Jerusalem. He continues, "The Mary to whom it belonged is known only as the mother of John Mark, a cousin of Barnabas, who is here mentioned by Luke for the first time and who is soon to feature in his story again as the renegade member of the first missionary journey (12:25; 13:5, 13)" (Stott, 210). According to Bruce, "Like several other persons mentioned in Acts, Mary's son had both a Jewish name (John) and a Roman name (Mark)...This John Mark is probably identical with the Mark mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:13) and with the author of the Second Gospel" (Bruce, 238).

When Peter knocked on the door, Rhoda, the servant-girl, answered. Recognizing Peter, she was overcome with such excitement that she left him standing outside as she ran to tell the others. They thought she was crazy (KJV: "mad"). By "it is his angel," Gempf says that they were probably expressing the common belief that "a person's spirit or guardian angel could roam around on its own and be mistaken for the person; see Mt. 14:26..." (Gempf, 1084; vv. 13-15). Stott says, "It is ironical that the group who were praying fervently and persistently for Peter's deliverance should regard as mad the person who informed them that their prayers had been answered!" (Stott, 211). But, Calvin says "we gather that they were not expecting the liberation of Peter. And yet we shall not say that they prayed without faith; because they were looking for other results, viz. that Peter, armed with heavenly power, would be ready to glorify the name of Christ whether by his life, or by his death; that the flock might not be scattered in terror at the violent inrush of wolves; that the weak might not give way; that the Lord might disperse that hurricane of persecution. But the Lord, with His immeasurable goodness, outdid their prayers, granting them more than they had hoped for. Now what has happened seems incredible to them, so that they are roused to praise the power of God all the more" (Calvin, 342-3). Richards says, "Expect God to do more than you expect" (Richards, 719; See Ephesians 3:20-21).

Trenchard: "This church was a company of potential martyrs, skilled in the ways of the Lord, and assured that any one of them might glorify God either by life or by death (cf. Phil. 1:19-24). As real, human people, they were surprised at the manner of Peter's deliverance---should not we have been?--but the Jerusalem church is a model of constant prayer and faith on a sublime level" (Trenchard, 1288).

The power of the Roman Empire was nothing in the presence of the power that the Church wielded in prayer. — Andrew Murray, p. 57.

ACTS 12:17-25

After telling the gathered believers about his miraculous escape from prison, Peter made plans to leave immediately for a safe place. But, he told to them to inform "James and the brethren" about what had happened (v. 17). There is not general agreement about the identity of the "brethren". "Some suggestions have been "fellow elders" (Bruce, 239; Trenchard, 1289), "the rest of the Christian assembly in Jerusalem" (Stott, 211; Peterson, 366), and "the apostles and the elders" (Calvin, 343). Many commentators, including Peterson, Bruce, Stott, Trenchard and Gempf conclude that "James" was the brother of Jesus. Peterson says, "Paul informs us that this James was the brother of Jesus (Gal. 1:19; cf. Mk 6:3; 1 Cor. 15:7). Along with Peter (Cephas) and John, James is identified as one of the 'pillars' of the Jerusalem church in Galatians 1:9. James plays a key role in the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15;13-21), maintaining the freedom of the Gentiles with respect to the law of Moses, but proposing a solution with respect to their recognition of Jewish Christian sensitivities" (Peterson, 366). Calvin disagrees, saying, "I rather conclude that this was James the son of Alphaeus" (Calvin, 343).

Luke moves now to the next day when Peter's absence was discovered. No wonder there was "no small disturbance among the soldiers!" (v. 17). Under Roman law, guards who allowed a prisoner to escape were subject to receiving the same punishment that would have been carried out against the prisoner. Herod ordered their execution and left for his home in Caesarea, the Roman headquarters for all of Palestine, including Judea (vv. 18-19).

Luke's account of what happened next is supported by the writings of the Jewish historian, Josephus in his *Antiquities*. Bruce says, "The accounts of Luke and Josephus are independent, but they agree on all essentials" (Bruce, 241). On the second day of the meeting, according to Josephus, Herod arrived 'clad in a robe made altogether of silver, of quite wonderful weaving' (Ant. 19:344; See Peterson, 369). Herod was hailed by the people, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Luke records that they "kept" saying it (vv. 21-22). Peterson says, "Adulation of kings was common in the ancient world, but no faithful Jew could accept divine honours in this way," and tells us to "contrast Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:14-18" (Peterson, 369).

"Immediately," Herod was struck down by "an angel of the Lord" (See also 2 Sam. 24:26; 2 Kings 19:35; Acts 5:19). Why was Herod struck down? Because " he did not give God the glory." Calvin says, "We do not read that similar plaudits were given to the king of Babylon; yet the prophet reproaches him because he tried to make himself equal to God (Isa. 14:13,14)...Now, since Scripture empties us of all merit as far as wisdom, virtue and righteousness are concerned, there is not one of us who can arrogate to

himself even the tiniest particle of glory without sacrilegious robbing of God. And, since Scripture pronounces that all who exalt themselves are, so to speak, making open war on God, and, on the other hand, since we all acknowledge that that cannot happen without our destruction, it is nevertheless astonishing that everywhere the majority of men rush to their own ruin with furious audacity. For there is scarcely one in a hundred who, remembering his own situation, leaves God His glory intact" (Calvin, 348; See also Isaiah 42:8, 48:11). How do you rob God of the glory He is due?

The NASB Study Bible says, "God does not immediately punish all sin, but he *will* bring all to judgment (Heb. 9:27)" (NASB, 1920). In this case, however, Herod's judgment was immediate. No one is certain what is meant by "eaten by worms" but it is certain that Herod died. And Peterson says, "From this time on, Judea reverted to government by Roman procurators" (Peterson, 370).

In contrast to the judgment that fell on Herod, Luke records, " *But*, the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied" (v. 24) [Emphasis added]. Stott notes, "The chapter opens with James dead, Peter in prison and Herod triumphing; it closes with Herod dead, Peter free, and the word of God triumphing" (Stott, 213). Calvin adds, "Therefore, although the faithful are accounted sheep appointed for the slaughter (Ps 44:22; Rom. 8:36), yet the Church always survives its enemies; and although the Word of God can repeatedly appear to be suppressed by the wicked tyranny of men, yet it soon rises up again" (Calvin, 349). Are you discouraged about the future of the Church or the lack of interest in God's Word? How does this example encourage you? (See also Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 16:18).

Verse 25 sets the stage for the next section of Acts as Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark return to Antioch from Jerusalem.

Week 10

Acts 13:1-52

WEEK 10, DAY 1

ACTS 13:1-52

1. Read the study notes for Week 9 (pp. 152-159).
2. Read and meditate on Acts 13:1-52.

WEEK 10, DAY 2

ACTS 13:1-12

1. Acts 13:1-12 is the Word of the Living God. Read and tremble like you believe it.
2. After Barnabas and Saul returned from their famine relief mission to Jerusalem (11:29-30; 12:25), why did they leave Antioch again?
 - a. To what work had God called them?
 - b. Whom did they take with them? How was he related to either Barnabas or Saul? (Col. 4:10)
3. What had the church been doing when they received the message to send out Barnabas and Saul and what did they do before the two were sent on their way? What is the church's responsibility in sending gospel ministers? As a group, pause and pray for Grace Church to be a healthy sending church.
4. What opposition did they encounter in Paphos when the proconsul (governor) summoned them to hear God's word?
 - a. What did the Holy Spirit, through Saul, say and do to the false prophet?
 - b. How did the proconsul respond to this and to the teaching of the Lord?
5. What is significant about Luke's use of the Roman name, "Paul", rather than his Hebrew name, "Saul", from this point on?

WEEK 10, DAY 4

ACTS 13:24-29

1. Seek God as you read Acts 13:24-29. Write something that stands out.
2. What had God promised David? (Psalm 89:3-4; 132:11; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14; Is 9:6-7; 16:5; Jeremiah 23:5, Luke 1:32-33)
3. What had John the Baptist proclaimed concerning Jesus before Jesus began His ministry?
4. The first great saving event that Paul concentrates on in his sermon is Christ's crucifixion. What had the Jews in Jerusalem and their leaders done that fulfilled the prophecies?

WEEK 10, DAY 5

ACTS 13:30-43

1. Aim to spend time with God over the words of Acts 13:30-43.

2. What great saving event did Paul speak of in today's text?
 - a. What did God do? Give the four verses from Paul's sermon.

 - b. Who had been witnesses of this? Give the verse.

3. How have the promises made to Israel through David been fulfilled? (vv. 23, 33-39)

4. What does Paul proclaim through Jesus' death and resurrection? From what are all believers freed? Right now, give God praise if you have received this blessing. If not, turn to Christ and believe!

5. What prophetic warning does Paul give? Give the verses.

6. What happened as Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue?

WEEK 10, DAY 6

ACTS 13:44-52

1. Humbly read Acts 13:44-52, talking with God about each verse.

2. What apparently happened in the city during the week following Paul's sermon?

3. What caused the Jews to be jealous and what did they do?

4. What did Paul and Barnabas reveal concerning:
 - a. To whom they had first spoken the word of God?

 - b. Why they were now turning to the Gentiles?

5. What was the reaction of the Gentiles who heard this? Who believed? Give the verse.

6. As persecution against Paul and Barnabas arose,
 - c. What did they do?

 - d. How does Luke describe the disciples remaining in Pisidian Antioch? Give the verse.

Week 10

Bible Study Notes

Acts 13:1-52

ACTS 13:1-12

Stott calls chapter 13 a "decisive turning point in (Luke's) narrative." He says, "The two deacon-evangelists have prepared the way - Stephen by his teaching and his martyrdom, Philip by his bold evangelization of the Samaritans and the Ethiopian" (Stott, 216; See Acts 7-8).

About the church at Antioch Hughes says, "This church was amazingly heterogeneous. It included Barnabas, a native of Cyprus, and a black man named Simeon (his other name, 'Niger,' is Latin for 'black'). Another Gentile named Lucius may also have been black because he was from Cyrene or North Africa. Also in this church was Manaen, who had been reared as part of King Herod's household. Finally, there was the rabbi Saul. This was the church staff at Antioch--a racially integrated group of go-getters who, Luke says in verse 1, were 'prophets and teachers' " (Hughes, 174; vv. 1-2).

