

# ACTS

A stylized graphic consisting of several overlapping, fan-like segments. The segments are colored in shades of grey and orange. The grey segments are on the left and right sides, while the orange segments are in the center and bottom. The segments have a slightly curved, feather-like appearance.

DISPENSATIONALLY  
CONSIDERED

C. R. STAM

**A C T S**

**Dispensationally  
Considered**

By  
**Cornelius R. Stam**

**VOLUME TWO**  
*Acts 9:1 through 15:35*

**BEREAN BIBLE SOCIETY**  
N112 W17761 Mequon Rd.  
Germantown, WI 53022

**Copyright 1954  
Copyright Renewed 1983  
By Cornelius R. Stam**

***Fourth Printing, 1996***

**PRINTED IN USA**

# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER XIV – Acts 9:1-7

- The Conversion of Saul:** Importance Of The Event. – Saul's Background And Character – Dispensational Significance Of Saul's Conversion – Letters To Damascus – Divine Intervention – A Light From Heaven – The Crucifixion Explained. 7

## CHAPTER XV – Acts 9:8-22

- Damascus and Arabia:** Saul Brought To Damascus – The Other Ananias – Saul's Call To Apostleship – How Great Things He Must Suffer – Saul Baptized – Saul's First Ministry For Christ – A Significant Omission. 21

## CHAPTER XVI – Acts 9:23-43

- Saul Sent Home:** The Record Of Peter's Ministry Resumed – The Escape From Damascus – The Return To Jerusalem – Peter And James – The Return To Tarsus – Saul's Stay At Tarsus – The Record Of Peter's Ministry Resumed – Aeneas Healed – Dorcas Raised From The Dead. 31

## CHAPTER XVII – Acts 10:1-29

- Peter Sent to a Gentile Household:** Cornelius' Vision – A Connecting Link – Cornelius' Background And Character – Cornelius' Spiritual Condition – God's Response To Cornelius' Need – Peter's Vision – Peter's Hunger – Voices From Heaven – A Change In Program – Peter And The Messengers From Cornelius – Peter At Cornelius' Home 42

## CHAPTER XVIII – Acts 10:30 – 11:18

- The Conversion of Cornelius and His Household:** Cornelius Tells His Story – God No Respecter Of Persons – Peter's Interrupted Sermon – Peter Called To Account – They Of The Circumcision Contend With Peter – Peter's Defense Before His Brethren – The Baptism Of The Gentiles With The Spirit. 55

## CHAPTER XIX – Acts 11:19-30

**The Church at Antioch:** Gentiles Saved At Antioch – Grecians And Greeks – The Believers At Antioch Greeks, Not Grecians – The Antioch Believers And Paul – Prophets From Jerusalem – Relief From Antioch – Paul And Jerusalem 66

## CHAPTER XX – Acts 12:1-24

**Persecution Rekindled at Jerusalem:** Herod Persecutes Messiah's Followers – The Murder Of James – The Imprisonment Of Peter – A Praying Church – Answered Prayer – Prayer And The Sovereignty Of God – Faith And Unbelief – Peter Reports To His Friends – James The Lord's Brother – Peter Not To Be Found – The Death Of Herod – Israel's Growing Apostasy – Herod A Type Of The Coming Man Of Sin – Peter's Experience Compared With Paul's Later Experiences. 78

## CHAPTER XXI – Acts 12:25 – 13:13

**Paul Begins His Apostolic Journeys:** Barnabas And Saul Sent Forth By The Church At Antioch – The Church At Antioch Firmly Established – The Dispensational Setting Of Acts 13:1-3 – Paul Not Working Under The "Great Commission" – The Beginning Of The Present Dispensation – When Did The Present Dispensation Begin? Paul's First Apostolic Journey – Paul's Apostleship – To The Jew First – The Story Of Bar-Jesus – Mark's Departure. 94

## CHAPTER XXII – Acts 13:14-52

**At Antioch In Psidia:** In The Synagogue In Pisidian Antioch – Paul's Address – Israel's History Recalled – God's Overruling Grace Proclaimed – The Ministry Of John The Baptist Discussed – Salvation Still Being Offered – Paul's Closing Exhortation – The Meeting Dismissed – Paul Turns To The Gentiles – The Story Of Bar-Jesus Reenacted – Jewish Opposition. 113

## CHAPTER XXIII – Acts 14:1-28

**Iconium, Lystra And Derbe:** The Work At Iconium – A Great Company Of Jews And Greeks Believe – A Call To Boldness – Paul And Barnabas Flee For Their Lives – At Lystra – The Lame Man Healed – The Lystrians Suppose Paul And Barnabas Are Gods – The Attempt To Offer Sacrifice To The Apostles – Paul Stoned – Was Paul Actually Stoned To Death? – The Apostles Retrace Their Steps. 131

## CHAPTER XXIV – Acts 15:1-12

**The Council at Jerusalem:** The Dispute At Antioch – Paul And His Party Arrive At Jerusalem – A Warm Welcome – The Number Of Sessions Held – The Preliminary Meeting – The Meeting Of The Apostles And Elders – Those Present – Paul’s Battle – Peter’s Protest – Barnabas And Paul Testify. 144

## CHAPTER XXV – Acts 15:13-35

**Gentile Liberty Recognized By The Church At Jerusalem:** James Declares The Decision – Other Agreements – The Letter To The Gentiles – A Lesson In Church Polity – The Decision Made Final – The Decision Now Repudiated – The Letter Delivered. 159

## CHAPTER XXVI

**More Trouble at Antioch:** Peter’s Defection – Who Was the Troubled Maker? 169

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the faithful and generous assistance of our typist, proofreaders and others who have helped in various ways to bring this second volume of *Acts, Dispensationally Considered*, to completion.

All maps: kindness of Mr. Walter Scott, Advertisers Engraving Company, Cincinnati, Ohio.



THE SCENE  
of  
PAUL'S  
LABORS



## ***Chapter XIV - Acts 9:1-7***

### **THE CONVERSION OF SAUL**

#### **IMPORTANCE OF THE EVENT**

We come now to one of the outstanding events of history: the conversion and commission of Saul of Tarsus.

Too little importance has been attached, in the minds of believers, to this great event. The distinctiveness of Paul's place in the program of God has been all but lost sight of. He has been considered merely one of a number of apostles. Little significance has been attached to the fact that there, on the road to Damascus, far from Jerusalem, entirely apart from the ministry of the twelve, the former persecutor and blasphemer was transformed into a willing bondsman of Christ and commissioned as the apostle of the grace of God.

In the revelation of God to us this event is given a most prominent place. Saul's conversion is more fully described and more often referred to in the Scriptures than any other conversion, or indeed, than any other one personal experience outside of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. The major parts of three separate chapters in Acts are taken up with this account and it forms the main subject of two of Paul's five recorded discourses. So conscious is the apostle himself of the importance of his conversion in connection with the gospel of the grace of God, that he refers to it over and over again in his epistles.

There is no testimony to the riches of God's grace, nor the power of the cross, nor the reality of personal salvation which equals that of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. This the apostle himself, by the Spirit, makes clear in I Tim. 1:15:

"THIS IS A FAITHFUL SAYING, AND WORTHY OF ALL ACCEPTATION, THAT CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS; OF WHOM I AM CHIEF."<sup>1</sup>

#### **SAUL'S BACKGROUND AND CHARACTER**

But who is this "chief of sinners?" A ruffian, a cut-throat, a villain? No, indeed. He is one of the chosen race and highly respected by his associates. He is a scrupulous observer of the law of Moses and zealous of the traditions of his fathers.

---

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the term "chief" here, see our note on Acts 8:3.

Is he ignorant of Old Testament prophecy, then, that he does not recognize his Messiah? Oh, no! He is a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the proud tribe of Benjamin, a spiritual leader in Israel with a profound knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, having been brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel.

Indeed, Saul was sincere and conscientious in his opposition to Christ. He later said to Agrippa: "*I verify thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*" (Acts 26:9). Still later he wrote to Timothy: "*I did it ignorantly in unbelief*" (I Tim. 1:13). He was blindly fulfilling the Lord's prediction in John 16:2:

". . . THE TIME COMETH, THAT WHOSOEVER KILLETH YOU WILL THINK THAT HE DOETH GOD SERVICE."

Did the fact that he was sincere in his hatred of Christ, then, excuse him somewhat for his murder and blasphemy? So some would teach us today. Do what you sincerely believe to be right, they say, and God will surely have no cause to be angry with you. Thus "what you believe" takes the place of *what God has said* and man, no longer held responsible to obey the revealed will of God, turns out self-made and self-righteous, or wallows in drunkenness, immorality and crime--in either case unsaved and separated from the life of God. We are reaping the fruits of this godless philosophy all about us today.

But the strange fact is that some who abhor this doctrine seem to make an exception in the case of Saul of Tarsus. In an effort to prove that he was *not* the chief of sinners, they point to his sincerity and make a rather good man of him after all! And that when they know that God utterly repudiates even the best deeds of Christ-rejectors!

Neither Paul himself, nor the Scriptures countenance such a view, for the very passage which declares that Saul did these things "ignorantly in unbelief"; that very passage was written to emphasize his *sin* and the *exceeding abundance* of the *grace* of God in saving him (I Tim. 1:13-16).

Surely Saul's intensely Hebrew background and his absorption in the Old Testament Scriptures do not explain--much less excuse--his failure to recognize Christ, or his bitter hatred of Him. Should not an *Hebrew* recognize the *Messiah*? And it was *by* the Old Testament Scriptures that he *could* and *should* have known that Jesus was the Christ (See John 5:39). But like other Pharisees, he did not *wish* to know it.

It was *sin* and *sin alone* that made Saul the enemy of Christ. His blind rage was but a demonstration of the deceitfulness and hardness of the human heart.

No, Saul's ignorance and unbelief in no wise lessened his guilt, though the hopelessness of such a condition did move the compassionate heart of God, much as we might pity one who, out of pure blind stubbornness, injures himself and others.

This great fact is vital to a clear understanding of the gospel of the grace of God, for it was by saving the chief of *sinner*s that the riches of God's grace was now demonstrated.

### **DISPENSATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SAUL'S CONVERSION**

As we have seen, the murder of Stephen and the fierce persecution that followed constituted a declaration of war by man against God and His Anointed (Psa. 2:2). Israel was to have brought blessing and salvation to the world with Christ as her King, but now she had joined the world in open rebellion against God and, by stoning Stephen, had "sent a message" to God, saying:

"WE WILL NOT HAVE THIS MAN TO REIGN OVER US" (Luke 19:14).

This message was wholeheartedly endorsed by Saul, for of those present when that message was sent, Saul alone is singled out by name with the comment:

"AND SAUL WAS CONSENTING<sup>2</sup> UNTO HIS DEATH" (Acts 8:1).

Thus distinguished at the outset for his bitter enmity against Christ, Saul's rise in Israel was inevitable and rapid, for it must not be forgotten that the rulers had suffered increasing embarrassment from those who had borne witness to Christ and His resurrection. It was not long before the young zealot had obtained "authority from the chief priests" to "punish" and "shut up in prison" all who followed Christ "in Jerusalem." Recognized as the leader of the uprising ([Acts 8:3](#); [Gal. 1:13](#)) he pressed the persecution until all the disciples, except the twelve, were either imprisoned, or slain, or had fled from Jerusalem. Nor was he content with even this for, obtaining further "authority and commission from the chief priests," he pursued the disciples "even unto strange cities," bringing as many as he could "bound unto Jerusalem for to be punished," and giving his "voice," or vote, against them so that they might be put to death (See [Acts 26:9-12](#); [22:5](#)).

Thus Saul "prospered in the Jews' religion" because of his bitter hatred of Christ ([Gal. 1:13,14](#); [Phil. 3:6](#)). He was the *personification*, the *symbol*, of Israel's rejection of Messiah.

---

<sup>2</sup> The original word implies more than passive agreement. In Rom. 1:32 it is rendered "have pleasure" and in I Cor. 7:12,13 twice "*be pleased*."

What now was to become of the prophesied purpose of God to bring blessing and salvation to the Gentiles through Israel? What of the Abrahamic Covenant? How could blessing go to the Gentiles when Israel, the channel through whom it was to flow, had *joined* the Gentiles in their rebellion against God?

The answer to this question is the most wonderful story ever told: the story of grace flowing from Calvary. Temporarily setting aside the prophesied program, God now reaches down in infinite grace to save the rebel leader. By the power of love and of the tender words from the One at whose name Saul has gnashed his teeth, the pitiless persecutor in one moment becomes, not only a docile follower of Christ, but the chosen vessel through whom God is to dispense the riches of His grace to a sin-cursed world.

The world's rebellion was to have resulted in the outpouring of God's wrath (Psa. 2:5; 110:1) but God, always slow to anger, was deferring the judgment and beginning to usher in a dispensation of *grace*.

The objection might well be raised whether it was quite in accord with justice for God, at such a time, to show kindness to the world and even to the leader of its insurrection against Christ. The answer to this objection is to be found at Calvary. Since Christ had died for sin, why could not God offer the riches of His grace to all who would receive it by faith, and still maintain His justice? And why could He not freely offer salvation to the Gentiles, entirely apart from Israel? This is why the message of Paul is properly called "*the preaching of the cross*" (I Cor. 1:18-25). As *grace* is more prominent in Paul's epistles than anywhere else in the Bible, so are the *cross*, the *blood*, the *death* of Christ. Nowhere else are these so frequently referred to.

"In whom we have redemption THROUGH HIS BLOOD, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7).

"Being justified freely by His grace, THROUGH THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS:

"WHOM GOD HATH SET FORTH TO BE A PROPITIATION THROUGH FAITH IN HIS BLOOD, TO DECLARE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS ....

"... THAT HE MIGHT BE JUST, AND THE JUSTIFIER OF HIM WHICH BELIEVETH IN JESUS" (Rom. 3:24-26).

It was Paul whose conversion demonstrated and whose ministry and message proclaimed these great facts. His conversion marked the *beginning* of the new dispensation. Note, we say the *beginning*, for the dispensation of grace, with the revelation of it, emerged *gradually* (See [Acts 26:16](#); [II Cor. 12:1](#)). The careful student of Scripture will not expect to find the Pentecostal program

suddenly abolished, with the dispensation of grace in its fulness suddenly replacing it.

Shortly after Saul's conversion, for example, Ananias instructed him: "*Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord*" (Acts 22:16). This was because water baptism was required in the dispensation under which Saul had been saved. The significance of his conversion and commission by the revelation of Christ to him had not yet been revealed. Yet it is clear from the record that Saul was actually saved on the road to Damascus, before his baptism with water. He was not saved because he had responded to the message of the twelve by repenting and being baptized. He had been their bitterest enemy and the foremost of *sinner*s, leading Israel and the world in rebellion against God, and he was saved and reconciled by *sovereign grace*. In this he was representative, and this was to be shown as the gospel of the grace of God was gradually unfolded to and through him and gradually displaced the Pentecostal order.

Of his own case he says:

"[I] was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but.... THE GRACE OF OUR LORD WAS EXCEEDING ABUNDANT....

"THIS IS A FAITHFUL SAYING, AND WORTHY OF ALL ACCEPTATION, THAT CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS, OF WHOM I AM CHIEF" (I Tim. 1:13-15).

And of mankind's case he says:

"Moreover the law entered that the offence might abound. BUT WHERE SIN ABOUNDED, GRACE DID MUCH MORE ABOUND:

"THAT AS SIN HATH REIGNED UNTO DEATH, EVEN SO MIGHT GRACE REIGN THROUGH RIGHTEOUSNESS UNTO ETERNAL LIFE BY JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD" (Rom. 5:20,21).

Thus the conversion of Saul marked the *beginning* of the unfolding of the mystery of God's purpose and grace. The very fact that *another* apostle was being raised up, quite separate from the twelve, clearly indicates that God had *begun* to usher in the new dispensation: "*the dispensation of the grace of God*" (Eph. 3:2,3).

With regard to this Dr. Arno C. Gabelein wrote in his book on *The Gospel of Matthew*:

"Superficial readers of the Word of God make no difference between the Gospel of the Kingdom and the Gospel of Grace ..." (Vol. II, P. 189).

But the distinction is important, as I. R. Dean, in his *Coming Kingdom*, points out. Says Mr. Dean:

"Why was it necessary for Paul to have a new revelation of the gospel if he was to preach the same gospel that John the Baptist and Christ and His disciples had preached? Wherein lies the difference?

"John the Baptist and Christ and His disciples offered *Israel* a Messiah .... *Paul's gospel* does not offer Israel a Messiah at all; God is not offering anyone a *Messiah* now" (P. 210).

Dean is right, for rather than offering men a Messiah now, God is offering reconciliation by grace to all men, in a world where the Messiah, the King, was, and remains, rejected.

"FOR GOD HATH CONCLUDED THEM ALL IN UNBELIEF, THAT HE MIGHT HAVE MERCY UPON ALL.

"O THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES BOTH OF THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD! HOW UNSEARCHABLE ARE HIS JUDGMENTS, AND HIS WAYS PAST FINDING OUT!" (Rom. 11:32,33).

### **PAUL THE PATTERN**

If the reason for Saul's conversion is not made perfectly clear in I Tim. 1:13-15, it certainly is made clear in the verse that follows:

"HOWBEIT FOR THIS CAUSE I OBTAINED MERCY, THAT IN ME FIRST<sup>3</sup> JESUS CHRIST MIGHT SHOW FORTH ALL LONGSUFFERING, FOR A PATTERN TO THEM WHICH SHOULD HEREAFTER BELIEVE ON HIM TO LIFE EVERLASTING."

Yet there are those who do not seem to see clearly the progressive unity of Paul's ministry and message. Because the Pentecostal program was not abolished at once and because it was actually predominant during the beginning of Saul's ministry, they suppose that God was simply proceeding with His prophesied program in the conversion of Saul. They argue that Saul's conversion was a pattern of Israel's future conversion and *not* of ours. They remind us of I Cor. 15:8, where the apostle says:

"And last of all [Christ] was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."<sup>4</sup>

Now this statement is exceedingly significant.

---

<sup>3</sup> Or, *chiefly*. The same word in the original as "chief" in Verse 15.

<sup>4</sup> Lit. "an abortion" -- born *before* the due time.

When Paul speaks of himself as having been born "before the due time," he seems clearly to have Israel's future conversion in mind.

But were not the twelve and many other Jewish believers saved even before Saul? Were they not also, then, born "before the due time"? Yes, but something important had taken place between the two.

The twelve were saved during what Christ called *Israel's day* and *the time of her visitation* (Luke 19:41-44). Christ also called this "*the acceptable year of the Lord*" for Israel (Luke 4:19). Furthermore this "acceptable year of the Lord" was prolonged until after the cross by the dying Savior's intercession (Luke 23:34).

It is further clear that the apostles could not know that Pentecost, when the kingdom was actually to be *offered*, was not the "due time" for Israel to be saved, for the Lord had declined to tell them this (See [Acts 1:6,7](#)).

But with the murder of Stephen it became evident that Israel would not accept Christ. By this act the nation answered the question of His apostles as to the establishment of His kingdom. Now Israel's conversion awaited a *future* day; the "due time" still lay ahead, even though all did not yet understand this.

This is why Paul speaks of himself as having been born *before*, not *after*, the due time. This should be carefully noted by those who teach that the new dispensation did not begin until some time after Saul's conversion, for if they were correct, why should it be said only of Paul, and not of the Pentecostal believers, that he was born before due time?

It should be noted, however, that while Saul was an Israelite born before the due time, it does not follow from this that his conversion was necessarily typical of Israel's throughout.

Paul, having been born before the due time, has a more direct relation to us than to Israel. Israel will be born again *in* due time, while we, like Paul, are born *before* the due time.

This may be demonstrated by a few simple questions:

When is the "due time" for Israel to be saved: past, present, or future? The answer, of course, is *future*. When is the "due time" for the Gentiles to be saved? The answer to this is also, *future*, for the Gentiles, according to covenant and prophecy, are to be saved *through Israel*. When *Jews* are saved today, then, are they saved "in due time," prophetically speaking, or "before the due time?" "*Before the due time*," of course. And when *Gentiles* are saved today, are they saved "in due time" or "before the due time"? The answer is also, "*before the due time*."

Thus, when Jews and Gentiles today are saved and reconciled to God in one body, they are saved "out of" or *before* the "due time," not on the basis of the covenants, but by *grace*; not according to prophecy, but according to the *mystery* revealed to and through Paul.

It is true that Saul's conversion, like Israel's, is associated in Scripture with the revelation of Christ (Cf. [Zech. 12:10](#); [Rom. 11:26](#)). But there are points of departure too for, unlike Israel of the future, Saul was not crying to God for deliverance when Christ appeared to him. He was the great persecutor, making others cry for deliverance. Furthermore Saul was out of the land of Palestine when Christ appeared to him, while Israel will be *in* the land. There are other points of departure which we will consider later.

But while some insist that Saul's conversion was "a pattern" of Israel's, mainly because of the revelation of Christ to him, *he* does not say this at all. He says, by the Spirit, that Christ, in his ease, showed forth *all longsuffering* as a pattern:

'THAT IN ME FIRST JESUS CHRIST MIGHT SHOW FORTH ALL LONGSUFFERING, FOR A PATTERN TO THEM WHICH SHOULD HEREAFTER BELIEVE ON HIM TO LIFE EVERLASTING" (I Tim. 1:16).

This doubtless has its bearing on the future conversion of Israel, for God is today teaching the great lesson which Israel must learn to be saved. But it is more directly related to us today for God is showing forth "all longsuffering" in this dispensation of grace.

It is clear, therefore, that Paul is our pattern in salvation. In him chiefly Jesus Christ, apart from the law or the conditions of the "great commission," entirely on the basis of the blood of Calvary, showed forth all longsuffering so that those who should thereafter believe on Him might, whatever their past, be assured of the exceeding abundance of His grace.

### **LETTERS TO DAMASCUS**

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

"And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bond unto Jerusalem."

--Acts 9:1, 2.

How much of blasphemy and bloodshed, of tears and terror, is contained in the little word "yet" here! Luke's use of it in this connection makes it clear that much had transpired between Acts 8:1 and 9:1. It was during the period covered



by Acts 8 that Saul "made havock of the church," persecuting it "beyond measure" and "laying it waste" (See [Acts 8:3](#) and [Gal. 1:13](#)).

While Damascus was probably the first *Gentile* city Saul travelled to in his persecution of Christ and His followers, it must not be taken for granted that he had thus far confined his activities to Jerusalem and its environs alone. In his testimony before Agrippa he later said: "*Being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities*" (Acts 26:11). This is doubtless what Ananias referred to when, reminding the Lord of all the evil that Saul had done to the saints "at Jerusalem," he said: "*And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy name*"<sup>5</sup> (Acts 9:14).

Just how far Saul had gotten in his campaign to stamp out the worship of Christ, or what cities had felt his wrath, we are not told, but we do know from the record that his fearful onslaught against the believers had by this time broken many hearts and homes and had sent many to their deaths.

And here we find him "*yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.*" The phrase is highly descriptive. It pictures a man greatly enraged, breathing fast and hard and threatening violence and murder with every breath.

In this frame of mind Saul now goes to the high priest for "authority and commission" to travel to the distant city of Damascus to apprehend any whom he might find of "this way"<sup>6</sup> and bring them bound to Jerusalem.

### **DIVINE INTERVENTION**

And so we find Saul still taking the initiative in the war against God and His Christ. It is he, not the high priest, who suggests carrying the battle to the distant city of Damascus.

We must not miss the significance of this. As we have pointed out, Israel, through whom God had promised to send salvation and blessing to the Gentiles, had now joined the Gentiles in their rebellion against God *and Saul of Tarsus was leading that rebellion.*

But when Saul pressed the persecution into Gentile territory, divine intervention was immediate and direct. If the people of Israel would not accept salvation through Christ they were not, at least, to be permitted to keep it from

---

<sup>5</sup> If Ananias was correct it seems that the chief priests had placed Saul at the head of the whole persecution against Christ and His followers.

<sup>6</sup> From other passages in Acts it seems clear that the term, "this way" is *Luke's* inspired designation for the faith and practices of Messiah's followers, not a derisive term used by Saul (See Acts 18:25,26; 19:9,23; 22:4, 24:14,22). Perhaps the term was used much as we might speak of "the message" or 'these truths," but it ill not without significance that the same terminology is used in John 14:6, where we have the words of our Lord: "I AM THE WAY, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."

the Gentiles. Thus God now proceeds to show them that He did not choose them because He needed them, but because of His sovereign grace, and that He can justly offer salvation to all, entirely apart from the covenant promises, entirely apart from Israel--wholly and solely through the merits of the Crucified. And for this purpose, yea, on these grounds, He saves Saul, His chief enemy on earth, sending him forth with "*the gospel of the grace of God!*" (Acts 20:24; Eph. 3:2).

*Wondrous manifestation of love!*

## **A LIGHT FROM HEAVEN**

"And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

"And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?

"And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

"And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

"And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man."

--Acts 9:3-7.

What a sight we now behold! The cruel persecutor of Messiah's followers is already in sight of Damascus, threatening slaughter with every breath when, suddenly, there shines about him a light above the brightness of the noonday sun.<sup>7</sup> Amazed and bewildered, he and all those who are with him fall to the ground, as a voice from heaven speaks to him in the Hebrew tongue.<sup>8</sup> It is the voice of Jesus Himself, whom Saul has hated and persecuted so bitterly. Wonder that He even speaks to Saul! Wonder that He does not *slay* him! See how graciously He reasons with him! "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks [goads].*"<sup>9</sup>

As the ox rebels in vain against the goad, and all its struggles serve only to increase its distress, so Saul's rebellion against God and His Christ, while utterly futile, served only to vex *him* more and get him deeper into trouble.