Now, as they were "ministering to the Lord and fasting," the Holy Spirit told them He had specific work for Barnabas and Saul. (v. 3) Hughes says, "Fasting is always a mark of deep spiritual concern, indicating that a person is willing to set aside the normal demands of life in order to concentrate for a time on what God wants." And, according to Hughes, "It appears that the entire Antioch church was joined in this pursuit." He also notes "Worship and service go together and should never be separated. If we try to work for the Lord without worshipping him, we will settle for legalistic, self-centered service. If we worship and never work, we will end up with a form of godliness but no power" (Hughes, 175). Now God revealed his plan for Barnabas and Saul, so that, in Peterson's words, "they might willingly release them from their responsibilities at Antioch and prayerfully support them in their God-given mission" (Peterson, 377).

Stedman says, "It is the Spirit of God--- not human beings---who takes the initiative and launches new movements in carrying out the program of God" (Stedman, 546).

It was the Holy Spirit who sent them out, the church showed their oneness with the mission by laying their hands on Barnabas and Saul before they departed. Commentators are in agreement that this was not an ordination. Some call it a "commissioning" but all emphasize that the actual commissioning was done by the Holy Spirit. Hughes says, "Just as in the Old Testament the offerer placed his hands on the sacrifice, expressing his identification with it, so now the assembled church of Antioch laid their hands on these two ambassadors for Christ. They were saying, in effect, 'Brothers, we are with you in this great enterprise. As you go, we go. We are part of you' (Hughes, 175; See Lev. 4:33). Trenchard says that it was "an act of fellowship" (Trenchard, 1289).

The NASB Study Bible says, "The church was involved in sending Paul and Barnabas, but it was God's plan. Why did Paul and Barnabas go where they did? (1) The Holy Spirit led them. (2) They followed the communication routes of the Roman Empire-- this made travel easier. (3) They visited key population and cultural centers to reach as many people as possible. (4) They went to cities with synagogues, speaking first to Jews in hopes that they would see Jesus as the Messiah and help spread the Good News to everyone" (NASB, 1920; See also Ex. 13:21). Bruce quotes W. M. Ramsay: "the synagogue provided a bridgehead for reaching Gentiles; Paul was always sure of a good opening for his Gentile mission among the "God-fearing", who formed part of his audience in every synagogue' " (Bruce, 247).

Trenchard adds "[Paul] was also the great missionary strategist to whom God commended His plan for heralding the *kerygma* ["proclamation"] to the Gentiles. He saw the need of establishing centres of witness in busy ports and other centres of communication, counting on the gifts that the Holy Spirit would raise up in the new churches -- not only for the edification of the believers, but also for the extension of the gospel in surrounding areas. The early visits to local synagogues did more than comply with the established order 'to the Jew first', for they also provided a nucleus of pious converts in each place, already instructed in the OT scriptures" (Trenchard, 1289).

Stedman says, "All through this book [Acts], you find that the strategy has all been worked out in advance not by people but *by the Holy Spirit*. As Christians are available to the Spirit, He unfolds the strategy step by step" (Stedman, 547).

"So," according to verse 4, "being sent out by the Holy Spirit," Barnabas, Saul and John Mark left Antioch and went to Seleucia, a Mediterranean port about 16 miles from Antioch. This would begin what was to be about a 1400 mile journey. Various dates are given for this first missionary trip. For example, Trenchard estimates the journey took two years and lasted from 45/46 to 47/48 AD (Trenchard, 1293). At Seleucia, they got on a ship for Cyprus. [Ed note: A map of the First Missionary Journey, found in the back of most Bibles, will be helpful from this point on] According to Hughes, "It was an easy 130-mile voyage. The ancient world regarded Cyprus very much like we regard Hawaii or the Bahamas." (Hughes, 176). It was familiar territory for Barnabas because it was "home." And Acts 11:19 tells us that after the death of Stephen, believers fleeing persecution had taken the gospel to Cyprus. Here would be a good place to start! Landing at Salamis, the trio followed the practice of preaching in the local synagogues (v. 5) Then, they crossed the island until they arrived in Paphos, the island's capital, about 90 miles away on the western end (three to four days' travel).

In Paphos they encountered their first difficulty. A man named Bar-Jesus ("son of Jesus or Joshua"; "son of salvation"), a "magician and false prophet" had the ear of the Roman governor of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus. Magic (sorcery) was prohibited in the Old Testament (Ex. 22:18; Deut. 18:10-11). *The NASB Study Bible* says that leaders like Sergius Paulus often employed private sorcerers (NASB, 1921). But, the governor

summoned Barnabas and Saul, interested in hearing what they had to say. Sergius Paulus obviously was searching for answers that only the missionaries could give him. At this point, Bar-Jesus (also called Elymas - "sorcerer") tried to interfere, "seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith" (v. 8). He was afraid of losing his job! As we will see again, economic considerations often drive opposition to the gospel (Acts 19:23-28; See also Acts 8:9-24). Here, for the first time in scripture, Saul is identified by the name with which he would go down in church history: Paul. In those days, it was common for Jews to have a Greek or Roman second name (i.e. e. "John Mark"). But, Peterson says, "As a Roman citizen, Paul would have had three (Roman) names, the third of which would have been the Latin *Paulus*" (Peterson, 381).

Being "filled with the Holy Spirit," Paul confronted the magician (v. 9). According to Peterson, "The description of Paul as filled with the Holy Spirit indicates a special enabling of the Spirit for the ministry he is about to exercise (cf. 2:4; 4:8)" (Peterson, 381). Staring him down, he called Elymas a "son of the devil" (quite the opposite of "son of salvation") and said that he was "full of all deceit and fraud," and that he was making "crooked the straight ways of the Lord" (vv. 10-11). Hughes asks, "How could Paul talk that way to anyone?" The answer: "He was filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 9). It was through the discernment that the Spirit gives that Paul saw the state of Elymas' heart. The Holy Spirit also fills his children with love. Paul loved God, and he loved Paulus, but 'The spirit of love is a Spirit of fire' " (Hughes, 178). *The NASB Study Bible* says, "There is a time to be nice and a time to confront. Ask God to show you the difference and to give you the courage to do what is right" (NASB, 1922). Paul now said that Elymas would be struck blind for a while, which happened immediately. Elymas had to grope in the darkness for someone willing to lead him around. The punishment certainly fit the crime here! According to Stott, "God's judgment of him was fitting. For those 'who put darkness for light and light for darkness' forfeit the light they originally had...Paul must have remembered the day not many years previously when he himself had been blinded, albeit by the glory of the Lord and been led by the hand into Damascus" (Stott, 220). Gempf notes that "What Jesus did to Paul he will now continue to do *through* Paul" (Gempf, 1086).

As a consequence of this and the teaching of the missionaries, Sergius Paulus was saved. According to inscriptions found by archeologists on Cyprus, not only did Sergius Paulus become a Christian, but his family also. Peterson says that "it was not this display of the supernatural that converted the proconsul. He became a believer in the gospel as the Lord enabled him to acknowledge the truth of the message he had received. Contemporary Christians may wish for such demonstrations of divine power to remove obstacles to faith and enable conversions today. But it should be remembered that even in Acts they are rare and are usually related to the movement of the gospel into some new area, the overcoming of some form of spiritual opposition, or the winning of some particularly significant figure for Christ" (Peterson, 383).

Reymond says that "What is unique in this man's conversion is the fact that he seemed to have no relation to the synagogue. Here was a Roman to whom Saul preached directly with no intervening 'synagogue connection' and who believed as a result, just as Greeks had done earlier at Antioch!" (Reymond, 116). Reymond concludes that, "Saul, ever sensitive to the theological meaning in what for others would have been simply an ordinary turn of events, apparently realized immediately that, if God, in the salvation of Sergius Paulus, had in fact and in some sense reached a Roman with Abrahamic blessing directly through the ministrations of 'Israel' but that the 'Israel' he employed was not an established institution of ethnic and religious Israel but rather himself -- a Christian apostle -- and his missionary team, then there had to be a 'spiritual Israel' (of which he was a member) within ethnic Israel (Rom. 9:6)" (Reymond, 120; See Isa. 1:9, 10:22; Gal. 6:16; Rom. 9:27-29).

Additionally, Reymond says that "Saul apparently saw more clearly in this incident what the church's mission to Gentiles logically involved...without neglecting to evangelize Jews, the church may and ought to go directly to Gentiles with the gospel. Thus Saul's mission policy and his typical pattern of Gentile mission labor began to crystallize: in a city he would make his initial proclamation of the gospel to Jews and to any Gentile 'God-fearers' who were present...But if a synagogue began to speak evil of the Way and refused his mission team further audience in the synagogue, he would 'shake the dust of the synagogue off his feet' and turn directly, as a representative of 'spiritual Israel', to the Gentiles in that city and begin a ministry among them (see Acts 13:46 and Paul's later expression, 'to the Jews first and also to the Greeks', Rom 1:16;2:9-10)" (Reymond, 120).

ACTS 13:13-23

Beginning with verse 13, Luke records a subtle change in the way he speaks of the missionary team. Whereas Barnabas' name was listed first before, now the group becomes "Paul and his companions." In verse 42, the two men become "Paul and Barnabas" and remain being identified that way with few exceptions. (Exception: Acts 14:12-14; 15:12)

Again by ship, the men traveled from Paphos to Perga, on the coast of Pamphylia in modern-day Turkey. According to the *Holman Bible Atlas*, "The region was known for its unhealthy climate and marshes [Ed note: very humid conditions which breed disease] and the trio did not tarry long" (Holman, 244). But here, something happened to the make-up of the team. Paul and Barnabas went north to Pisidian Antioch along a steep road through the Taurus Mountains, known to be full of bandits. John Mark went home to Jerusalem.