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Acts 22:6; 26:13.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 26:14.

<sup>9</sup> This last phrase is not found in Acts 9 in most texts, but in Acts 26:14 is placed directly after the opening question where, evidently, it belongs.

*"And he said, Who art Thou, Lord?"*

*"And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."*

Note the patience and love with which the Lord speaks to His enemy. There is not a harsh word, not a sign of bitterness.

His conciliatory attitude is representative of the dispensation of grace. Instead of crushing Saul, He asks: "Why persecutest *thou Me?*"

And thus in one moment the Lord wins the heart of the leader of the world's rebellion against Him. In one moment Saul's life is gloriously transformed and the one who had breathed threatenings and slaughter *against* Christ enters a life of toil and suffering and even goes to death for Him.

Saul was further instructed to go into Damascus, where he would be told what he should do, i.e., what he should do next, but in his own account of the event, given later before Agrippa, he tells how he first received *his* great commission here from the Lord Himself. We quote the passage from the translation by Conybeare and Howson:

"I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest: but rise and stand upon thy feet; for to his end I have appeared unto thee, to ordain thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou has seen, and of those things where I shall appear unto thee. And thee have I chosen from the House of Israel, and from among the Gentiles; unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among the sanctified, by faith in Me" (Acts 26:15-18).

Paul's Roman, as well as his Hebrew citizenship is strongly emphasized in the book of Acts. This is significant, for here at the outset, as a representative of both Jew and Gentile, he is sent to both Jews and Gentiles to turn them from darkness to light and to give them an inheritance among the sanctified.

Saul was not sent out to work under the commission given to the twelve. Indeed, the Lord had raised him up as *another* apostle, entirely apart from the twelve, that through him "*He might reconcile both [Jews and Gentiles] unto God in one body by the cross*" (Eph. 2:16).

Here several passages from William R. Newell's *Paul vs. Peter* are appropriate:

"Therefore," says Newell, "is Paul vehement and positive. 'Before God,' he cries, 'I lie not! I have no connection, nor has the gospel I preach, with the other apostles. All I teach was a direct revelation by Jesus Christ to me and must be

harkened to, for I speak with the Lord's own authority. The Lord appeared to me not in order to convert me--for the Lord could have converted me by any one's preaching but to make me His witness for this dispensation" (Pp. 31,32).

"The failure or refusal to discern the Pauline Gospel as a separate and new revelation and not a 'development from Judaism,' accounts for most of the confusion in many people's minds today as regards just what the Gospel is" (P. 9).

"... unto none of these twelve Apostles did God reveal *the great body of doctrine for this age*" (P. 4).

"... It pleased Him to choose *Paul* to be the great proclaimer and revealer of *just what the Gospel is for this dispensation*" (P. 6).

These important truths were emphasized by most of our great Bible teachers a generation ago. Had it but continued so the results for the Church would have been far reaching. Mr. Newell was right when he wrote:

"Paul's constant testimony to the fact that he had an especial message from God cannot be overlooked. No other apostle speaks of 'my gospel!' And it is according to the revelation given to Paul that men are established."

This does not mean that Saul received all the details of his new commission at once, or that all the glories of the new dispensation were immediately unfolded to him for, as we have already seen, the Lord said:

"For to this end I have appeared unto thee, to ordain thee a minister and a witness BOTH OF THOSE THINGS WHICH THOU HAST SEEN, AND OF THOSE THINGS WHEREIN I SHALL APPEAR UNTO THEE" (Acts 26:16).

With the conversion of Saul, then, we have the *dawn*, the *beginning*, of the dispensation of grace and we may expect to see it gradually unfolded from this point on.

## **THE CRUCIFIXION EXPLAINED**

The crucifixion of Christ and the conversion of Saul have been called the two greatest events of history. Certainly they should always be associated in our minds, for the one is the complement to the other.

In the one we have the Son of God dying for sin; in the other, the chief of sinners saved from sin. In the one we have the holy One crying to His Father: "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?" In the other we have the same holy One asking His arch-enemy: "SAUL, SAUL, WHY PERSECUTEST THOU ME?" The former "*Why?*" came from the lips of the dying

Son of God on Calvary's cross; the latter, from the Son of God in His exaltation at the Father's right hand.

These two "*Whys*" represent the two greatest riddles of history; yet one is the simple explanation of the other.

We well remember the unspeakable grief of a young woman whose lovely little daughter had been suddenly taken by the hand of death; how she wrung her hands in anguish, sobbing, "*Why? Why?*"

Man, down through the ages, has asked "Why?" almost continuously--sometimes in grief and disappointment, sometimes in anger and rebellion. Why all this misery and sorrow and trouble? Why all this sickness and pain and death? Why all this war and desolation and bloodshed?

Yet in the final analysis it is not strange that *we* should suffer misery and death. This is the natural result of sin. A far greater question, the greatest of all, is voiced in the anguished "Why?" which was wrung from the lips of the Son of God as He died in agony and disgrace for sins He had never committed.

Why did--how could--a just and holy God, not to say a loving God, stand aloof while wicked men spat in that blessed face and scourged and mocked the holy One, finally nailing Him to a tree? Why did He not stop them? Why did He *add* to the anguish and misery by Himself forsaking His Son?

Ah, the question is answered as the Son of God later, "exalted far above all," looks down on the world's rebellion and pleads with its leader: "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?*"--*and then saves him!*

"*Saul, Saul, why?*" It might well be asked of all mankind. Why this enmity against Christ? Why this going on in sin and rebellion against Him? Who can give a good answer? Is He not what He claimed to be? Can man save himself from condemnation and death without the Crucified? Why reject and oppose Him? What reason is there in it?

It was this unreasonable enmity of man against Christ--personified in Saul--that both brought about that cruel crucifixion and at the same time rendered it necessary for salvation. And the conversion of Saul was the supreme demonstration of what the cross could and did accomplish.

Until the conversion of Saul the crucifixion had been pointed out as something to be ashamed of and repented of. But henceforth the *glory* of the cross is to be increasingly unfolded. The apostle looks back upon it and cries: "*He loved me and gave Himself for me!*" He proclaims it as the ground of redemption and offers salvation through it. He *boasts* in it.

Thus to Paul was first committed what is properly called "*the preaching of the cross*" (I Cor. 1: 17,18).

*This* is the answer to that anguished "*Why?*"! If it is not, then there is no answer, for how can we trust God as either just or loving if indeed He allowed wicked men to outrage and murder one so good--not to say His own holy Son--for naught? Under such circumstances what would be the use of anything, for then indeed is "truth forever on the scaffold; wrong forever on the throne."

Yes, the death of Christ and the sin of man considered without relation to each other are two insoluble problems, but put them together and you have the solution. Not that we may now know *all* the reasons why God permitted each, but that we have the solution to these problems as they affect us.

"Christ died for our sins"; not merely *on account of* our sins, but *for* our sins. This is the key to heaven. This is the solution to *our* problem. There is no need to remain under the condemnation of sin, for "*Christ died for our sins.*" We cannot complain that we were born in sin, for "*Christ died for our sins.*" We cannot argue that we are not responsible for our condition, for though we *are* responsible, *He* took the responsibility upon Himself when "*Christ died for our sins.*"

"O, why was He there as the bearer of sin  
If on Jesus thy guilt was not laid?  
O, why from His side flowed the sin-cleansing blood  
If his dying thy debt hath not paid?"

## **Chapter XV - Acts 9:8-22**

### **DAMASCUS AND ARABIA**

#### **SAUL BROUGHT TO DAMASCUS**

"And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

"And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink."  
--Acts 9:8,9.

It should be noted that Saul was stricken blind when Christ appeared to him, whereas Israel's blindness will be *removed* when Christ appears to her. This must surely pose a problem for those who consider the *manner* of Saul's conversion to be "a pattern" of Israel's future conversion, and question that the *longsuffering* shown to him was "a pattern" of the longsuffering being shown to sinners *today*.

It was a shaken man that was led into the city whither he had gone breathing threatenings and slaughter against Messiah's followers, vowing that he would find every one of them and have them delivered to judgment and death. His letters of authority from the chief priests must have seemed the wrong thing to be carrying now--a worthless, inappropriate and even *dangerous* possession, for he was helpless in the midst of those whom--and whose loved ones--he had sought to kill.

We doubt, however, that his mind was very much occupied with his own safety at this time. There were more important things to think about during these days without sight, food or drink. These letters of death; what did he want with them now? The past; the fathers, mothers and loved ones he had hunted to their deaths; those he had scourged to make them blaspheme Christ; his recent intense hatred of Christ. How could he ever begin to set all this right? And yet here he was *saved*, and chosen to bear Christ's name before the world! But how would they receive *his* testimony? Or, would his testimony, perhaps, bear *greater* weight than the testimonies of others? Ah, but how utterly *undeserving* was he to speak one word in Christ's behalf!

What mingled feelings of sorrow and joy, remorse and gratitude, shame and glory must have surged within Saul's breast as he contemplated what he had just seen and heard!

No wonder he writes years later, his own experience still fresh in his mind:

"... WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE" (Eph. 1:7).

Nor is it any wonder that, still remembering his cruel persecution of the believers, he writes to the Corinthians:

"For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet [worthy] to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (I Cor. 15:9).

There is abundant evidence all through his letters that the apostle never forgave himself for his heartless persecution of the saints and never ceased to wonder at the grace of God in saving him and putting him into the ministry. Yet in the conversion of Saul God had just *begun* to manifest the grace that flows from Calvary.

### THE OTHER ANANIAS

"And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

"And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

"And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

"Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to Thy saints at Jerusalem:

"And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy name.

"But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

"For I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake."

--Acts 9:10-16.

Luke's record gives us some idea of the scope and extent of Saul's warfare against Christ and His saints. Here in Damascus, far from Jerusalem, Ananias, a devout believer, knows a great deal about the persecutor and his doings. He has heard "by many" of all the evil that Saul has done to the saints at Jerusalem. He has even learned that Saul has now received authority from the chief priests to bind *all* that call upon Messiah's name.



Indeed, Saul's purpose in coming to Damascus seems to have been common knowledge among the Jews there for they had already girded themselves for the storm, and when, instead, they found that Saul himself had been converted to Christ, they exclaimed in amazement:

"Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?" (Acts 9:21).

But all this was changed now and the great indication of it is found in the Lord's command to Ananias to go and visit him, with the explanation: "*For, behold, he prayeth.*"

This "behold" is not without significance. Whatever Saul's manner of life before his conversion, he could *not* have been described as a praying man.

He had been a scrupulous observer of the law, zealous of the traditions of his fathers and conscientious in his persecution of Christ and His followers. No doubt he had even *repeated* many prayers. But with all his religion He did not *know God*, nor His Christ. Now he had come face to face with Christ and had come to know His saving love and power, and it had changed him completely. Humbly now, he *prays*. This is why Ananias need no longer fear him.

There is a great lesson for us in the fact that Paul's Christian life began with the humble prayer:

"*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*" and that his first three days as a believer were spent mostly in *prayer*.

### **SAUL'S CALL TO APOSTLESHIP**

The Lord's explanation to Ananias that He had chosen Saul to bear His name "before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel," must not be taken to mean that Saul's commission was but another step in the carrying out of the "great commission" given to the twelve. Rome's constant emphasis on Peter and the eleven has influenced Protestantism and even Fundamentalism here and has left them confused and divided.

Saul was commissioned as *another* apostle, quite distinct and separate from the twelve. As he points out in Gal. 1:1; his apostleship did not originate with man, nor were men even led by the Holy Spirit to appoint him, as was the case with Matthias. He was chosen and called by the glorified Lord Himself, while both were far from Jerusalem.

With regard to this William R. Newell wrote, in his *Paul vs. Peter*:

"Is it not strange that sixteen (seventeen, if we include 9) of the twenty-eight chapters of Acts should be given to that apostle who was not one of the original twelve at all, and was not converted till long after Pentecost? Must there not be a deep reason for this? What is that reason? . . . One thing is certainly evident already, that we Gentiles have a relation to Paul that we do not have to the other apostles; exactly what that relation is we must most prayerfully seek to discover" (P. 10).

And Dr. Arno C. Gaebelin, in his *Gospel of Matthew*, wrote:

"The twelve apostles . . . stand in prominent and definite relation to Israel .... It is astonishing to hear able teachers of the Word talk and write of the mistake which the eleven made in the first chapter in the Book of Acts in casting the lot and choosing Matthias .... it is also said by these Brethren, who see in the choosing of Matthias an error, that the Lord wanted *Paul* to be the one who belongs to the Twelve. This is the *worst* blunder of all" (Vol. I, P. 205).

The twelve were not commissioned to go to "the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." They were instructed "*that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM*" (Luke 24:47). This, as we have pointed out, was based on the Abrahamic covenant and the prophetic promises that the world should be blessed *through the nation Israel* (See Gen. 22:17,18; Zech. 8:13).