Why did John Mark leave? Luke does not tell us. Hughes *suggests* "The realities of missionary life were too much for John Mark. He had inwardly romanticized the ministry they were undertaking, but reality had smashed his dreams" (Hughes, 179). They had traveled 411 miles and struggled for one recorded convert! Hughes also believes that "There may also have been sickness along the way, because Paul did not preach in Pamphylia but in Galatia. [Ed. note: Pisidian Antioch was located in Phrygia, part of the Roman province of Galatia] He wrote in Galatians 4:13, 'As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you' " (Hughes, 179;). Hughes writes, "life is continually difficult for the Christian... No matter what your level of involvement in Christian activity or ministry, you will be subject to difficulties and trials...How we view the war makes a vast difference in our conduct and even our longevity, just as it did with Paul, the great missionary general, and John Mark, the first missionary casualty" (Hughes, 174; See 2 Corinthians 11:24-28).

Some have *suggested* John Mark was unhappy about the change in team leadership because of family loyalty. Maybe he was homesick. Or, he was unwilling to take that difficult and dangerous trek of over 100 miles up the Taurus Mountains. For whatever reason, John Mark went back to Jerusalem. He had failed in his commitment, but God would give him another chance! He would not only help Barnabas in future missionary activities, but eventually be commended by Paul who, for now, saw him as a deserter (See Acts 15:37-41; 2 Tim. 4:11).

Arriving in Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. *The NASB Study Bible* tells us the usual order of service: "First the *Shema* was recited (this is Deuteronomy 6:4, which Jews repeated several times daily). Certain prayers were spoken; then there was a reading from the law (the books of Genesis through Deuteronomy), a reading from the prophets intending to illustrate the law, and a sermon" (NASB, 1922). One of the synagogue officials had responsibility for choosing the speaker each week, often selecting a visiting rabbi. Perhaps Paul was dressed as a Pharisee, which he was (Acts 23:6), and that got the official's attention. Invited to speak, he stood up. It is his first recorded sermon.

Paul's sermon, according to Richards, "is similar to Peter's early messages. He identifies Jesus as a historic person, a descendant of David, who is thus qualified by birth to be the Saviour (vv. 16-23). He shows how prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus' announcement, His death, and His resurrection (vv. 24-37). He promises forgiveness to those who believe in Jesus (vv. 38-39) and warns that a choice now must be made (vv. 40-41)" (Richards, 720); See notes for Acts 2). Peterson also notes that "His speech resembles that of Jesus in setting (a synagogue service with reading of Scripture) and resembles Peter's in points of content." And he quotes Tannehill who said "the three speeches either contain or lead to a Scripture quotation that interprets the mission that is beginning (Luke 4:18-19; Acts 2:17-21; 13:47). They lead immediately (Luke 4:24-30) or in due course (Acts 4:1-3; 13:45-52) to an outbreak of opposition" (Peterson, 383).

Stott suggests that, because of Paul's quotations, the readings from the "Law and the Prophets" were Deuteronomy 1 and Isaiah 1 (Stott, 222).

Bruce says, "His opening words indicate quite clearly the twofold composition of the audience. There were the 'Israelites' (Jews by birth and possibly, in some cases by conversion) [Ed. note: proselytes] and there were Gentiles who recognized that the true God was worshipped in the synagogue, and desired to join in his worship. They are the people who are commonly, but not technically, known as God-fearers" (Bruce, 253).

Notice, as Stott points out, that in these verses, God "is the subject of nearly all the verbs" (Stott, 223). Trenchard says, "Paul, like Stephen, reviews Israel's history, but his purpose is to show God at work until the promises are fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah..." (Trenchard, 1290; See Acts 7). Peterson breaks down the opening to the sermon (vv. 17-23) this way:

- His choice of the Patriarchs and His promises to them: Genesis 12-50
- The beginning of His fulfillment of His purpose for them in the Exodus events: Exodus 1-15
- His endurance of their conduct in the Wilderness: Exodus 16-40 and Numbers
- His overthrow of seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance: Joshua
- His provision of judges to rule over them: Judges
- His giving of Saul as king and replacing him with David: 1,2 Samuel
- His promise to David: 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:20-29

According to Peterson, "Once David is mentioned, the rest of the message focuses on him and the promises made to him. However, Paul presents an immediate challenge to his audience with the words, '*from this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as he promised*' (*kat' epangelian*, 'according to promise')...Thus the fulfillment of the promise to Israel of an heir to David's throne is the leading idea of the speech. The sense in which Jesus is *Saviour* will now be unfolded" (Peterson, 387-88).

Calvin says, "The first part of the sermon has this aim, that this is the main point of the Law, and the foundation of God's covenant, that they may have Christ as Leader and Governor..." (Calvin, 364).

ACTS 13:24-31

After speaking of David's descendant, Jesus, Paul reminds his listeners about John the Baptist who was still famous and well-regarded among the Jews. Peterson says, "John's ministry is first described in terms of the need for all the people of Israel to repent and be baptized, thus becoming ready to meet their Messiah (cf. Lk. 3:1-20, citing Is. 40:3-5). John made it clear that Israel was estranged from God..." (Peterson, 389). Then Paul tells them that John pointed away from himself to Jesus (vv. 24-25; See also John 1:29, 35).

Paul focuses his sermon on Jesus, the one who had been promised to the Jews, but who had been put to death and then was resurrected. Stott says, "Paul tells the story of Jesus, as he has told the story of Israel. In doing so, he concentrates on the two great saving events, his death and his resurrection, and demonstrates that both were fulfillments of what God had foretold in Scripture" (Stott, 224).

In verses 26-31, according to Gempf, "Jesus' apparent failure in Jerusalem is faced squarely, and the reversal that features in Peter's speeches (see e.g. 2:23-24; 3:15; 4:10-11) comes in here as well. Yes, Paul said, the human decision about Jesus was one thing, but God's was quite different: his enemies had him executed, *but God raised him from the dead*. This was *good news*, and it was related to the promises given to David" (Gempf, 1086).

ACTS 13:32-43

Stott says, "Paul goes on to quote three Old Testament scriptures -- Psalm 2:7 about God's Son, probably linked in his mind with God's promise to David that his descendant, whose throne would be established would be his son; Isaiah 55:3 about *the holy and sure blessings promised to David* (34), which could be 'sure', i.e. permanent, only because of the resurrection of David's son; and Psalm 16:10 about God's holy one not being allowed to decay (35)" (Stott, 224-25). So, Peterson says, "The gospel for Israel is fundamentally about the fulfillment of God's promises (cf. Mk. 1:14-15; Lk. 4:16-21)" (Peterson, 391).

Then Paul offers forgiveness of sins to his audience. Trenchard says, "'Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know'...introduces Paul's application of God's great saving work to the needs of the Jews of Antioch; vv. 38 and 39 are characteristically Pauline" (Trenchard, 1291). Bruce notes, "Forgiveness of sins has been regularly proclaimed at the end of similar speeches in Acts (cf. 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 10:43), but now

justification is mentioned as well. Knowing Paul's gospel as unfolded in the letters to the Galatians and the Romans, we are not surprised to find this reference to justification in the first address attributed to him in Acts" (Bruce, 262). [Ed. note: "freed" = "justified"] Reymond says, "As far as the Acts record is concerned, no one before Paul had preached so explicitly that men could be justified individually before God solely on the ground of their faith in Christ...Paul included in his preaching of the gospel not only the blessing of forgiveness but also his teaching of divine acquittal which...he saw as a significant eschatological aspect of redemptive history" (Reymond, 123).

Peterson says, "A Jewish audience may well have wondered why they needed such forgiveness, but John the Baptist's preaching had made it clear that 'all the people of Israel' needed to express a radical repentance, to be ready to meet their God...Furthermore, the prophets had promised definitive forgiveness and cleansing as an essential part of the renewal of Israel in the end time (e.g., Je. 31:34; Ezk. 36:25)" (Peterson, 393). Calvin notes that in verse 39 ["from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses "], Paul was "anticipating what could appear to be contrary to the preceding teaching...They thought that they possessed righteousness in sacrifices; that they acquired true cleanliness by washings (*baptismis*); that God was pleased with them when they had gone through their external displays; in a word, they forsook the substance and were laying hold of empty shadows...Indeed, the ceremonial law ought to have been a tutor to lead them by the hand to Christ; and all rites enjoined by God were aids given for supporting and increasing their faith...But as Christ was the end of the Law (Rom. 10.4), and the heavenly pattern of the tabernacle (Heb. 8.5), so the force and effect of all ceremonies depended on Him. The deduction from that is that apart from Him (*eo remoto*) they were fleeting shadows" (Calvin, 383).

"On the other hand," says Stott, "over against the offer of forgiveness, Paul issues a solemn warning to those who reject it. He reminds his hearers of the prophets' denunciations. In particular, he quotes Habakkuk (Hab. 1:5), who predicted the rise of the Babylonians as instruments of divine judgment upon Israel (40-41)" (Stott, 226). Bruce adds, "Great as was the disaster that overtook those who ignored the prophetic warnings, an even greater disaster will befall those who refuse the gospel" (Bruce, 263).

ACTS 13:44-52

Bruce says, "During the following week, the Gentiles who had heard Paul's address spread the news throughout the city to such good purpose that on the next sabbath a great crowd of Gentiles turned up at the synagogue. Knowing (as we unfortunately do) how regular Christian worshippers can manifest quite un-Christian indignation when they arrive at church on a Sunday morning to find their customary seats occupied by rank outsiders who have come to hear some popular visiting speaker, we can readily appreciate the annoyance of the Jewish community at finding their synagogue practically taken over by a Gentile audience on this occasion...Many Jews, according to the narrative, did welcome the gospel as Paul had proclaimed it the previous sabbath, but the majority, and especially their leaders, had no use for a salvation which was open to Gentiles on the same terms as Jews...Thus we are introduced to a pattern of events which was to be reproduced in one place after another to which the gospel was brought...The local Jews, almost invariably, gave a corporate refusal to the gospel (though in every place there were some among them who did believe it), and it was accordingly proclaimed to Gentiles, who embraced it in great numbers. It was regularly the God-fearing Gentiles who attended the synagogue that formed the nucleus of Paul's 'churches of the Gentiles' " (Bruce, 265-66; vv. 44-49). Trenchard says, "We must not deduce any change of policy from v. 46, for Paul returned again and again to the Jews of the synagogues after this date" (Trenchard, 1291).