Was Saul now to go to the Gentiles because Israel had accepted Messiah? Indeed not. He had been the very leader of the persecution that proved that Israel was *not* accepting Christ. He was sent to "all men," as Acts 22:15 has it, not in fulfillment of covenants or prophecies, but *by grace*.

Mark well that right here, at the outset of his ministry, when the Lord first commissions him, the Gentiles are mentioned before Israel. It is true, to be sure, that until Acts 28 he went to the Jews first in city after city, but this was not to further extend Peter's offer of the kingdom, for that offer could be accepted only *in the land*. It was rather that Israel as a nation might have no excuse for rejecting Christ. While God was still dealing with Israel, these Jews outside the land were given first opportunity to hear that "Jesus is the Christ," so that they might decide for themselves whether or not they would join the nation in its rejection of Christ and accept the responsibility for the judgment which was to follow. Furthermore, it was the natural thing for Saul, a Jew, to begin his ministry to "all men" by going first to his own people, who at least believed in the true God, to witness to them that the rejected Jesus was truly God's Anointed. But Saul's ministry was to be *mainly* to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13).

It is significant that upon Saul's first return to Jerusalem after his conversion Christ appeared to him to say:

"Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem; FOR THEY WILL NOT RECEIVE THY TESTIMONY CONCERNING ME" (Acts 22:18).

And when Saul argued the case, thinking that his testimony, more than that of others, might bear weight with them, the Lord replied summarily:

"DEPART: FOR I WILL SEND THEE FAR HENCE UNTO THE GENTILES" (Acts 22:21).

Thus at the very outset of his ministry Saul was commissioned as the apostle of the Gentiles.<sup>10</sup>

### **HOW GREAT THINGS HE MUST SUFFER**

When we view the conversion of Saul in the light of sacred history we find there is more than meets the eye in the Lord's prediction: "*I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake.*"

Saul, as we have pointed out, had represented the world in its enmity toward Christ. Israel had joined the Gentiles in their rebellion and Saul of Tarsus had led them in it. War had actually been declared against God and His Christ in the stoning of Stephen and the great persecution that followed.

How would God respond? The Old Testament Scriptures give their united answer: He would make a counter declaration of war, put down their rebellion, and set Christ up as King in spite of them. Two passages from the Psalms bear vivid witness to this:

Psa. 2:1-9: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people [of Israel, see Acts 4:25-27] imagine a vain thing?

"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Anointed, saying,

"Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

"HE THAT SITTETH IN THE HEAVENS SHALL LAUGH: THE LORD SHALL HAVE THEM IN DERISION.

"THEN SHALL HE SPEAK UNTO THEM IN HIS WRATH, AND VEX THEM IN HIS SORE DISPLEASURE.

---

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that the term *Gentiles* does not necessarily *exclude* the Jews for it simply means *nations, or* people of the nations. It is naturally used exclusive of the Jews, however, when *contrasted* with them as. e.g., when *Jews and Gentiles* are spoken of.

"YET HAVE I SET MY KING UPON MY HOLY HILL OF ZION.

"I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee.

"Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession.

"Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

Psa. 110:1: "The Lord said unto my Lord, SIT THOU AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES THY FOOTSTOOL."

There is no indication in these, nor in any other Old Testament prophecies, that any period of grace would be granted to the rejectors of Christ. As we know now, however, the Lord graciously interrupted the prophetic program and ushered in "the dispensation of the grace of God." This loving purpose had been previously kept a secret (Eph. 3:1-3).

Rather than bring in the great tribulation and judge the world immediately, the Lord chose to remain an Exile, rejected and despised on earth, so that He might offer reconciliation *by grace* to all who would receive it. Rather than coming in *judgment and war* (Rev. 19:11) He sent forth ambassadors to proclaim *grace and peace* (Gal. 1:3) through the merits of His cross.

Saul himself was sent out as the first such ambassador; an ambassador of reconciliation to a world at enmity with God. As before his conversion he had travelled to strange cities by "authority and commission from the chief priests" to persecute others, so now he was to travel to strange cities by authority and commission from the ascended Christ, to proclaim the good news of His grace. It would be a dangerous mission, for an ambassador on enemy territory may expect hardship, imprisonment and even death, but the apostle suffered these gladly for the Christ he had persecuted, especially since he did not know how long the period of grace would last.

This explains one of his statements in the Colossian letter with which many have experienced difficulty:

"[ I ] now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind [still remains] of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church" (Col. 1:24).

This passage in no way indicates that our Lord's death on Calvary did not suffice to pay the whole debt of sin. It has rather to do with the *present* afflictions of Christ which we, his ambassadors, suffer, or should suffer, for Him.

The world's attitude toward Christ has not changed. Were He here today they would crucify Him again. But He is exalted far above all, out of their reach. It is we who "fill up" that which still remains of His afflictions.

And Saul is our leader in this. He had led the rebellion and had cruelly persecuted the believers. Now God, allowing the rebellion to continue, had *saved* Saul, sending him forth as an ambassador of reconciliation to His enemies. Hence *he* now had to bear the suffering he had once inflicted upon others--suffering for Christ. Ah, but such suffering is sweet. He calls it "*the fellowship of His sufferings*" (Phil. 3:10). He *rejoices* in it (Col. 1:24).

And we follow him in this too, for we also are ambassadors of grace, ourselves saved by grace.

Therefore the apostle says to us:

"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29).

### **SAUL BAPTIZED**

"And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

"And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

"And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus."

--Acts 9:17-19.

The conversion and commission of Saul was representative. Rather than immediately crushing the rebellion against Christ, God was now to save men out of it and send them, like Saul, back into enemy territory with the offer of reconciliation by grace through faith.

It must be emphasized, however, that Saul's conversion was but the *first step* in this direction. The salvation of the leader of the world's rebellion, the call of *another* apostle, separate from the twelve: these were but the first departures from the prophetic program. This program was to be *gradually* displaced and temporarily replaced - by the parenthetical program of the mystery. As a whole the prophetic program still prevailed at this time.

This is clear from the fact that the Holy Spirit (as He operated then) was imparted to Saul by the laying on of hands, and that his sight was miraculously restored in the same way.

This is clear also from the fact that he was baptized with water to "wash away" his sins (See [Acts 22:16](#)). We know of course, that the washing of water was only symbolic; that it could not *in itself* wash away sin; that Saul was saved *essentially* by the grace and power of God. Indeed he was soon to go forth to make this truth known, preaching "the gospel of the grace of God." But the fact that a new dispensation had *begun* does not mean that the old had already passed away. The other apostles could not yet have understood the secret purposes of God, nor had it been indicated to them that the discharge of their "great commission" would be interrupted, hence water baptism was still required, along with faith, for salvation (Mark 16:15,16) at the time when Saul was converted, and any true believer would be "baptized for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38).

The fact that the old dispensation still prevailed at that time is further emphasized by the type of man God chose to baptize Saul. Paul later says of him:

"And one Ananias, A DEVOUT MAN ACCORDING TO THE LAW, HAVING A GOOD REPORT OF ALL THE JEWS WHICH DWELT THERE, came unto me..." (Acts 22:12,13).

Those who contend that Israel was set aside at the cross and that Peter and the eleven were then sent forth by the risen Christ to preach "*the gospel of the grace of God,*" must find it difficult to explain why even Paul was later baptized by a devout, law-observing Jew, *to wash away his sins!*

No, Saul's conversion was not the fruit of a message of grace preached by the twelve. He was saved "by the revelation of Jesus Christ" while the prophetic program and the "great commission" was still in force. But his salvation and his ministry were to usher in "the dispensation of the grace of God," which was to emerge gradually from the deadlock caused by Israel's failure to accept her Messiah.

The three soul-searching days having ended with the restoration of his sight and his being baptized, he received food and was strengthened. A few days more he spent with the disciples in what must have been a most touching and tender fellowship, but how could he remain silent longer?

### **SAUL'S FIRST MINISTRY FOR CHRIST**

"And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

"But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?"

"But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ."

--Acts 9:20-22.

What a revolution has taken place! This Saul has come to the synagogues of Damascus especially to apprehend the followers of Christ and "bring them bound unto Jerusalem"; now, in these very synagogues, he openly declares "that He is the Son of God." But a few days ago he was "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord"; now he confounds the Christ-rejecting Jews of Damascus, boldly "proving that this is very Christ." Little wonder that "*all that heard him were amazed!*"

The apostle's proclamation of Christ during his early ministry deserves the most careful attention. Because Gal. 1:23 states that he preached "the faith which once he destroyed," some have concluded that he, like the twelve, offered the kingdom to Israel during his Acts ministry and that he preached the very same message they had been sent to proclaim under the "great commission." This is entirely without Scriptural foundation. Nowhere do we find him offering the kingdom to Israel. Moreover, he says clearly in this same letter to the Galatians, written during the Acts period: "... they [the leaders at Jerusalem] saw that *the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter*" (Gal. 2:7). It is true that the wonderful message of grace was *gradually* revealed to and through him, but this began with the revelation of Christ to him.

Looking back, in Acts 20:24, the apostle speaks of "*the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*"

The fact is simply that whereas he *had opposed* the preaching of Christ (in any form) he had now himself come to trust and preach Christ. This is no ground for the contention that he first preached a kingdom message as did the twelve, and then changed to another message. It simply indicates that there was a connection, as well as a distinction, between his message and that of the twelve, and that this connection centered in the person of Christ.

It will be noticed that according to the record here in Acts Saul first preached the Lord Jesus as "*the Son of God*" and "*very Christ.*" This, of course, was the truth upon which the kingdom message was founded ([Matt. 16:16-18](#); [John 1:49; 11:27; 20:31](#)). But can we deny this now and be saved? Most certainly not. It is true that we now look to Him as Savior and Lord, rather than as Christ (the Anointed King) but it is nevertheless God's *Christ*, Israel's rejected King, whom we have come to know as Savior and Lord. One who does not believe that the

Jesus whom Israel rejected is the Christ, the Son of God, is, of course, far from salvation, even though the earthly establishment of Christ's kingdom is not now being offered.

Thus Paul did not work at cross purposes with the twelve. They had preached the truth in proclaiming Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and he now *confirmed* what they had been preaching. Indeed, we do this today. But this does not mean that Paul preached *the whole message and program* of the twelve, or that he offered the kingdom to Israel. He simply began his preaching in these synagogues with the *fact* that the Jesus whom Israel had rejected was indeed the Son of God and very Christ. This was the natural place to begin.

Another reason why we find Paul proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, here is that the book of Acts is essentially the story of Israel's fall, not the story of the birth and growth of the Church of this age. The opening question of the book is: "*Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*" (Acts 1:6). The answer at the close is: "*The salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles*" (Acts 28:28). The Body of Christ did have its beginning with Paul during the period covered by the latter part of Acts, but the main purpose of the book is to show how Israel rejected Christ in spite of the miraculous demonstrations of Pentecost, in spite of the powerful appeals of the twelve and even in spite of the testimony of Paul, who once had been Christ's greatest enemy on earth.

### **A SIGNIFICANT OMISSION**

This brings us face to face with a significant omission in the Acts record of Saul's conversion. We read here only of his ministry at Damascus and his return to Jerusalem (Ver. 26). In his own account before the multitude at Jerusalem, years later, it is the same. He tells of his baptism at Damascus and continues with his return to Jerusalem. But in his letter to the Galatian believers he has more to say:

"But when it pleased God, who separated me, from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace,

"To reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen [Gentiles]; IMMEDIATELY I CONFERRED NOT WITH FLESH AND BLOOD;

"NEITHER WENT I UP TO JERUSALEM TO THEM WHICH WERE APOSTLES BEFORE ME; BUT I WENT INTO ARABIA, AND RETURNED AGAIN UNTO DAMASCUS.

"THEN AFTER THREE YEARS I WENT UP TO JERUSALEM TO SEE PETER, AND ABODE WITH HIM FIFTEEN DAYS" (Gal. 1:15-18).



Thus Saul departed from Damascus, spent the greater part of three years in Arabia and returned to Damascus, *before returning to Jerusalem*. This stay in Arabia is doubtless included in the "many days" of Acts 9:23.

How his time was chiefly spent in Arabia we are not told, but we do know that this period of seclusion was necessary for several reasons. In the first place, the rulers at Jerusalem must have been enraged at Saul for suddenly turning to Christ, and to return there immediately would have been an unwarranted risk of his life, for if the rulers there were putting ordinary followers of Christ to death, they would certainly not have allowed such as Saul to escape. Indeed, when he did return to Jerusalem three years later the Grecian Jews "went about to slay him."

But there was another reason why God would not have him return to Jerusalem as yet, and this is what he alludes to in the above passage from the Galatian letter. His going to Jerusalem at this time would have been injurious to his future influence and usefulness by bringing the original and underived authority of his apostleship into question. It would have been said that he was subject to the twelve and that he had received his ministry and message from them, while in fact it was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who had invested him with plenary apostolic authority entirely apart from the twelve, so that he was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.