"Even if the Heavenly Father calls all men to faith by the external voice of a man, yet He calls effectually by His Spirit only those whom He has determined to save." --Calvin, 393 [See verse 48]

Luke records that the Jewish leaders were filled with jealousy. According to Bruce, "They regarded [Paul] as one who poached on their preserves, a sheep stealer who seduced from the synagogue many well-disposed Gentiles for whose complete conversion to Judaism they had hoped..." (Bruce, 266). So these Jews stirred up opposition to Paul and Barnabas among some of the prominent "God-fearing" Gentile men and women. Calvin says, "For it was a considerable stumbling-block for the ignorant and those who were scarcely yet begotten in Christ, to see all the men and women, who were highly regarded and praise-worthy in men's eyes, in opposition to Christ" (Calvin, 394). This forced them to leave town, shaking off "the dust of the feet" (vv. 50-51; See Matthew 10:14; Luke 9:5, 10:11). But, Bruce says, they "had left a body of believers there, and they paid a return visit to them a few months later (14:21)" (Bruce, 268; v. 52).

Week 11

Acts 14:1-28

WEEK 11, DAY 1

ACTS 14:1-28

1. Day One: Read the Notes for Week 10 (pp. 168-177).
2. Read and meditate on Acts 14:1-28. Note things you desire to gain a better grasp of during this week's study.

WEEK 11, DAY 2

ACTS 14:1-3

1. Prayerfully read Acts 14:1-3. How did the Lord minister to you?
2. On a Bible map, locate the cities of Iconium, Lystra and Derbe in the district of Lyconia. In what Roman province were these places located?
3. Compare the experience of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium (Give the verses) with their experience in Pisidian Antioch as follows:
 - a. At what location in each city did they begin their preaching? (13:14)
 - b. What was the initial response to their message? (13:42-43)
 - c. Who believed? (13:43,48)
 - d. What were the actions of the unbelieving Jews? (13:45, 50)
4. How did the missionaries respond to the opposition? Give the verse.
5. How was the Lord "testifying to the word of His grace"?

WEEK 11, DAY 3

ACTS 14:4-12

1. Steep your soul in God through Acts 14:4-12.

2. What happened as a result of the activities of the unbelieving Jews in Iconium?

3. What did Paul and Barnabas do after they fled to Lystra, Derbe and the surrounding region?

4. Compare the account of Paul healing the lame man at Lystra (Give the verses) with that of Peter in Jerusalem (3:1-10) as follows:
 - a. How long had each man been lame? (3:2)

 - b. What was each man told to do? (3:6)

 - c. What did both men do and what was one striking difference? (3:7-8)

 - d. What was the response of each crowd to the healing? (3:10)

WEEK 11, DAY 4

ACTS 14:13-18

1. God is waiting to meet you in Acts 14:13-18. What are you waiting for?

2. When Paul and Barnabas understood that these pagan people were trying to worship them as gods, they tore their robes. What did this action signify? (See Num. 14:4-6, Matt. 26:63-65, Mk. 14:62-63)

3. The missionaries used the pagans' own misdirected worship.
 - a. To whom were the pagans directed to turn?

 - b. How is God described?

 - c. What witness of Himself had God given them? (See also Rom. 1:19-20)

 - d. What was the response of the crowd to this message?

4. If you have turned to the Living God, are you communing with Him? Are you turning from all known idols? Consider listing matters you'd invite your group to pray about with you.

WEEK 11, DAY 5

ACTS 14:19-20

1. Acts 14:19-20. Only two verses. Imagine yourself being treated as those in them. Pray for grace to faithfully follow Christ no matter what!
2. Describe what happened in Lystra when the unbelieving Jews came from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium.
3. Compare verses 11-13 and 19 with Luke 19:38 and 23:18-21. What parallels do you see?
4. What did Paul do after the stoning despite being left for dead?

Week 11

Bible Study Notes

Acts 14:1-28

ACTS 14:1-7

Peterson says, "Every chapter in Acts appears to have a particular focus or theme...the theme of persecution and suffering is particularly highlighted in [Chapter 14]...Faith is also an important theme in the chapter (14:1, 9, 22, 23), illustrating the claim that God had 'opened a door of faith to the Gentiles' (14:27; cf. 13:48)" (Peterson, 401-2).

Iconium (in modern day Turkey) was a city more ancient than Damascus. It was not as Roman a city as the others. There was no Roman garrison stationed there and the people were more independent from Rome, even though it was a part of the Empire.

Further, let us note what is said here, that the Lord bore witness to the Gospel in miracles, for it teaches us what the true use of miracles is. Their primary purpose is indeed to show us the power and grace of God, but since we are bad and perverse interpreters of them, God hardly ever allows them to be detached from His Word, lest they should be drawn into abuse and corruption...We must keep to the principle that the miracles that come from God have never any other purpose than the establishing of the Gospel in its full and genuine authority" (Calvin2, 3).

The NASB Study Bible says, "God gave these men power to do great wonders as confirmation of the message of grace, but people were still divided. Don't spend your time and energy wishing for miracles. Sow your seeds of Good News on the best ground you can find in the best way you can, and leave the convincing to the Holy Spirit" (NASB, 1925; vv. 3-4).

Luke now says that some sided with the Jews and other with the "apostles." This the first of two places in Chapter 14 that Luke uses this designation for Paul and Barnabas [See v. 14]. Richards says, "The term is used in both a restrictive and general sense. In the first sense the Twelve and Paul are Apostles, with a capital 'A.' In the second sense persons like Barnabas, who undertook itinerant evangelistic missions, are apostles, lower case 'a.' Today we would probably call these apostles 'missionaries' " (Richards, 721). But, according to Calvin, "Properly speaking, however, evangelists were not apostles; unless perhaps, because Barnabas was joined to Paul as a colleague, we place them both on the same official level, and in that case the title of apostle will really be appropriate for him" (Calvin, 9).

ACTS 14:8-18

Lystra, a city in Lycaonia, was on the frontier of the Roman Empire in eastern Galatia. Most of the people were uneducated and spoke their own language. This preaching of the gospel was, according to Reymond, "directly to the Gentiles since apparently there was no synagogue there (vv. 6-7)" (Reymond, 125). [Ed. note: Some Commentators agree that Lystra probably did not have a synagogue; others, like Bruce (p. 278) believe it did. Luke does not say].

Paul began preaching, perhaps by one of the city gates near the temple of Zeus (v. 13). Gempf says, "This remarkable story is one of two that show how the apostles dealt with pagan Gentile audiences (here simple village folk, and in 17:16-34 sophisticated Athenians), and it is perhaps significant that in both cases the gospel was initially misunderstood" (Gempf, 1088). Right away as he was speaking, Paul got the people's attention by healing a cripple, a man "lame from birth" (vv. 8-10). Trenchard says, "The story of the miracle is similar to that of the healing of the lame man at the temple gate by Peter (3:1-8), although the reactions of a Gentile crowd are very different [from that of a Jewish audience]" (Trenchard, 1292). Gempf adds "In this story, however, we are told that when the apostle looked directly at the man, he was able to tell that he had the faith to be healed" (Gempf, 1088). Bruce says, "In Acts, as in the Gospels, faith is regularly emphasized as a condition of receiving both physical and spiritual healing" (Bruce, 274). According to Calvin, "It may well be possible for many to receive the Gospel, and yet not to be cured of the diseases from which they suffer. But, since God determined to provide evidence of His grace in the cripple, He prepared his mind beforehand and made him capable of this new experience" (Calvin2, 5). Peterson, however, points out "The Greek verb is rightly translated 'healed' rather than 'saved' (as in 4:12). Such faith had possibly been aroused by the preaching of the gospel (vv. 6-7), but it was not yet a seeking for salvation in the sense of forgiveness, eternal life, and entrance into the kingdom of God" (Peterson, 407).

But, now an unexpected turn of events took place. When they saw the miracle God had worked through Paul and Barnabas, the people concluded that the men were the gods Hermes and Zeus, respectively. Bruce says, "Barnabas may have been identified with Zeus because of his more dignified bearing; Paul, the more animated of the two, was called Hermes 'because he was the leading speaker' " (Bruce, 275).

Since the people were speaking to each other in Lycaonian, unfamiliar to Paul and Barnabas, it took a while for them to understand what was going on (vv. 11-12). But when the priest from the temple of Zeus came with oxen decorated in garlands and obviously prepared for being sacrificed, Paul and Barnabas reacted quickly with horror. Hughes says, "It is difficult to say which was worse -- having stones thrown at them or

this blasphemous attempt to worship them as gods" (Hughes, 186). Here, and Luke reverses the order of the names, "Barnabas and Paul...tore their robes" in a symbolic gesture of horror at the blasphemy (See Mark 14:63). Calvin comments: "By rending their garments and leaping into the midst of the crowd Paul and Barnabas show how great was their burning zeal for the glory of God" (Calvin2, 8).

Stott points out, "The context within which [Paul] preached to the Jews in Antioch was Old Testament Scripture, its history, prophecies and law. But with the pagans in Lystra he focused not on a Scripture they did not know, but on the natural world around them, which they did know and could see" (Stott, 232). Bruce comments, "Preachers to such audiences would not be expected to insist on the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, as they did in addressing synagogue congregations; instead, an appeal to the natural revelation of God the Creator is put in the forefront. Yet this appeal is couched in language largely drawn from the Old Testament...To Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, who already knew that God is one, and that he is the living and true God, the gospel proclaimed that this God had sent his Son as Messiah and Savior; but pagans had first to be taught what Jews already confessed regarding the unity and character of God." Continuing, Bruce says, "In Rom. 1:19-20 Paul similarly insists that, if men and women had paid heed to the works of God in creation, they might even in them have found tokens of his 'everlasting power and divinity' "(Bruce, 276; v. 15).

Calvin says of verse 15, "What they said amounts to this: 'Does the miracle move and affect you? Then believe our words. And indeed the point of our mission is the destruction and elimination of all the fictitious deities with which the world has been deluded up till now'" (Calvin2, 10). But, Calvin notes that "it has come about that the sincere and sound worship of God (pietas) has never flourished in the greater part of the world. For men have laboured only to the extent of abolishing ancient idolatry, but at the same time they have certainly neglected the other side, to rally themselves to God alone, after they have abandoned their idols. Sometimes they did indeed change the name of the idol into the name of God, but under that very pretext they were still cherishing the old errors, which they ought to have taken pains to correct. Thus the Galli, the priests of the great Cybele, introduced (genuerunt) celibacy; nuns were substituted for the vestal virgins; 'All Saints' (Pantagion) succeeded 'All gods' (Pantheon); and ceremonies were replaced by others that were not unlike them. Finally a host of deities was brought in, which they thought would be legitimate if they were masked with the titles of saints" (Calvin2, 10). Church history shows that the spread of Christianity among pagan peoples was often achieved with such compromise with local religious customs ("syncretism") rather than with faithful adherence to the Word of God.

What about us? Hughes says that, "we find it easy to exalt the messenger instead of the message. We want to make men and women, rather than God, our sense of security. So we have our own Christian pantheon -- our own Christian matinee idols. We must with God's help, honestly examine our hearts to see whom we are truly worshipping.

Ourselves? Our favorite preacher or writer or Christian entertainer? Or do we worship and serve the Lord Jesus Christ?" (Hughes, 187).

According to Calvin, "they [Paul and Barnabas] assume this principle that in the order of nature there is a certain and clear manifestation of God. Because the earth is watered by rain, because the heat of the sun quickens its growth, because fruits in such great abundance are produced year by year, we may surely gather from these things that there is some God who governs all things" (Calvin2, 13). Having provided this witness, Calvin says, "Paul and Barnabas deprive the Gentiles of an excuse for their ignorance...[But] while the kind of witness mentioned deprived men of excuse, it was, nevertheless, not sufficient for salvation...it is 'by faith that we understand the worlds to have been framed by the Word of God' (Heb. 11:3). But faith is not conceived by the bare observation of heaven and earth, but by the hearing of the Word (ex verbi auditu). It follows from that that men cannot be brought to the saving knowledge of God except by the direction of the Word. Yet this does not prevent them being rendered inexcusable even without the Word, for, even if they are naturally deprived of light, they are nevertheless blind through their own malice, as Paul teaches in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans (v. 20)" (Calvin2, 12-13). C. S. Lewis says, "Nature cannot satisfy the desires she arouses nor answer theological questions nor sanctify us...But the love of her has been a valuable and, for some people, an indispensable initiation" (Lewis, 456). Lewis says, "We must...go back to our studies, to church, to our Bibles, to our knees..." (Lewis, 457).

Peterson says, "God did not provide the nations with special revelation, such as he gave to Israel, and did not directly offer them a way of salvation, though Israel was always meant to be a source of blessing for the nations (cf. Gen. 12:3). The expression in the past hints at a new situation in which Jesus Christ brings redemption for Jews and Gentiles alike, but Paul does not get the chance to develop that idea because of the reaction of the audience" (Peterson, 410).

ACTS 14:19-20

Hughes invites us to "notice how quickly the crowd changed" (Hughes, 187). Encouraged by trouble-making Jews from Antioch and Iconium, the crowd of people in Lystra stoned him. Stoning was a horrific means of execution, commanded in Jewish laws for certain crimes. (See Exodus 19:13; Leviticus 20:2-5, 27; 24:10-16; Numbers 15:32-36; Deuteronomy 13:7-12; 17:2-7; 21:18-21; 22:13-21, 23-24) Even an ox could get stoned (Exodus 21:28).

In such an execution, people picked up heavy stones, not pebbles or small rocks, and pounded the condemned until he/she fell and was helpless to fend off the merciless pounding of additional stones that crushed the body and invariably killed. Like a firing squad, no one would know who delivered the fatal blow. This was what Paul endured

and, not surprisingly the crowd, believing they had killed him, dragged him outside the city (v. 19).

But, while his followers stood around him, Paul got up and went back into Lystra! He was alive! Hughes suggests, "Maybe this is when he experienced the ecstasy of being caught up into the third heaven as described in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. To the Galatians he would later write, 'Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus' (6:17)" (Hughes, 188). Undoubtedly, anyone who survived being stoned would carry permanent scars on his body. Bruce adds, "There is grim irony in the quick reversal of the local attitude to the two visitors" (Bruce, 279). And Stott says, "One is amazed at the fickleness of the crowd. One day they tried to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas as if they were gods, while soon after they joined in stoning Paul as if he were a felon. Yet Luke recorded something similar of the Jerusalem crowd who with loud voices first acclaimed Jesus and then demanded his execution. Like Jesus, Paul remained unmoved. His steadfastness of character was upset neither by flattery nor by opposition (Stott, 233; See Luke 19:37-40; 23:23).

The next day Paul felt well enough to leave for Derbe, about 60 miles to the southeast. He was going to persevere! (v. 20). "we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;" -- 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

Hughes says "Dave Howard, in his book *The Power of the Holy Spirit*, tells about a fearless pastor he ministered with in Colombia named Lupercio Taba. One Sunday Taba was preaching from his pulpit when a man appeared at a side window of the church, aimed a pistol at him, and ordered him to stop preaching. The congregation, seeing the danger, dove to the floor and hid under the pews. Taba, however, went right on preaching the gospel. The man then fired four shots at him. Two shots went past the preacher's head, one on one side, one on the other, and lodged in the wall behind him. Two shots went past his body, one under one arm, one under the other, and also lodged in the wall. The would-be assassin then dropped his gun and fled. Taba, still unmoved, continued his sermon" (Hughes, 188).

Reymond says, "In spite of seemingly little positive results at Lystra, apparently one positive result at this time was the conversion of Timothy (See Acts 16:1)" (Reymond, 125).

ACTS 14:21-28

After Paul and Barnabus preached the gospel in Derbe and saw many converts they reversed course, revisiting all the places they had been. (vv. 21-22). Trenchard points out, "Over the other side of the Taurus range was Paul's native town of Tarsus, but he and his company turned back from Derbe along the route of their triumphs and sufferings" (Trenchard, 1292).

Trenchard continues, "The dangerous return journey well illustrates Paul's set purpose of strengthening the churches he left so quickly after their foundation" (Trenchard, 1293). According to Calvin, "our sloth needs goads, and our coldness needs to be warmed up. But, because God wants His people to be disciplined through various struggles, Paul and Barnabas warn the disciples to be prepared to endure tribulations. It is a very necessary warning that, if we are to live devoted and holy lives, we have to engage in warfare in this world" (Calvin2, 16).

Luke records that in all the cities they revisited, "they appointed elders for them in every church." Trenchard says that "It is widely agreed that Paul was "able to discern what the Holy Spirit had done in his absence, for a number of brethren in each church had given proof of having received the pastoral gift, and these were appointed as elders" (Trenchard, 1293). Reymond says the word "appointed" [Ed note: cheiriotonesantes] refers to a "show of hands the election of" (Reymond, 125; See also Vines, 34). Calvin agrees, saying that "Paul and Barnabas are said to appoint presbyters. Are they acting alone, by virtue of the office peculiar to them? On the contrary they allow it to take place by the votes of all. Hence in ordaining pastors the people had a free election; but in case there might be any disorder Paul and Barnabas preside like moderators" (Calvin2, 19). According to Richards, "The apostles confirmed those that the young churches had already discerned were spiritually qualified to lead (cf. 1 Tim. 3)" (Richards, 721).

"Then," says Stott, "just as the missionaries had been sent forth from Antioch with prayer and fasting, so with prayer and fasting the elders of the Galatian churches were committed...to the Lord" (Stott, 234; v. 23). Calvin says, "Luke's statement that they were commended to God on whom they had believed, gives great confidence to us, because he assigns to God as His own office, the saving and keeping of all those who, by true faith, have embraced His Word" (Calvin2, 20).

Years later, during his second Roman imprisonment, Paul recounted to Timothy his first missionary journey experiences: "persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Tim. 3:11-12)

Returning to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas gave a report of their journey to the entire church "from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished" (v. 26). Calvin says that with these words Luke "expresses more clearly the fact that they had not been sent out by men, and that they had not attempted anything relying on their own strength, but that the whole expedition, with its success, had been entrusted to God (Deo permissam) as its promoter" (Calvin2, 20).

Verse 28 says, "And they spent a long time with the disciples." Raymond notes, "Their stay in Antioch may also have been as much as a year in length" (Raymond, 126). Bruce says, "The missionary tour had occupied the best part of a year, if not more; and now Paul and Barnabas resumed their ministry in Antioch for a period. But their activity in Cyprus and Asia Minor was a matter of interest not only in the Antiochene church but farther afield as well; in particular, the church of Jerusalem was concerned about the implications of a forward movement which so decisively altered the balance of Jews and Gentiles in the whole Christian fellowship" (Bruce, 281).

Week 12

Acts 15:1-35

WEEK 12, DAY 1

ACTS 15:1-35

1. Read the study notes for Week 11 (pp. 186-193).
2. Read and meditate on Acts 15:1-35. After reading the passage, list a couple of goals for this week's bible study.

WEEK 12, DAY 2

ACTS 15:1-5

1. Commune with God as you read Acts 15:1-5.
2. In your own words, what did "some men" (verse 1), later identified as Pharisee believers (verse 5) teach the believers in Antioch?
3. What did Paul and Barnabas do as they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria on their way to meet with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem? What was the response?
4. What did Paul and Barnabas report to the church in Jerusalem? (See also 14:27).
5. How did some Pharisee believers (also called Judaizers) react to this report? (v. 5) (Note: Paul was a Pharisee; See Philippians 3:5)

WEEK 12, DAY 3

ACTS 15:6-11

1. Soak your mind in Acts 15:6-11, praying you will know God more as a result.
2. After the apostles and elders convened, Peter stood up and reminded them that he was the first among them to be used by God in reaching Gentiles. (10:24-48)
 - a. Who were these Gentiles? (10:1, 2, 24)
 - b. How had God "testified to them"? (v. 8; 10:44-46)
 - c. How had He testified to the first Jewish believers? (2: 4, 18)
 - d. How had He shown no distinction between "us" and "them"? (v. 9, 11:17,18)
3. What does it mean "to put God to the test" (NASB) or "test God" (NIV)? (Ex. 17:2-7, Dt. 6:16, Ps. 95:7-9, Acts 5:9)
4. Why was the demand that Gentiles be circumcised putting God to the test?
5. Using a dictionary, give the definition of "yoke" that is applicable here? What does Peter refer to as an unbearable yoke? (See also Matt. 23:4; Rom. 3:9-20, Gal 5:1. See also Matt. 11:28-30)
6. How, then, are both Jews and Gentiles saved? (v. 11; Gal. 2:16)

WEEK 12, DAY 4

ACTS 15:12-18

1. Carefully, and prayerfully, read Acts 15:12-18.
2. After Peter's speech, Barnabas and Paul spoke to the council:
 - a. What did they add to the earlier report (v. 4) that they had made to the Jerusalem church?