## ***Chapter XVI - Acts 9:23-43***

### **SAUL SENT HOME**

#### **THE RECORD OF PETER'S MINISTRY RESUMED**

#### **THE ESCAPE FROM DAMASCUS**

"And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

"But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

"Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket,"

--Acts 9:23-25.

Already the great persecutor had become the persecuted one. Already he was "in peril among [his] own countrymen." In II Cor. 11:32,33 he tells more of the story:

"In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me:

"And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands."

We are told that Aretas was father-in-law to Herod Antipas and that he had made war on Herod for casting aside his daughter for his (Herod's) brother Philip's wife, Herodias (cf. [Mark 6:17, 18](#)). If this be true the Jews at Damascus may well have sided against Herod, and the governor under Aretas may have reciprocated by trying to seize Saul for them.

Whatever the reason, the governor of Damascus closed the city in order to ensure Saul's arrest, but the matter became known, and Saul, concealed in a basket, was let down by friends through a window by the city wall. Thus began a long series of perils and persecutions, some of which the apostle lists in II Cor. 11.

It is interesting, in this connection, to note what the apostle always glories in. It is never his rank or influence, much less his former place in the Hebrew nation, but always his position in Christ and His persecutions for Christ. He sees that in himself he is nothing but a poor sinner; that, were it not for the grace of God, he would still be among the blasphemers and persecutors of Christ; that his sufferings now are but the sufferings of Christ.

In II Cor. 12:1-5 he glories in the man "in Christ", the one "*caught up*" to the third heaven. But he also speaks in II Cor. 11:32,33 of the man "*let down*," a fugitive hiding in a basket at night to escape death,<sup>11</sup> and adds:

"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (II Cor. 12:10).

### THE RETURN TO JERUSALEM

"And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

"But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

"And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

"And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians; but they went about to slay him.

"Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

"Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."

--Acts 9:26-81.

As we have already seen, Saul returned to Jerusalem on this occasion "to see<sup>12</sup> Peter" (Gal. 1:18). This was natural. His life was not safe at Damascus and while it would be his deepest desire to return to Jerusalem, the former headquarters of his persecution, the peril to his life might be even greater among the Jews there. He would go, then, directly to Peter, the leader of the twelve and the appointed head of the Pentecostal Church, and relate his story to him.

But his attempts to unite himself with the disciples there were discouraged and repelled for "*They were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple*" (Ver. 26).

---

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps he mentions this case particularly because it was the first of his sufferings for Christ and representative of what he would have to face throughout his Christian life and testimony.

<sup>12</sup> Lit. *to have a meeting with*.

This too was natural, for it is not difficult to understand how the Jerusalem believers would shrink with suspicion and dread from one who had been so violent a persecutor; whose hands dripped, as it were, with the blood of their own relatives and friends.

But here Barnabas, "The Son of Consolation,"<sup>13</sup> comes to Saul's aid. It is suggested that these two may already have known each other since Barnabas hailed from Cyprus ([Acts 4:36](#)) and Saul from Tarsus, just across from Cyprus on the Asiatic coast. At any rate, Barnabas took Saul in hand (as the original has it) and brought him to the apostles, explaining how the Lord had appeared to him and how Saul had boldly preached in His name at Damascus.

As a result Peter evidently took Saul into his own home, for Paul later says of that visit: "[I] abode with him fifteen days" (Gal. 1:18). This gained him some admittance, for we read further that "he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem" (Acts 9:28).

## PETER AND JAMES

From the record in Acts alone it might be supposed that *all* the apostles were present in Jerusalem at that time. This is not so, for Paul himself testifies of this visit:

"Other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19).

Now it is not strange that the other apostles should have been away, perhaps preaching in other cities of Judaea, and that Peter should remain at headquarters in charge of the whole work, but it is most remarkable that this "other apostle" at Jerusalem should have been James, the Lord's brother after the flesh, for he was not one of the twelve at all, but an apostle in the secondary sense, as Barnabas later became.

Two apostles by the name of James appear in the list of the twelve: the son of Zebedee and the son of Alpheus ([Matt. 10:2-4](#)). It has been suggested that Alpheus may have been the second husband to Mary, the mother of Jesus, so that his son James would have been the Lord's half brother. But the records of the crucifixion refer three times to "Mary, the mother of James," in *addition* to Mary, the mother of Jesus and Mary, the wife of Zebedee. Since Zebedee's wife was the mother of one apostle James and this other Mary the mother of the other apostle James, it is clear that James, the Lord's brother, could not have been either of these, and therefore could not have been one of the twelve.

It should be noted further that there was a James in the Lord's family ([Matt. 13:55](#)) and that the Lord's brethren are mentioned *separately* from the twelve apostles listed in Acts 1:13,26 (See [Acts 1:14](#)).

---

<sup>13</sup> So named by the apostles themselves (Acts 4:36).

Here then, we have the other apostles absent from Jerusalem and only Peter present, with James, the Lord's brother, who is *not* one of the twelve.

It will be remembered that our Lord had appointed Peter as the chief of the twelve apostles ([Matt. 16:19](#); cf. [18:18](#)). Therefore, in early Acts it is always Peter who assumes the leadership, as the following passages indicate:

Acts 1:15 "... Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples..."

Acts 2:14: "... Peter standing up with the eleven ..."

Acts 2:37: "... Peter and ... the rest of the apostles..."

Acts 5:29: "... Peter and the other apostles..."

But after the raising up of Paul a change takes place. It seems that precedence in the Jerusalem Church passes from Peter to James, the Lord's brother after the flesh, who is not even one of the twelve.

Here, shortly after Saul's conversion, this James alone is at Jerusalem with Peter as one of "the apostles."

Later, when Peter was released from prison by an angel, he said to his friends: "*Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren*" (Acts 12:17). Why did he report particularly to this James?<sup>14</sup>

Again, it was this James, not Peter, who closed the great Jerusalem council with the words: "*Wherefore, my sentence is . . .*" (Acts 15:19). When and how had James been appointed the presiding officer over this council?

Again, it was "*James, Cephas and John,*" who gave to Paul and Barnabas "the right hands of fellowship," acknowledging Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles ([Gal. 2:9](#)). Notice that James is mentioned first here, and then notice that Paul calls these three, those "*who seemed to be pillars*" ([Gal. 2:9](#)).

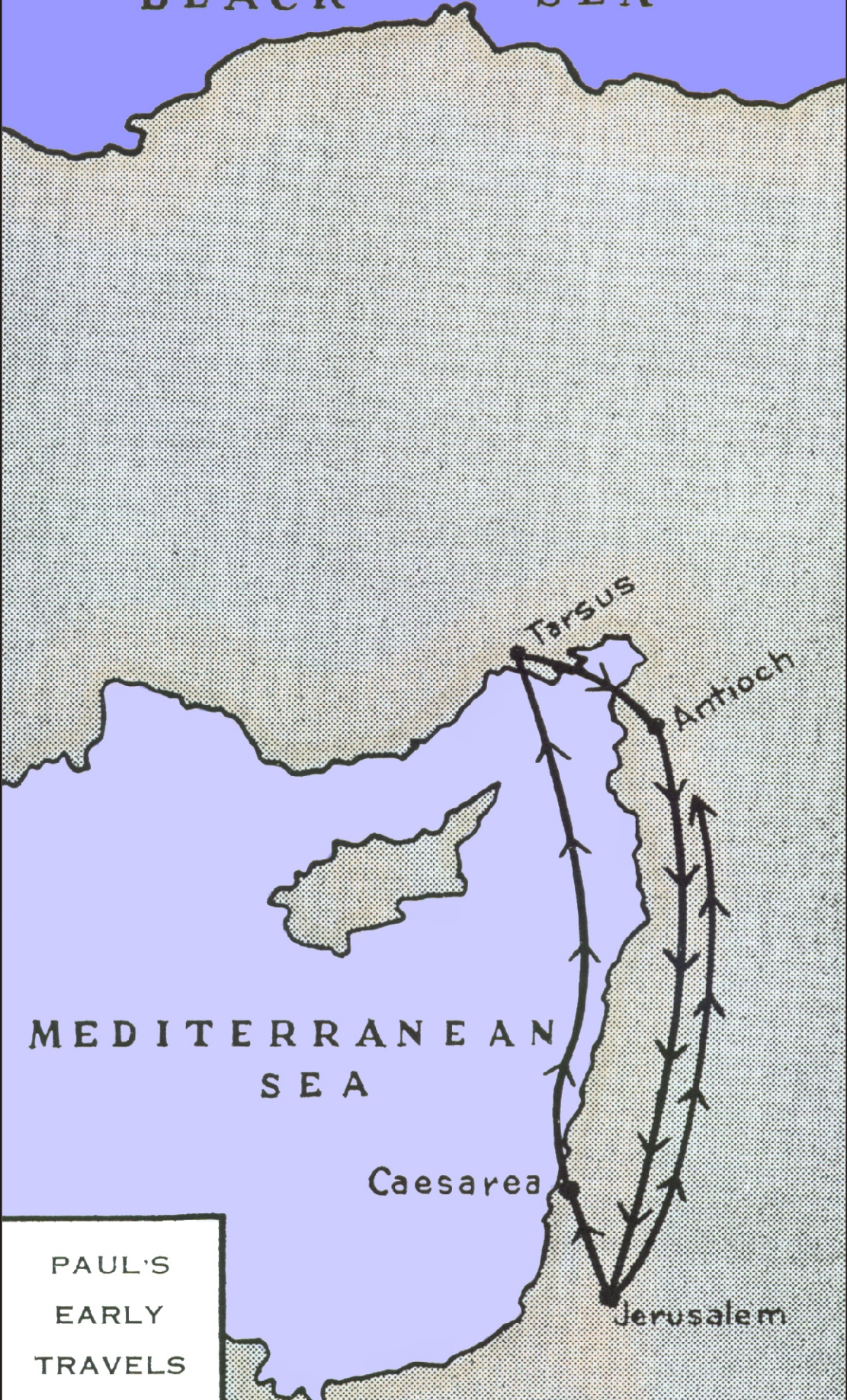
Later, at Antioch, Peter even allowed himself to be intimidated by "certain [who] came from James," fearing to eat with the Gentiles in their presence. For this he was publicly rebuked by Paul ([Gal. 2:11-14](#)).

Did James thus come to displace the Christ-appointed leader of the twelve and exert the greater influence simply because he was the Lord's brother after

---

<sup>14</sup> The James of the famous trio, Peter, James and John, had already been slain (Acts 12:2).

BLACK SEA



Tarsus

Antioch

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Caesarea

Jerusalem

PAUL'S  
EARLY  
TRAVELS

the flesh? If so, it would seem to indicate a spiritual decline in the Pentecostal Church. In the will of God, however, it indicated that the kingdom was not to be established for the present, for the Lord had promised that the *twelve apostles* would sit with Him in the kingdom and had made Peter their chief, giving to him the keys of the kingdom, while now James, who is not one of the twelve, had assumed the position of leadership.

But it is significant that already here in Acts 9, *both* Peter, the appointed leader of the twelve, and James, the Lord's brother, who was soon to take over the leadership, recognized Saul's conversion and commission. This too was of God's overruling.

### THE RETURN TO TARSUS

But in spite of this Saul's life was soon again in danger. Speaking boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, he aroused the enmity of the Grecians and they went about to slay him. The brethren, realizing the seriousness of the situation, then brought him to Caesarea and sent him back to Tarsus. Since Caesarea was a seaport, the implication is that they sent him by ship, which was the shortest route.

It was not their word alone, however, that induced him to leave Jerusalem, for the Lord had again appeared to him in the temple, saying:

"Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me" (Acts 22:18).

With a heart yearning for his people, whom he had led in persecution against Christ, Saul at first argued that surely they would listen to *him*, but the Lord knew better.

"And He said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles" (Acts 22:21).

The Lord had specifically instructed the twelve to begin their ministry at Jerusalem, but it was not so with Paul, for God had now concluded Israel, along with the Gentiles, in unbelief.

Thus Saul is sent home, apparently unwanted, and some considerable length of time must elapse before his friend, Barnabas, will come to Tarsus to look for him and introduce him to a fruitful ministry at Antioch.

Thus Saul remains "unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea" (Gal. 1:22). And now that he is gone the Church in Palestine enjoys rest and is multiplied; such anxiety has the very rumor of his presence in Jerusalem caused the believers.

## SAUL'S STAY AT TARSUS

Saul's sojourn at Tarsus at this time has been called a "period of retirement," but it is hard to believe that one of his temperament and experiences would exactly go into retirement.

At the time of his conversion he had no more than received his sight than "*straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues*" of Damascus (Acts 9:20) and, later, having barely escaped with his life to Jerusalem, an even more dangerous place, he "*spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus*" (Vet. 29). Indeed, his whole life as a believer was characterized by the most intense zeal to make Christ known.