 - b. How did this support Peter's argument that the Holy Spirit had fallen upon uncircumcised Gentiles who believed?

 - c. What was the purpose of signs and wonders in the early church age? (See Gal. 3:5, Rom. 15:19, 2 Cor. 12:12)
3. How does James summarize the testimony of Peter (Simeon)? (v. 14)

4. What phrase from Amos 9:11-12 shows that God planned all along to save Gentiles? (See also Zech 2:11)

WEEK 12, DAY 5

ACTS 15:19-29

1. Read Acts 15:19-29, and thank God for giving His wisdom to His people, like you.

2. What was James' judgment that the Council accepted?

3. Regarding the letter sent from the Jerusalem Council:
 - a. Who delivered the letter?

 - b. To whom was the letter addressed?

 - c. Who, if anyone, had authorized the group of men (vv. 1, 24) that had gone down from Jerusalem to Antioch?

 - d. Under whose guidance was the decision of the Council made? (v. 28)

4. Considering the four things from which believers should abstain:
 - a. Which might have offended the consciences of Jewish fellow - believers? (v. 21; Ex. 34:12-15; Dan. 1:8; 1 Cor. 8:7-13)

 - b. Which is/are contrary to an outward profession of faith?

(Day 6 continued on next page)

- c. Which might have been especially prevalent in pagan areas where idolatry is widespread? (Acts 8:1, 12-13; 17:16, 1 Cor. 5:1)
5. What had been the fundamental error of the Judaizers? (Gal. 5:6; Phil. 3:1-4a, 7-11)
6. How do people commit the same error today? Have you ever witnessed this error first-hand?
7. What is meant by the phrase “it seemed good to us” that is used several times in chapter 15?

WEEK 12, DAY 6

ACTS 15:30-35

1. Meditate on Acts 15:30-35, noting below anything that stands out.
2. How did the congregation respond to the letter from the Jerusalem Council?
3. Besides giving oral testimony to support the letter, what did Judas and Silas do for the congregation in Antioch?
4. In what ways do you encourage other church members? What are some additional ways that you can encourage and build up others? (See Acts 11:22-23; Phil. 2:1-3; Col. 4:11; 1 Thess. 3:2, 5:11,14)
5. With the doctrinal error of the Judaizers having been resolved, what did Paul and Barnabas, along with many others, continue to do in Antioch?

(Day 5 continued on next page)

6. Read study notes for week 12 (pp. 204-215).

7. Spend time reviewing your notes from chapters 1-15, and summarize what the Lord has taught you during your study of this portion of His Word. Thank Him!

Week 12

Bible Study Notes

Acts 15:1-35

ACTS 15:1-5

As Acts 15 begins, "some men came down from Judea" and taught that Gentile Christians had to be circumcised in order to be saved (v. 1). Hughes says, "Good-bye, free grace! Good-bye joy!" He continues, "These were the kind of ecclesiastical wet blankets who can listen to the testimony of a new convert and say, 'Well, that is okay, but there is something more that you must do before you have the whole package' " (Hughes¹, 191).

These men were members of the sect of Jews known as Pharisees [Ed. note: called "Judaizers"]. According to Holman, "Pharisees accepted all the Old Testament as authoritative. They affirmed the reality of angels and demons. They had a firm belief in life beyond the grave and a resurrection of the body. They were missionary, seeking the conversion of Gentiles (Matt. 23:15)...They had little interest in politics. The Pharisees opposed Jesus because He refused to accept the teachings of the oral law" (Holman, 791).

Hobbs says, "The Pharisees were accustomed to the idea that Gentiles were outside the circle of God's love and to their becoming Jewish proselytes in order to become a part of the people of God. This involved being circumcised, making certain sacrifices, experiencing proselyte baptism, and living by the law of Moses" (Hobbs, 113). "Of course," says Stott, "circumcision was the God-given sign of the covenant, and doubtless the Judaizers were stressing this; but they were going further and making it a condition of salvation" (Stott, 242).

The NASB Study Bible says, "There is something of a "Pharisee" in each one of us. We may unwittingly mistake upholding tradition, structure, and legal requirements for obeying God" (NASB, 1927). Henry adds, "There is a strange proneness in us to make our own opinion and practice a rule and a law to everybody else, and to conclude that because we do well all do wrong that do not just as we do" (Henry, 1693).

The phrase "came down" does not indicate travel from north to south, but from a higher elevation (Jerusalem in the mountains) to a lower one. (See Luke 10:30; See also Genesis 35:1: "go up").

Bruce says, "The people who came down from Judaea may have been those who, in Paul's narrative, came to Antioch 'from James' (Gal. 2:12). Whether they were so or not, they exceeded the terms of their commission, according to the apostolic letter in verse 24 [of Acts 15]" (Bruce, 286). Calvin says, "we must note this trick of Satan's, in misusing the names of the saints in order to deceive the simple, who, engrossed by reverence for the men, do not venture to make inquiry about the truth of the matter" (Calvin², 23). Bruce continues, "Many Jewish Christians no doubt feared that the influx of so many

converts from paganism would bring about a weakening of the church's moral standards, and the evidence of Paul's letters shows that their misgivings were not unfounded. How was this new situation to be controlled?" (Bruce, 286).

According to Hobbs, "Naturally Paul and Barnabas opposed the Judaizers. You can see how strongly Paul felt about this by reading Galatians, a letter Paul wrote later to refute the Judaizers who continued to oppose him. Especially read Galatians 1:6-9" (Hobbs, 114).

[Ed. note: Many Biblical scholars believe that Paul wrote the letter to the Galatian churches just prior to the Jerusalem Council. Some even suggest he may have written it on his trip from Antioch to Jerusalem. Others believe the book was written just after the Council met. It is generally agreed that Galatians was the first of the several epistles Paul wrote to the churches he planted during his missionary journeys. It addresses this very issue: How are we saved? By grace alone (*sola gratia*), or by grace plus adherence to the law? Reymond calls the book, the "Magna Carta of Christian Liberty"

(Reymond, 131). Martin Luther loved Galatians more than any other book of the Bible. Of it he said, "The Epistle of Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine." (Luther, unknown source)

Hobbs says, "The issue was as simple as this. Paul and Barnabas had preached salvation *by grace through faith* (see Eph. 2:8-10). The Judaizers were preaching that these Gentiles must be saved *by works plus faith*. It was a question of 'spiritual religion' or 'ritualistic or ceremonial religion' " (Hobbs, 113). The Greek word for "grace" is *charis*. According to Vines, grace is "set in contrast with debt, Rom. 4:4, 16, with works 11:6, and with law, John 1:17; see also, e.g., Rom. 6:14, 15; Gal. 5:4" (Vines, 277). According to Hobbs, "You cannot be saved by both grace and by works or law. They cancel out each other. If you sell me one thousand acres of land for one dollar; it is a bargain but not a gift. If your salvation requires you to obey one law of God, it is works plus faith, not salvation by grace." He continues, "Now this does not mean that you can be saved by grace and then live like the devil. If you really are saved, you will have a new nature and you will want to live by God's will, not that of Satan. Good works are the *fruit* and not the *root* of salvation (see Eph. 2:10)" (Hobbs, 114).

According to Reymond, "never did Moses teach that circumcision was essential to salvation. Related as circumcision was to the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 17:10-14), it was the sign and seal of 'the righteousness that [Abraham] had by faith while he was still uncircumcised' (Rom. 4:11). Moses understood this (Rom. 10:5-8); the Judaizers did not" (Reymond, 139).

Bruce says, "It was not enough to indulge in dissension and questioning at Antioch: the whole issue had to be debated and decided at the highest level. Otherwise, there was grave danger of a complete cleavage between the churches of Jerusalem and

Judaea on the one hand and the church of Antioch and her daughter-churches on the other" (Bruce, 287; vv. 2-3).

And so Paul, Barnabas and some other leaders at Antioch left for Jerusalem. Upon arrival, they reported "to the church and the apostles and elders" what "God had done through them" in their first missionary journey among the Gentiles (v. 4). However, even as they spoke, members of the church who were Pharisaic Jews stood up to insist that those Gentiles needed to be circumcised (v. 5). Bruce says, "For many of them the church was the righteous remnant of Judaism, embodying the ancestral hope which all Israel ought to have welcomed" (Bruce, 287). Therefore, Gentile converts needed to submit to circumcision and agree to keep the Mosaic law since circumcision was the outward sign of that commitment (See Gal. 5:3).

ACTS 15:6-11

Whoever among the apostles was still in or near Jerusalem "came together" along with the elders of the Jerusalem church (v. 6). After "much debate," Peter spoke first. Trenchard says, "Never has 'freedom from law' been better expressed" (Trenchard, 1293). Bruce says, "Peter, as leader of the apostles, spoke out unambiguously in the interests of gospel liberty. He had maintained these interests with purpose of heart ever since his visit to Cornelius in Caesarea" (Bruce, 290; See Acts 10). However, during a visit to Antioch, recorded in Galatians 2:11-21, Peter had behaved hypocritically regarding fellowship with Gentile believers. Paul had rebuked him which, according to Reymond, "provided him his lead-in to his sustained argument in [Galatians] 3:1-5:12 for the doctrine of justification by faith alone...Given Peter's later words and actions at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, we can justifiably glean that Peter saw the error of his way" (Reymond, 129). Stott agrees saying that "by the time Peter reached Jerusalem for the Council, he had regained his theological equilibrium" (Stott, 243-44). Now, Peter reminds his audience of his experience with Cornelius (vv. 7-9).