In Gal. 1:21, referring to the same period of his life, he says: "*Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.*" It may well be, then, that Tarsus was merely his base of operations from which he preached Christ in Syria and Cilicia. In fact there appears to be considerable evidence that this was the case.

We read in Acts 15:23 of the communication sent by the Church at Jerusalem to "*the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia.*" Also, in Acts 15:41 we are told that after Paul's separation from Barnabas he "went through Syria and Cilicia confirming the churches."

Now how and when did it come about that there were Gentile believers in Syria and Cilicia? Who had founded churches there?

In answer to this question it should be observed first that neither Paul nor Jewish believers from Judaea could have led these Gentiles to Christ before the conversion of Cornelius for according to the testimonies of both Peter and James in Acts 15:7,14, Cornelius and those of his household were the *first* Gentiles to "hear the word of the gospel and believe."

There were men of Cilicia in Jerusalem during Stephen's ministry there ([Acts 6:9](#)) but these could not have brought Christ to Cilicia for they themselves had rejected Stephen's testimony and had helped to bring about his martyrdom.

Those scattered by "the persecution that arose about Stephen" could hardly have brought Christ to the Gentiles of this territory, for we are distinctly told that they "travelled as far as *Phoenice*, and Cyprus, and Antioch, *preaching the Word to none but unto the Jews only*. And some of them . . . when they were come to *Antioch*, spake unto the Grecians [or *Greeks*, R.V.] preaching the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:9,20). Thus these scattered believers reached as far as Antioch, but not further into Syria, much less Cilicia. Moreover Antioch is designated as the one city where they ventured to preach Christ to the Gentiles at that time.



It was the conversion of the Gentiles at Antioch, of course, that brought Saul there, and there he ministered for "a whole year" (Acts 11:26). We would not exclude the possibility that he evangelized Syria and Cilicia during that year, but again the record seems to confine his ministry to Antioch for that entire period, for it is written: "*a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people*" (Acts 11:26). Nor could Paul have founded these churches during his first apostolic journey, for his route is outlined for us in the record, and it did not take him further into Syria or into Cilicia.

It is true that Paul could have sent evangelists into Syria and Cilicia during the year he spent at Antioch, but in the absence of any statement to that effect it would seem more probable that these churches were founded by Paul during this so-called "period of retirement" in Tarsus. Indeed, the statement in Acts 15:41 that "*he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches,*" would seem to imply that these were churches which *he* had founded.<sup>15</sup>

### THE RECORD OF PETER'S MINISTRY RESUMED

As we have seen, the Apostle Peter is the central figure of the first eight chapters of Acts. Then, in chapter nine we have the conversion of Paul and his earliest Christian experiences. This is followed again by the story of Peter, but only briefly; (Acts 9:32--11:18) for in the eleventh chapter Paul again becomes the central figure and remains so until the close of the book.

It is commonly said that the story of Peter and his associates (Acts 1:1--11:18) is interrupted in chapter nine by the conversion of Paul. This is so, but it is equally true that the story of Paul and his associates (Acts 9:1--28:31) is interrupted by Peter's dealings with Aeneas, Dorcas and Cornelius. The ministries of the two men are interlinked thus:

Peter Central Figure	(Paul)	(Paul)	Paul Central Figure
1:1 – 8:40	9:1-31	9:32 – 11:18	11:19 – 28:31

It is important that we bear this fact in mind in our study of the book of Acts, for it is not merely in the chronological record that the ministries of these men are interlinked. The record was given to show a *dispensational* connection.

It is true that Paul's apostleship was entirely separate and distinct from that of the twelve. He was called, on the road to Damascus, "not of men, neither *by* man" (Gal. 1:1). Moreover he was called to a different ministry than they: "*to testify the gospel of the grace of God*"; to "preach among the Gentiles *the*

---

<sup>15</sup> We do not hold the view that Paul's Gentile ministry did not begin until Acts 13.

*unsearchable riches of Christ"* (Acts 20:24; Eph. 3:8). But it must not be supposed from this that there was no connection between their ministries.

To begin with, Paul represented the same God as the twelve, against whom Israel was now rebelling. He represented the same Christ, whom Israel was now rejecting. And *"the salvation of God,"* which Israel had refused, was now to be *"sent unto the Gentiles"* (Acts 28:28; cf. 13:46; 18:6).

Furthermore the apostles at Jerusalem soon recognized that because Israel was now refusing the risen, glorified Christ, God had chosen Paul to preach salvation to the Gentiles in spite of Israel, and in a solemn agreement their leaders gave to Paul and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, agreeing to continue their labors with Israel while Paul went to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:2,7,9).

Thus Paul's ministry was not merely another program which he had decided to start separately from the church at Jerusalem. It was *the next step in the program of God,* and unless we see the *progress, the development,* in the *whole program* we miss a great deal. This is why--as we shall see especially in the case of Cornelius--the two ministries are thus interlinked.

### **AENEAS HEALED**

"And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.

"And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.

"And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.

"And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord."

--Acts 9:32-35.

As we have seen, God began to do something *new* with the conversion of Saul. But He would teach us at the outset that this does not mean that the old program was immediately to disappear. Though the secret crisis in Israel had passed with the stoning of Stephen, God would not leave the nation any excuse for rejecting Christ. He would continue to work with His people. He would provoke them to jealousy by the conversion of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:11). He would continue to prove, through Paul as well as the other apostles, that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 9:22, 18:28). He would stretch out His hands all day long to a disobedient and gainsaying people (Rom. 10:21). The new program would only *gradually* displace the old. This is one reason why God now introduces Peter again, in the healing of Aeneas, the raising of Dorcas and the conversion of Cornelius.

The presence of saints at Lydda should not surprise us when we remember that Philip the evangelist had "preached in all the cities" from Azotus to Caesarea just previous to this ([Acts 8:40](#)). A glance at a map of Palestine will show that Lydda was on the main road between these two cities.

But while there were perhaps many saints in this city, Aeneas occupies the central place in the story and reminds us of Israel's condition and need. The name Aeneas is said to mean *praise*, but Aeneas was a paralytic, lying helpless in his bed. But now Peter says: "Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole," and immediately the man rises to his feet and many, through his miraculous restoration, turn to the Lord.

*Praise* should have been Israel's name, so to speak. It should have characterized her existence and experience ([Isa. 60:18](#); [62:7](#)). But here she lay prostrate, paralyzed by her unbelief and rejection of Christ. It was Jesus Christ she needed to make her whole, and it is He who will one day raise her up and, through her, turn many to Himself.

### **DORCAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD**

"Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.

"And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.

"And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

"Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

"But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

"And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

"And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.

"And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner."

--Acts 9:36-43,

In contrast to paralyzed Aeneas we are now introduced to Tabitha, or Dorcas. The name means *Antelope* or *Gazelle* and makes one think of alertness and activity; the very opposite of paralysis. Moreover we read that she was "full of good works and almsdeeds."

This woman, residing at Joppa, died while Peter was at Lydda and the disciples, learning of his presence there, sent for him to come without delay.

When Peter arrived, the widows whom Dorcas had helped, stood about him weeping and showing the coats and garments she had made for the needy. At this Peter, like the Lord in [Matt. 9:25](#) and like Elisha in [II Kings 4:33](#), had them leave the room, doubtless that the glory of her resurrection might be God's alone. Then, like Elijah in [I Kings 17:21](#) and like Elisha in [II Kings 4:33](#), Peter *prayed*<sup>16</sup> and turning to the body, said: "Tabitha, arise." And once more we read that through the incident "many believed in the Lord."

As the healing of Aeneas foreshadows the restoration of a sick Israel in the future, so the raising of Dorcas speaks of the future resurrection of those in Israel who will have died "full of good works." Together, the restoration of living Israel and the resurrection of Israel's saved dead will be the means of turning many to the Lord.

---

<sup>16</sup> We do not find the Lord kneeling in prayer at the working of any miracle. Even at the raising of Lazarus He addresses the Father for the sakes of those about Him.

## **Chapter XVII - Acts 10:1-29**

### **PETER SENT TO A GENTILE HOUSEHOLD**

#### **CORNELIUS' VISION**

"There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band;

"A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

"He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

"And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

"And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:

"He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

"And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually:

"And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa."

--Acts 10:1-8.

#### **A CONNECTING LINK**

The story of Cornelius, while filled with interest and refreshment to the student of Scripture, is nevertheless one of the most difficult in the book of Acts to fully understand. Many of its details seem paradoxical, to say the least. This is doubtless because it is the connecting link between the ministries of Peter and Paul.

#### **CORNELIUS' BACKGROUND AND CHARACTER**

Cornelius was a Roman. His name is Latin and we read that he was a centurion of the *Italian Band* (made up of conscripts or volunteers from Italy). He

may well have been a member of the great *Cornelia Gens* (House of Cornelia) one of the most distinguished houses of Rome, for Julian the Apostate names him as one of the few persons of distinction (among the Romans) to become a follower of Christ.

The first thing we read about Cornelius is that he was "*devout*" and "*feared God*" (Ver. 2). Nor is this meant in any superficial sense, for we are further informed that he "*gave much alms to the people and prayed to God alway,*" that he was "*a just man*" and "*of good report among all the nation of the Jews,*" and that he "*fasted*" in his desire to know the truth (Vers. 2,22,30.)

In the light of this it is not strange that "*all his house*" (*household*, doubtless including his servants) feared God with him. Indeed, we even read that a "*soldier . . . that waited on him continually*" was also "*devout*" (Vers. 2,7) and conclude, in the light of the foregoing, that this soldier either became God-fearing under Cornelius' influence or was chosen by Cornelius because he was God-fearing. In either case we have another evidence of the consistency of Cornelius' piety.

### **CORNELIUS' SPIRITUAL CONDITION**

Does this mean that Cornelius was already *saved*; that he had received *the remission of sins* and possessed *eternal life*? We believe not, for the following reasons:

1. It was in response to his prayers that he was instructed to send for Peter to show him the way of salvation (Vers. 4-6; 11:14).

2. The statement: "*He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do*" (Ver. 6)<sup>17</sup> is analogous to the "*What shall we do?*" of Acts 2:37 and the "*What must I do?*" of Acts 16:30. In each case the inquirers were told how to be saved.

3. Cornelius was promised: "*He [Peter] shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be SAVED*" (11:14).

4. Peter instructed Cornelius and his household as to the "*remission of sins*" (10:43).

5. When Peter had rehearsed the incident to his brethren at Jerusalem they exclaimed: "*Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life*" (11:18).

It is not true, as some have supposed, that Cornelius was a proselyte, at least in the Scriptural sense of the term. Much is written in commentaries about "*proselytes of righteousness*" and "*proselytes of the gate,*" and generally Cornelius is made to be one of the latter, but *Scripture* knows of only one kind of

---

<sup>17</sup> Though this phrase is not retained in all the texts.

proselyte--one who submitted to circumcision and the law ([Isa. 56:6,7](#), cf. [Acts 15:1](#)). Had Cornelius been a proselyte in the Scriptural sense there would have been nothing remarkable in Peter's ministering to him, for he had ministered to many proselytes at Pentecost ([Acts 2:10](#)).

So far as the Scriptures are concerned, then, Cornelius was not a proselyte. Peter calls him *"one of another nation"* (10:28). And not only Peter, but his six companions, the writer of Acts and "the apostles and brethren in Judaea" all considered him a *"Gentile"* (10:45; 11:1). He had been looked upon as *"unclean"* (10:28). The Jews had considered it "unlawful" to keep company with such (10:28). And when Peter did go to him he was called to account for keeping company and eating with *"men uncircumcised"* (11:3).

What, then, is meant by Peter's statement: *"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him"*? (10:34,35 ).

We believe it means that such were accepted in the sense that they were not "cut off" from God's favor because of their uncircumcision (See [Gen. 17:14](#)). Peter had thought of only the Jews as accepted and of the Gentiles as unclean, but God was now about to show that He was no respecter of persons. Cornelius was thus *"accepted"* in the same sense as all such Gentiles were now *"cleansed,"* i.e., no longer to be considered religiously unclean (10:15,28, cf. [Rom. 2:25,26](#)). This must be how Cornelius was "accepted," for never in *any* age has mere reverence for God, much less works or character alone imparted eternal life. Furthermore, the record makes it clear that he was *not* "saved" and did *not* have "life" or "the remission of sins" (Acts 10:43; 11:14,18). Hence he was not accepted in the same sense in which we are now "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6).

### **GOD'S RESPONSE TO CORNELIUS' NEED**

We do not deny that God had been working in Cornelius' heart, nor do we doubt that his many prayers indicate that he truly desired to know God. It is touching to hear him explain to Peter how he had spent considerable time in fasting (10:30) and to learn that in response to his earnest desire God had instructed him to send for Peter to tell him words whereby he and his house should be saved ([11:13,14](#)).