According to Peterson, "Putting God to the test (*peirazete ton theon*; cf. Ex. 17:2; Dt. 6:16; Ps. 95:9; Acts 5:9 [Ananias and Sapphira]) is another way of talking about hindering his purpose (cf. 5:39; 11:17). Insisting on something which is against his will stretches his patience and invites his judgment" (Peterson, 426).

Bruce observes, "Not all Jews thought of the law as an intolerable burden. Some thought that God had honored Israel by giving them so many commandments. The author of Ps. 119 found them to be His delight...But, Peter spoke as a representative of the rank and file of Galilaeen Jews...By contrast with those 'heavy burdens, hard to bear' (Matt. 23:4), he and his associates had learned to rejoice in their Master's easy yoke (Matt. 11:29-30). They recognized that their own salvation was due to the grace of

Christ; were they to acknowledge a different and more burdensome principle of salvation for Gentile believers?" (Bruce, 291).

"Then," says Hobbs, "Peter made his strongest point. He said that in their demands the Judaizers had the matter backwards. They insisted that Gentiles must first become Jews in religion, then believe in Jesus in order to be saved. In truth Jews must be saved in the same way as Gentiles are saved--by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus" (Hobbs, 118; v. 11).

Compare Peters' words in verse 11 with what Paul said in Galatians 2:16:

Peter: *"But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."*

Paul: *"nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified."*

According to Peterson, "Peter's final statement in 15:11 is similar to Paul's assertion in 13:38-39, that God now offers a justification through faith in Christ which was not available through the law of Moses" (Peterson, 427). Hughes says, "God had given them the Law as a schoolmaster to lead them to Christ by demonstrating at every turn they were sinners in need of mercy (see Galatians 3:23-25; Romans 3:19-20)" (Hughes¹, 194).

Calvin says that "since the covenant of life which God made with his servants from the beginning right to the end of the world, is eternal and the same, it would be absurd and intolerable for there to be taught today another and different way of obtaining salvation than the one the fathers had long ago. Therefore Peter affirms that we are completely at one with the fathers, because they, no less than we, placed the hope of salvation on the grace of Christ...Furthermore we must note what Peter teaches, that the faith of the men of old was always founded on Christ, seeing that life could never be found in any other source, and there was no other means by which men might come to God. Therefore this verse [v. 11] agrees with that saying of the apostle, 'Christ yesterday, and today, and forever' (Heb. 13:8)" (Calvin², 42).

At this point, according to Bruce, "Peter now disappears from the narrative of Acts; so far as Luke is concerned, says Martin Hengel, 'the legitimization of the mission to the Gentiles is virtually Peter's last work' " (Bruce, 291). Hobbs adds, "On that day he stood ten feet tall!" (Hobbs, 117).

ACTS 15:12-18

Verse 12 records that all the people kept silent. Calvin says, "Luke means by these words that the Spirit of God reigned in that assembly in such a way that they yielded to the argument straight away...when the Spirit presides He is effectual enough to put an end to all disagreement..." (Calvin², 43). Barnabas is listed first as he and Paul began to speak. Bruce says they are "named naturally in this order in a Jerusalem setting" (Bruce, 291). The message was brief. The two missionaries related the signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. Trenchard says, "The principle God had established in Cornelius's house had been confirmed by the abundant and victorious experiences of the first journey. The church must recognize the further revelations God was giving through inspired messages confirmed by mighty works" (Trenchard 1294). Peterson invites us to "Note what Paul says in Romans 15:19; 2 Corinthians 12:12; and Galatians 3:5 about the verifying impact of *signs and wonders*" (Peterson, 428).

The "one voice" was that of James, who now entered the debate. (v. 13). Who was this James? Scholars generally agree that he was James, the half-brother of Jesus (See Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; John 2:12; 7:3, 10) [Ed. note: Calvin, however, believes he was James the son of Alphaeus; See Calvin², 45]. Reymond says that "he was not one of the original apostles. However, Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7), bringing him to repentance and faith in him as the Shekinah 'Glory' of God (James 2:1), and thus he appears, along with his other brothers, among the one hundred and twenty believers who gathered in the upper room to await the Spirit's coming (Acts 1:14). From an incidental remark of Paul, we may infer that he was married (1 Cor. 9:5)" (Reymond, 142). James was one of the three "pillars" of the Jerusalem church, the others being Peter and John. (Galatians 2:9). Paul referred to him as an "apostle" in Galatians 1:19. Bruce says, "If the elders of the Jerusalem church were organized as a kind of Nazarene Sanhedrin, James was their president, *primus inter pares*." [Latin: "First among equals"] He adds, "When he said 'Listen to me,' they listened" (Bruce, 292; v. 13; See also Acts 12:17; 21:18). Richards says that James "was noted for his personal piety, commitment to prayer, and adherence to O. T. Law!" (Richards, 722). According to tradition, James was martyred in 62 A.D.

Stott says, "In his New Testament letter he [James] would later emphasize that saving faith always issues in good works of love and that heavenly wisdom is 'peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere'. He manifested some of that wisdom now" (Stott, 246).

According to Hughes, "The hopes of the Pharisaic sect rocketed as James stood to speak. Surely he would set Peter and Paul and Barnabas right. They were undoubtedly

surprised at the apostle's response, for James first showed how the conversion of Gentiles was in accord with the Old Testament Scriptures" (Hughes¹, 195).

James began: "*Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name*" (v. 14). Stott says, "His [James'] statement is considerably more significant than it looks at first sight, for the expressions 'people' (*laos*) and 'for himself' (literally, 'for his name') are regularly applied in the Old Testament to Israel. James was expressing his belief that Gentile believers now belonged to the true Israel, called and chosen by God to belong to his one and only people and to glorify his name" (Stott, 247).

According to Bruce, "What James states concisely here is implied throughout the New Testament: one example is 1 Pet. 2:9, where God's description of the returning exiles of Judah, 'the people whom I formed for myself, that they might declare my praise' (Isa. 43:21), is applied to Gentile converts to Christianity. Cf. also Tit. 2:14" (Bruce, 293).

Now, James pointed to the words of the Prophet Amos (9:11-12). Peterson says that James "could have cited Zechariah 2:11, where the prediction is given that 'many nations will be joined with the LORD on that day, and will become my people'. However, Amos 9:11-12 is chosen because of the salvation-historical perspective it gives" (Peterson, 430). Stott says, "Councils have no authority in the church unless it can be shown that their conclusions are in accord with scripture" (Stott, 247).

Stott says, "As it stands, this quotation from Amos is a powerful statement of two related truths. God promises to restore David's fallen tent and rebuild its ruins (which Christian eyes see as a prophecy of the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, the seed of David, and the establishment of his people) so that, secondly, a Gentile remnant will seek the Lord" (Stott, 247).

According to Peterson, "With this promise of restoring the rule of David's line, James highlights a theme that has featured in Luke's birth narratives (Lk. 1:32-33, 69; 2:10-11)..." (Peterson, 431).

Bruce says, "It has already been emphasized in Acts that, by the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, the Son of David, God has fulfilled his dynastic promises to David (cf. Peter's argument in 2:25-36 and Paul's in 13:23, 32-37). This may be what is understood here as the raising up of David's fallen tent. But the promised extension of the sovereignty of the house of David over the Gentiles is taking place here and now, says James, through the Gentile mission: over a far wider area than David ever ruled, men and women of Gentile stock are making haste to yield willing and glad allegiance to David's greater Son. 'The remainder of humanity' [NASB: "rest of mankind"/ ESV: "remnant of mankind"] comprises the Gentiles -- 'all the Gentiles over whom my name has been invoked' (i.e., in baptism). Similar phraseology appears in James 2:7, where the readers are reminded of 'that honorable name by which you are called.'" (Bruce, 294).

Reymond says, "Employing Amos 9:11-12 as he did in Acts 15:16-17, James designates the church to which the 'remnant of men', even 'all the Gentiles who bear my name', was being drawn through the missionary activity of Peter and Paul as Amos' 'fallen tabernacle of David' which God was even then in process of 'rebuilding' precisely by means of drawing from the Gentiles a people for himself and making them members of the church of Jesus Christ. But for James to represent the church of Jesus Christ as the 'fallen tabernacle of David' which Amos predicted was to be 'rebuilt' means that James (1) believed that the prophets did speak of this age and the church of this age, (2) that Gentiles were being drawn into 'David's fallen tabernacle'---Amos' picturesque term for Israel, and (3) that an unbroken continuity exists between God's people in the Old Testament and Christians in the New Testament" (Reymond, 147).

In summary, Bruce says, "The Gentile mission, then, is the work of God: he has made it known in advance 'from of old' and now he has brought it to pass" (Bruce, 294; See Isaiah 45:19-21). And, Henry observes, "Whatever God does, he did before design and determine to do. He not only *does whatever he determined*, which is more than we can do (our purposes are frequently broken off, and our measures broken), but he *determined whatever he does*. What we shall do in such or such a case we cannot tell till it comes to the setting to; but *known unto God are all his works*." (Henry, 1695) [Ed. note: "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world": Acts 15:18 KJV; See also Acts 2:23].

Regarding James' speech, Bruce notes that J. B. Mayor has enumerated what he calls 'remarkable agreements' between this speech and the letter of James" (Bruce, 292). James is dated between 45 and 48 AD which is prior to the date usually given for the Jerusalem Council (50 AD). Richards says, "Surprisingly, despite Luther's opinion, the word "faith" is found more often in James than Galatians. It is simply that James is interested in the impact of faith on the life of the believer...The epistle of James is an important New Testament book for any who tend to see Christianity as a matter of just 'believing right things'. James reminds us 'that kind of faith' is worthless, for only a faith that transforms us and our way of life is truly Christian" (Richards, 868; See also 1 John 2:3-6). In his commentary on the epistle of James, Calvin says, "It is not surely required of all to handle the same arguments" (Peterson, 868).