This instruction came through a vision in which he saw *"evidently [plainly] about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God"* (10:3) who assured him that his prayers and alms had not been overlooked<sup>18</sup> and that he should send for Peter to tell him what to do (10:4-6).

---

<sup>18</sup> This indicates that (1) while prayers and works in themselves cannot save, (2) yet when these express a true desire to know God, God will respond to that desire.

It is touching, too, to see how the angel had no more than left Cornelius, than Cornelius called two of his servants and a God-fearing soldier, told them what had happened, and sent them straightway to Joppa to enquire for Peter.

### **PETER'S VISION**

"On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour.

"And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,

"And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:

"Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

"And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

"But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

"And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

"This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven."

--Acts 10:9-16

### **PETER'S HUNGER**

As Cornelius' messengers drew near to Joppa, God prepared Peter for their coming in a remarkable way.

It was about noon when Peter went to the housetop to pray. Becoming very hungry, he would have eaten, but the meal being prepared for him was not yet ready. Thus it was that he fell into a trance and saw the vision of the sheet and received permission to eat the unclean meat contained in it.

As to the vision, we are not left in doubt about its meaning. The unclean creatures represented the Gentiles. The Jews, God's "peculiar treasure," had long considered the Gentiles "common" and "unclean." The Mosaic law had placed a "middle wall of partition" between them, and the only way a Gentile could find true acceptance among the people of Israel was by submitting to



circumcision and the Law as proselytes to Judaism ([Isa. 56:6,7](#)). But this was now to be changed and God-fearing Gentiles were to be received as *such*.

In the interpretation of Peter's housetop experience, however, one important detail is generally overlooked. It is Peter's *hunger*. This is as significant as the permission to "kill and eat."

Peter's hunger should remind us of a similar occasion when our Lord Himself hungered as He entered Jerusalem.<sup>19</sup> On that occasion He saw a fig tree with nothing but leaves on its branches and cursed the tree so that it withered away ([Matt. 21:18-20](#)).

The whole story, of course, is symbolic. The fig tree is a familiar symbol of national Israel and, like John before Him, the Lord had toiled and hungered for *fruit* among the favored people ([Matt. 3:8](#); [Luke 8:14,15](#); etc.). The cursing of the barren fig tree spoke of the curse which was to fall upon Israel because of her refusal to repent and turn to Christ.

This heart-hunger for fruit in Israel is further emphasized in Luke 13, where the Lord uses the fig tree in one of His parables (Vers. 6-9). Here fruit is sought in vain for three years (evidently representing the three years of our Lord's earthly ministry). In this parable, however, we find that the cursing and cutting down of the fig tree was not to take place immediately, for through the intercession of "the dresser" of the vineyard the tree was to be let alone "this year also" and then, if still it bore no fruit, it was to be cut down. Clearly this indicates that the judgment upon Israel was to be delayed, and mercy extended.

And so it was. The judgment was postponed; mercy was prolonged through our Lord's intercession on the cross ([Luke 23:34](#)). Thus Israel was given another chance to bear fruit as Peter and the Pentecostal believers sought to bring their nation to Messiah's feet.

And now Peter, on Joppa's housetop, is hungry too--"very hungry"--and his physical hunger, like the Lord's, is symbolic. We must not overlook the fact that Peter had gone to the housetop to *pray*. His physical hunger was but symbolic of a deep heart-hunger.

The Scriptures clearly indicate that Peter longed for Israel's repentance and restoration so that she might become the channel of blessing to the world. He was eager that the "great commission" might get under way so that the good news of the kingdom might be sent to all nations. He was hungering that the Gentiles too might hear the gospel. This is clear from his own declaration to Israel, recorded in Acts 3:25,26:

---

<sup>19</sup> See the writer's booklet entitled: *Two Hungry People*.

"Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, AND IN THY SEED SHALL ALL THE KINDREDS OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED.

"Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

It is sometimes supposed that the apostles were prejudiced against the salvation of the Gentiles, but the above passage indicates that the opposite was the case. Indeed, in Acts 11:18; 11:23 and 15:3 we find that there was genuine rejoicing among the Jewish believers when Gentiles were saved.

It would seem quite natural that Peter, being "very hungry," would see these forbidden foods in his vision and would hear the voice instructing him to freely partake, but both his hunger and the permission to eat are symbolic of *spiritual* things. Peter's *prayer* was being answered and the Gentiles were now to be received by God in spite of Israel's refusal to be a blessing to them.

### **VOICES FROM HEAVEN**

As Peter's hunger at Joppa is related to our Lord's hunger upon entering Jerusalem, so Peter's trance bears a close relation to a similar experience in the life of Paul when he first returned to Jerusalem after his conversion. This experience is related in his own words in Acts 22:17-21:

"And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even WHILE I PRAYED in the temple, I WAS IN A TRANCE;

"And saw Him saying unto me, MAKE HASTE, AND GET THEE QUICKLY OUT OF JERUSALEM: FOR THEY WILL NOT RECEIVE THY TESTIMONY CONCERNING ME.

"And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee:

"And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

"And He said unto me, DEPART: FOR I WILL SEND THEE FAR HENCE UNTO THE GENTILES,"

Both Peter and Paul, on these occasions heard the voice of the Lord, both while in trances and both praying at the time. Paul's experience concerned God's purpose to turn from the Jews; Peter's concerned God's purpose to go to the Gentiles. Both talked back to God. In each case, however, the Lord insisted on carrying His purpose through.

## A CHANGE IN PROGRAM

We have brought our Lord's hunger and Paul's trance in here, because they have such an important bearing on Peter's experience, and emphasize so clearly the nature of the step now being taken in the unfolding of the purposes of God.

We are quite aware of the fact that Peter did not proclaim the mystery to these Gentiles. He did not even know about God's unprophesied purpose and grace. We are explicitly told that he did not understand why God was now sending him to the Gentiles and that the best explanation he could give to his critics was: "*What was I, that I could withstand God?*" (Acts 10:20; 11:17).

Nevertheless, Peter's commission here was a *departure* from the prophetic order (Acts 3:25,26) and from the order of the so-called "great commission" (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8) and was one of the first steps in the unfolding of God's plan to bless the nations in spite of Israel's rejection of Christ.

Here we would remind the reader of what we have said about Cornelius' conversion being part of the connecting link between Peter's ministry and Paul's. While fully recognizing that Peter did not preach the mystery to Cornelius and his household and did not even know about it, we should nevertheless take careful note of the following:

1. This incident took place *after the conversion of Saul*, which was the *supreme demonstration* of the longsuffering and grace of God, and the *pattern* for those who should thereafter believe on Christ to life everlasting (I Tim. 1:13-16).

2. In the case of Cornelius we read for the first time that God had put "no difference" between Jew and Gentile (Acts 15:9).

3. Peter did *not* go to Cornelius under the so-called "great commission," but in obedience to a *special commission*.

4. God did not send Peter to Cornelius because Israel had now *accepted* Messiah and the apostles might now go on with their commission. He sent Peter because Israel had continued to *reject* Messiah and God was now to send salvation to the Gentiles in spite of them.

5. This could not have been the next, step in the carrying out of the "great commission," for the apostles had not yet finished their work at Jerusalem (Read carefully Zech. 8:13; Luke 24:47 and cf. Acts 1:8).

6. There is no record in Scripture of any of the circumcision apostles ever going to Gentiles again. Indeed, later they promised to confine their ministry to Israel and acknowledged Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles (Gal. 2:2,7,9).

7. The Lord's declaration that He would send Saul "far hence unto the Gentiles" is followed by this special commission to Peter, in order to open the way for Paul's ministry among the Gentiles. Since Peter himself had, under God, recognized the salvation of uncircumcised Gentiles, the Hebrew believers at Jerusalem could take no legitimate exception to Paul's Gentile ministry.

8. It was on the basis of Peter's experience that Paul's ministry among the Gentiles was later officially recognized ([Acts 15:7-27](#); [Gal. 2:1-9](#)).

All this indicates that Peter's ministry to Cornelius and his household was a distinct departure from the prophetic program and fits in naturally after Paul's conversion and before his great ministry among the Gentiles was called in question.

### **PETER AND THE MESSENGERS FROM CORNELIUS**

"Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,

"And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

"While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.

"Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.

"Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: What is the cause wherefore ye are come?

"And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.

"Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him."

--Acts 10:17-23.

Little wonder Peter was perplexed over his vision from heaven. He had been taught from his youth to observe the prohibition against unclean meat:

"Ye shall therefore put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean: and ye shall not make your souls abominable by beast, or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that creepeth on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean" (Lev. 20:25).

Peter could not take such a command lightly. It was the law of God by Moses, and to disregard it was a serious matter. When the Lord was with the apostles on earth, He Himself had scrupulously obeyed the law and had taught His disciples to obey it. He had even called upon His followers to "observe and do" all that the scribes and Pharisees commanded, simply because they occupied Moses' seat of authority (Matt. 23:1-3). And this was carried over even into the "great commission" for there, after His resurrection, the Lord commanded the apostles to make disciples of all nations,

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you . . ." (Matt. 28:20).

From the record of Acts it is further clear that the followers of Christ, contrary to prevailing notions, had been careful *not* to start a sect separate from Judaism and had faithfully observed the law. These were the true Israelites, who accepted Christ as their Messiah, and there had as yet been no revelation to the effect that the Law had been done away, nor do we find any such revelation until it is given through Paul.

It naturally perplexed Peter, therefore, to be instructed by God to partake of unclean meat. And what perplexed him most was that so evidently the vision signified *more* than the mere permission to partake of unclean meat, for this alone would have been a nullification of only one detail of Moses' law.

While Peter considered the matter, two things happened simultaneously to interpret the vision for him. Down at the gate, three men stood inquiring for Peter, while up on the housetop, the Spirit informed him of the fact and bade him go with them doubting nothing, since He, the Spirit (as well as Cornelius) had sent them.

Now Peter, perplexed as he was, could not go wrong if only he followed the divine leading step by step. God was directly taking charge. *He* had prepared both Cornelius and Peter by giving them special visions. *He* had sent these messengers and *He* now instructs Peter to go with them.

Peter's action in inviting these Gentiles in and lodging them was not contrary to the Law, for God had exhorted the people of Israel to be kind to Gentiles who came *among them*.

"But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:34).

But on the morrow Peter was to go with these men to a Gentile house and eat *with them*. That was different. It was well for Peter that he took six Jewish brethren with him as witnesses of what was to take place ([Acts 10:23,45; 11:12](#)).

And so, on the morrow, a company of ten departed for Caesarea: seven Jews (Peter and his six brethren) and three Gentiles (two of Cornelius' servants and one of his soldiers). Perhaps Peter already sensed that they were to have part in a pivotal event in the history of God's dealings with mankind.

### **PETER AT CORNELIUS' HOME**

"And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

"And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.

"But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

"And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.

"And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

"Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?"

--Acts 10:24-29.

As Peter and his friends entered Caesarea Cornelius was waiting for them, having called together his relatives and closest friends. Probably he went to the gate, or outer entrance, to meet Peter, for we read that he met Peter as he was "coming in," yet we are also told that Peter *then* went in with Cornelius and found that a considerable company had gathered.

Cornelius, falling down before Peter and worshipping him, revealed his lack of knowledge of the true God and His commandments ([Ex. 20:1-3](#)) but Peter immediately lifted him up, declining to accept his worship, protesting that he himself was also but a man. Those who deny the deity of Christ should take note that by contrast many fell down and worshipped our Lord during His earthly

ministry, yet He freely accepted their worship ([Matt. 8:2](#); [9:18](#); [14:33](#); [15:25](#); [18:26](#); [28:9](#); [28:17](#); etc.).

It is a significant testimony to the depth of Cornelius' sincerity, and to the respect and affection in which he was held by his loved ones, that "many" had gathered to hear the words whereby he and all his house were to be saved (Acts 11:14). It must have touched the heart of Peter, too, to see so many Gentiles gathered together to hear the Word of God.

Before even inquiring why Cornelius had sent for him, Peter reminded his hearers that it was "an unlawful thing" for a Jew to keep company, or to come unto one of another nation, but explained how God had showed him that he should no longer call any man common or unclean.

In exactly what sense this had been "unlawful" we shall now seek to determine.

We know that the Samaritan woman was surprised that our Lord, a Jew by birth, would even *speak* to her ([John 4:9](#)). We know too that the Jews refrained from entering Pilate's judgment hall, lest they should defile themselves just before the Passover ([John 18:28](#)). We know further that the other apostles called Peter to account for going in to "men uncircumcised" and eating with them (Acts 11:3). Yet we know of no command in Moses' law prohibiting the Jews from keeping *company* or *coming* to one of another nation.