ACTS 15:19-21

As Bruce notes, "There remained, however, a practical problem. In most cities Gentile believers had to live alongside Jewish believers, who had been brought up to observe the levitical food restrictions and to avoid contact with Gentiles as far as possible" (Bruce, 295). Trenchard says, "The answer is that Gentile believers in the area most affected (Cilicia and Syria) were to be asked to abstain from practices which were

repugnant and scandalous to the Jews because of the constant reading of such legal prohibitions as those of Lev. 11 and 17. Such wise restraint would go far to diminish friction between brethren and would remove obstacles to the spread of the gospel" (Trenchard, 1294).

These practices, from which the Gentile Christians were to refrain:

1) Eating food sacrificed to idols

Calvin notes that "laws about things necessary in themselves are bound to be permanent. But we know that, as soon as the uproar and contention had ceased, this law was abolished by Paul, when he teaches that nothing is unclean, and gives freedom and permission to eat any foods at all, even those that had been sacrificed to idols (Rom. 14:14; 1 Cor. 10:25)" (Calvin, 55).

2) Fornication

Trenchard: "We must remember that sexual purity was extraordinarily rare among pagans, but at the same time abstinence from sexual sin could never have been treated as voluntary or optional as the other restraints later were." (Trenchard, 1294) Gempf says, "Gentile Christians need not become Jews, but neither may they continue to act like typical Gentiles" (Gempf, 1089).

3) Partaking of meat that has been strangled or has blood in it (some count these as two separate practices from which to abstain)

Calvin says, "As far as blood and what is strangled are concerned, it was not only the Jews who were prohibited from eating them by the Law of Moses (Deut. 12:23), but this law had been given to the whole world immediately after the flood (Gen. 9:4)" (Calvin, 50; See also Lev. 17:10; Deut. 12:16, 23-25). [Ed note: The prohibition about meat that has been strangled refers to the fact that the blood of the animal would have dried within its muscle and flesh rather than being drained.].

According to Bruce, "This observation [v. 21] was perhaps intended to calm the apprehensions of the believing Pharisees, in whose eyes it was specially important that the whole Torah should be taught among the Gentiles; this, said James, was being attended to already by the synagogues." (Bruce, 296) Hughes says that "Jewish communities existed in nearly every city, and the Gentile converts were not to do anything that would offend the Jews' religious scruples" (Hughes¹, 196).

Calvin states, "[James] warned that it is not possible for the ceremonies to be abolished so quickly, as if at one fell swoop, because the Jews had already been accustomed to the teaching of the Law for many generations, and Moses had his preachers; that agreement therefore must be gained for a short time until the freedom, procured by Christ, should gradually be more clearly understood..." (Calvin, 51-52). Calvin also maintains that "the apostles do not go beyond the limits of the Word of God,

when they propose an external law, according to the circumstances of the time, by which they may reconcile the churches with each other" (Calvin, 56-57).

Reymond says, "If we observe Paul's own practice concerning the scruples of 'weaker' brethren, it is quite clear that he always accommodated his personal liberty and practice in order not to offend the sensitive among his congregations... whereas Paul agreed with those advocating freedom, he always surrendered his own freedom in order not to offend the 'weak'... Thus when a theological issue was at stake; he refused to have Titus circumcised (Gal 2:1-3); but in the case of Timothy, when it did not involve a theological issue but permitted greater freedom in ministering among the Jews, he was willing to have him circumcised (Acts 16:1-3) " (Reymond, 149; See Rom. 14:1-15; 1 Cor. 8:1-13; 10:23-33).

Hughes observes: "James gives us two complementary principles for grace-filled living. First: *as those under grace we are not to make non-Biblical requirements of others*---specifically, those that come from secondary cultural traditions. In that day this meant not foisting a Jewish lifestyle on Gentiles. Today this means we are not to make areas of our lifestyle that are not spelled out in Scripture normative for others if they are to be 'good' Christians -- for example, how we dress, how we run our church, the standards of living we think proper, personal tastes, musical preferences (including in a worship service), etc. If we thrust any of these on others as necessary to a life of grace, we repeat the sin of the Judaizers! We so easily push our preferences on others. We assume they will either do things our way or they are unspiritual! Extra-Biblical restrictions take their toll. Perhaps even more serious, they block the proclamation of God's grace (divine favor ---free and undeserved) to a dying world." Continuing, Hughes says, "So much for the first principle. The second is: *because we are under grace, we gladly restrict our freedom for the sake of others*. There was not anything intrinsically wrong with eating a rare steak, but James said to boil it or eat it well-done for the sake of fellowship with the Jews. Paul states the same principle in 1 Corinthians 9:19-21) ..." (Hughes¹, 196-97).

ACTS 15:22-29

Hughes says, "James's magnificent pronouncement carried the day! Who could take issue with the most scrupulous of all the Hebrew Christians -- a man whose piety was admired by the most orthodox, a man who led a life of such exemplary self-denial?" (Hughes¹, 197). The council decided to send a letter by Paul and Barnabas accompanied by two of the leading men from Jerusalem, Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas. This letter restated the decision by James and emphasized that the Judaizers' teaching had not been authorized by the leaders in Jerusalem. Judas and Barsabbas were sent in order to verify "by word of mouth" all that the letter contained (vv. 22-27).

Bruce says, "Of these two messengers, Judas -- who had the same surname as the Joseph mentioned in 1:23 -- does not appear outside this context. The other, Silas, continues to figure in the narrative of Acts as a companion of Paul in the evangelization of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth. He is plainly identical with the Silvanus of Paul's letters (2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1); his relation to the Silvanus of 1 Pet. 5:12 is uncertain" (Bruce, 297).

According to Stott, "The Jerusalem church and its leaders made three important points in their letter. First, they disassociated themselves from the circumcision party and therefore, by clear implication, from the requirement of circumcision...(24) ... Secondly, they made it abundantly clear that the men they had now *agreed to choose...and send...* (25), namely *Judas and Silas*, did have their full approval and support. They would not only deliver the letter, but also *confirm by word of mouth* what it contained (27). Thirdly, they enunciated their unanimous decision (made by *the Holy Spirit and...us*) *not to burden* Gentile converts *with anything* (certainly not with circumcision) *beyond ...the four specified abstentions...*The letter's conclusion, which expresses more a recommendation than a command, was: *You will do well to avoid these things* (29)" (Stott, 251-52). Bruce says, "So conscious were the church leaders of being possessed and controlled by the Spirit that he was given prior mention as chief author of their decision" (Bruce, 298).

Bruce maintains that "The decree is regarded as binding in the letters to the seven churches of proconsular Asia (Rev. 2:14, 20). Toward the end of the second century it was observed by the churches of the Rhone valley (which had close links with those of Asia) and of the province of Africa. Toward the end of the ninth century the terms of the decree, together with the negative Golden Rule, were included by English King Alfred in the preamble to his law-code" (Bruce, 299). [Ed. note: Proconsular Asia was a Roman province comprising the western parts of Asia Minor. Ephesus was the capital; "The Negative Golden Rule says "What is hateful to you do not unto another."]

The NASB Study Bible says, "This is a wise way to handle conflicts within the church. Problems must be confronted, and all sides of the argument must be given a fair hearing. The discussion should be held in the presence of leaders who are spiritually mature and trustworthy to make wise decisions. Everyone should then abide by the decisions" (NASB, 1927).

Stott says, "No wonder Haenchen can write: 'Chapter 15 is the turning point,' 'centerpiece' and 'watershed' of the book...Its unanimous decision liberated the gospel from its Jewish swaddling clothes into being God's message for all humankind, and gave the Jewish-Gentile church a self-conscious identify as the reconciled people of God, the one body of Christ" (Stott, 241).

ACTS 15:30-35

Arriving in Antioch, the men gathered the congregation together and read the letter. The church responded with much rejoicing! Judas and Silas also spoke. Calvin says, "Those two brethren were sent for the specific purpose of also adding their spoken testimony to the letter. Otherwise the apostles would not have sent such a short and concise letter about a matter of such importance, and would have mentioned something about the mysteries of the faith, and would have given an exhortation at greater length for devotion to godliness. Luke then relates something else that they did, viz. that, being endowed with the gift of prophecy, they edified the Church in a general way..." (Calvin, 58; vv. 30-33).

[Ed. note: Verse 34 was inserted by a later copyist to explain why Silas was still in Antioch before the Second Missionary Journey. It is included in the King James Version. But, other versions use brackets and a footnote (NASB) or delete it entirely and include a footnote (ESV/NIV) to indicate it is not found in the earliest existing manuscripts. This is not the only example of a later insertion of text in Acts (See 8:37)].

Reymond says, "No doubt it was Paul's observance of Silas' manly and congenial leadership qualities during the latter's visit to Antioch that commended him to Paul later as a colleague for the second missionary journey" (Reymond, 152). The passage concludes by saying that "*Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord.*" (v. 35) Calvin observes that "as long as Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch they were intent on teaching, and were constantly engaged in this task, and yet they allowed a place for many others at the same time. From that it is apparent that they all had the same devotion, without jealousy, and that they combined their efforts in public in order to be effective" (Calvin, 59).

Did the trouble with the Judaizers go away? Hobbs says, "The New Testament reveals that when the Judaizers lost on doctrinal grounds, they continued to oppose Paul on personal ones. They denied his apostleship and accused him of preaching a false gospel, of preaching for money, and of being a dictator. They belittled his method of preaching and accused him of not loving the people among whom he ministered. Wherever he went, they sought to stir up opposition against him. All this is reflected in many of Paul's writings such as the Corinthian epistles, Galatians and Romans (see Rom. 16:17-18). The Judaizers are still with us. Anyone who adds anything to salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus is a neo-Judaizer" (Hobbs, 119).

ACTS VERSES TO MEMORIZE

(Write the verses out in the translation you will memorize; use back for additional space)

1. Acts 1:6-8

2. Acts 2:22-24

3. Acts 3:18-21

4. Acts 4:32-35

5. Acts 7:55-56, 59-60

6. Acts 8:35-38

7. Acts 9:15-16, 31

8. Acts 10:38-41

9. Acts 12:5

10. Acts 13:47-49

11. Acts 14:21-23

12. Acts 15:8-11

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