The Israelites were, indeed, denied the "unclean" meats of which Gentiles freely partook ([Lev. 20:25](#)). They were also forbidden to make covenants with the Gentiles or to intermarry with them ([Deut. 7:2,3](#); [Ezra 9:2](#)) and thus a distinct separation was maintained between them, but we know of no explicit injunction prohibiting any association at all with those of other nations, nor even of doing business with them. Indeed, as we have already seen, the Israelites were specifically instructed to deal kindly with Gentiles who had come *among them* and to treat them as those born in their midst ([Lev. 19:33,34](#)). Certainly Cornelius, a God-fearing man, and living, as he did, in Palestine, was entitled to this sort of treatment as far as Moses' law was concerned.

In what sense, then, had it been "unlawful" for Peter to even *visit* Gentiles, and why did his fellow apostles call him to account for so doing? Shall we say that Jewish tradition had caused them all to become prejudiced against the Gentiles, even to the point of keeping salvation from them? If we do, we forget Peter's hunger and prayer on Joppa's housetop, and how God responded by a vision *giving him permission to partake of unclean meat*. We have already seen from Acts 3:19-26 that Peter longed that salvation should go to the Gentiles and that there was genuine rejoicing among the Jewish believers when Gentiles were saved (Acts 11:18,23; 15:3).

We believe the key to this problem is to be found in our Lord's first commission to His twelve apostles ([Matt. 10:1-7](#)). Here the apostles were specifically instructed:

"GO NOT INTO THE WAY OF THE GENTILES, AND INTO ANY CITY OF THE SAMARITANS ENTER YE NOT" ([Matt. 10:5](#)).

While our Lord had as yet *sent forth* only these twelve, this rule would, of course, apply to any Jew, even though those who were indifferent or antagonistic to His claims would not recognize it.

As we know, our Lord Himself also kept aloof - from the Gentiles during His earthly ministry. He did help one Gentile man and one Gentile woman, but *they* came to *Him* for help, and at least in the latter case He made it very clear that He had not been sent "but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" ([Matt. 15:24](#)).

We know that our Lord did not follow this course because of lack of love or pity for the Gentiles, but because He recognized the divine plan of covenant and prophecy to send salvation to the Gentiles *through redeemed Israel* ([Gen. 22:17,18](#); [Zech. 8:13,23](#); etc.). So far as the *revealed* program of God was concerned, Israel must first be saved before salvation could be sent to the Gentiles. Thus our Lord said to the Gentile woman referred to above: "*Let the children first be filled*" ([Mark 7:27](#)).

Our Lord did not change all this after His resurrection, for under the so-called "great commission" the apostles were explicitly instructed to begin their ministry with Israel ([Luke 24:47](#); [Acts 1:8](#)). This was with the assumption, of course, that Israel would now receive Christ, and that salvation could then also be sent to the Gentiles. Surely Peter makes it clear in [Acts 3:25,26](#), that Israel must *first* be saved, so that salvation might flow *through* her to the Gentiles.

In view of this, it is natural that Peter had considered it "unlawful" to go to the Gentiles, for Israel had certainly not yet been saved. Indeed Israel had declared war on Christ ([Acts 8:1-3](#)).

But now the prophetic program was to be interrupted by the dispensation of the grace of God. God, in infinite grace, had already reached down to save Saul, the leader of the rebellion, with a view to sending him to the Gentiles, Israel's obstinacy notwithstanding. To pave the way for this and to ensure the recognition of Paul's subsequent ministry by the twelve, God had now sent *Peter* to the Gentiles, even though Israel remained unrepentant.

Peter, then, had been in perfect harmony with the will of His Master, and was in perfect harmony with it still as he now went to the Gentiles. Note carefully the exact wording of his statement in [Acts 10:28](#):



"... it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; BUT God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."

From the conversion of Saul to the end of Acts we find several such significant "buts."

*How did God show Peter that he should go to these Gentiles even though his labors with Israel had not been successful? Was it by opening his eyes to Old Testament truth? Was it by the so-called "great commission"? No, it was by a special vision.*

Let us not confuse this, however, with the revelation of the mystery to Paul. Peter was not told that there would be any change in the *program*. He was not instructed to *continue* going to Gentiles. He was simply instructed to go to this one household and, so far as Scripture is concerned, we have no record of his ever ministering to Gentiles again. In fact we find him shaking hands with Paul, solemnly agreeing to confine his own ministry to the circumcision, while Paul goes to the Gentiles.

It is evident from the record, that Peter did not understand what God was doing. He was simply commanded to go "doubting nothing" (Acts 10:20) and when he ministered to Cornelius and his household, God took the matter out of his hands, so that "they of the circumcision were astonished" as the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44,45). In defending his action before the other apostles Peter could say only: "*What was I that I could withstand God?*" (Acts 11:17).

Peter, then, did not receive the revelation of the new dispensation to be ushered in, any more than he used "the keys of the kingdom" on this occasion, but he did receive a vision and instructions to go to this one Gentile household, and it was on the basis of this incident that the Church at Jerusalem later recognized Paul's ministry among the Gentiles. How could they object, since their own Christ-appointed leader had himself been sent to a company of Gentiles apart from the conversion of Israel?

## ***Chapter XVIII - Acts 10:30-11:18***

### **THE CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS AND HIS HOUSEHOLD**

#### **CORNELIUS TELLS HIS STORY**

"And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,

"And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

"Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.

"Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

'Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

"But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him."

--Acts 10:30-35.

Cornelius now relates to Peter and his companions the circumstances and details of his vision.

Four days previous he had fasted until "this hour," i.e., the same hour of the day as that in which he was then speaking; not "this hour" of the fourth day, as some have supposed. "This hour" was apparently "the ninth hour" for it was then that the angel had appeared to him (Ver. 30).. Now, the ninth hour, or three o'clock in the afternoon, was Israel's evening "hour of prayer" (Acts 3:1) and it is significant that this was when the angel appeared, informing him that his prayer was heard and that his alms had been remembered in the sight of God.

We have already proved by the Scriptures that at this time Cornelius was not yet "saved" (11:14) that he had not yet received the "remission of sins" (10:43) or eternal "life" (11:18) but his prayers and works indicated a desire to know the true God, and God now revealed to him, at Israel's time of prayer, that He was about to respond to that desire.

The deep sincerity of Cornelius' desire to know God and do His will is expressed in his words:

"Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

### **GOD NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS**

And now Peter makes a significant statement:

"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons" (Ver. 34).

Mark well, this is the same person who, a few years ago, had been instructed: "Go *not* into the way of the Gentiles" (Matt. 10:5); who had heard his Master say: "*I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" (Matt. 15:24) and "*Let the children first be filled*" (Mark 7:27). This is the one who had later been sent with the other apostles to preach repentance and remission of sins to all nations "*beginning at Jerusalem*" (Luke 24:47) who himself had cried to the house of Israel: "*Ye are the children... of the covenant.. . UNTO YOU FIRST...*" etc. (Acts 3:25,26). But now he says: "*God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean*" (Acts 10:28) and "*Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons*" (Ver. 34). Peter did not know that a new *program* was to be ushered in. He did not know that God was concluding all in unbelief that He might have mercy upon all. He did not proclaim the gospel of the grace of God to Cornelius and his household. But he *did* know that God, according to His own sovereign will, had instructed him to go to these Gentiles, "nothing doubting" and had learned therefrom that God was indeed no respecter of persons.

Is it not significant that this should take place just after the conversion of Saul, for it was Saul who was now to be sent forth as the apostle of grace to all the world, and there must be some recognition of this by those apostles who *had* been sent to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom to all the world beginning with Israel.

It is in the epistles of Paul that we learn why God, who is "no respecter of persons," ever put a difference between Jews and Gentiles. He *made* a difference between them simply to show that there *is* no difference. He made a *dispensational* difference to show that there is no *essential* difference. He erected a "middle wall of partition" between them to demonstrate that that wall must be broken down; that the one is no better than the other.

But let us go on with Peter's statement.

"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons;

"BUT IN EVERY NATION HE THAT FEARETH HIM, AND WORKETH RIGHTEOUSNESS, IS ACCEPTED WITH HIM" (Acts 10:34,35).

We have seen that this passage cannot mean that Cornelius was already saved. These words must be viewed in the light of Ver. 28 and the rest of the context. Cornelius was accepted simply in the sense that he was no longer to be considered "*unclean*." The answer to his prayer at Israel's hour of prayer, indicated that God now accepted him in the same sense that He did His covenant people Israel. This did not indicate that he was saved any more than it indicated that all Israelites were saved for, remember, even circumcision itself did not save.

The case of Cornelius should be considered in the light of two important passages from Paul's writings:

"... He that cometh to God MUST BELIEVE THAT HE IS, AND THAT HE IS A REWARDER OF THEM THAT DILIGENTLY SEEK HIM" (Heb. 11:6).

"For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.

"THEREFORE IF THE UNCIRCUMCISION KEEP THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LAW, SHALL NOT HIS UNCIRCUMCISION BE COUNTED FOR CIRCUMCISION?" (Rom. 2:25,26).

Cornelius sincerely *believed* that Israel's God was the true God.<sup>20</sup> He diligently *sought Him*, as his prayers and piety and works indicated. Hence God responded to his desire and revealed Himself to him.

Cornelius' works did not take the place of Christ, but of Moses (10:35,36). Suppose Cornelius, after hearing about Christ, had chosen to rest in his own works. He would, of course, have been lost, for obedience to the moral law in itself has always been as impotent to save as circumcision and the sacrifices. Witness the cases of Nicodemus, the rich young ruler and Saul of Tarsus.

Thus Cornelius was accepted, not *as saved*, but *for salvation* (11:14). And now Peter begins to tell him those words whereby he and all his house are to be saved.

### **PETER'S INTERRUPTED SERMON**

"The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all:)

---

<sup>20</sup> Though this did not save him (Jas. 2:19). It was merely a *prerequisite to salvation* (Heb. 11:6).

"That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him.

"And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

"Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly;

"Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead.

"And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

"To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins.

"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the Word.

"And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

"For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

"And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days."

--Acts 10:36-48.

The link between prophecy and the mystery is clearly seen in Peter's sermon and God's interruption of it at the home of Cornelius.

That Peter did not know God's long-hidden plan concerning the ascended, glorified Christ is certain. Even Paul had only *begun* to learn about it, for it was *gradually* made known to him from the time of his conversion on ([Acts 22:14; 26:16; II Cor. 12:1,7](#)). Peter's message to this gathering of Gentiles was strictly in

accord with the prophetic Word and with the great commission which the Lord had given him to carry out.

He began with *"the word which God sent unto the children of Israel... after the baptism which John preached"* (Ver. 36,37).

Peter here stressed a fact which is too often overlooked: that John actually *preached baptism* (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3) and that he did this in connection with the manifestation of Christ to Israel (Cf. John 1:31). Then he continued with the story of the Lord's earthly ministry *"in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem"* (Ver. 38,39) and finally related how they slew Him and hanged Him on a tree, but how God raised Him from the dead again, and how He had commanded the eleven to proclaim Him as God's ordained Judge of quick and dead (Ver. 39-42).

All this, of course, is strictly in line with prophecy and forms a striking contrast to Paul's gospel of the grace of God, for whereas Peter began with Christ's earthly ministry and proceeded to His death, resurrection and appointment as Judge, the Apostle Paul later began with the death and resurrection of Christ as *glad news for salvation* and proceeded to His glory at God's right hand as the Dispenser of grace and Head of the Body. Indeed, Peter, relating the fact of our Lord's death, did not even offer it as the means of salvation, as Paul later did in *"the preaching of the cross."*

Even according to prophecy and the "great commission," however, salvation was to be through faith in the person of Christ.<sup>21</sup> Hence Peter went on to say:

"TO HIM GIVE ALL THE PROPHETS WITNESS, THAT THROUGH HIS NAME WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM SHALL RECEIVE REMISSION OF SINS" (Ver. 43).

Now this statement, while in perfect harmony with the prophetic program, coincides at the same time with the mystery kept secret until revealed through Paul, for in *both* faith in the person of Christ was basic.

And here God interrupted Peter.

"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the Word" (Ver. 44).

Most Bible teachers have taught that Peter used the "keys of the kingdom," first with Israel, at Pentecost, and then with the Gentiles at the home of Cornelius. This is not confirmed by the Scriptures, however, nor can it be. Peter did not open the door to these Gentiles. God took the matter out of his hands,

---

<sup>21</sup> Though the true believer at that time would "repent and be baptized for the remission of sins" according to the divine instructions (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).

interrupting his sermon and opening the door Himself, while "they of the circumcision" looked on in astonishment.

It is a fair question to ask how Peter would have concluded his sermon had he not been interrupted, for the Scripture sheds clear light on this question.

Suppose Peter had continued with his sermon and his hearers, like those at Pentecost, had been convicted and had asked: "*What shall we do?*" What would Peter have replied? There can be but one answer. He had not, like Paul, been sent to preach faith in Christ *without works*, for salvation. Those who believed under his ministry, even among the Gentiles, were to be "*baptized for the remission of sins*" (Cf. [Acts 2:38](#) with [Mark 16:15,16](#)). But before Peter had come to this, and just after he had stated the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation, God interrupted his sermon and took the matter out of his hands. Hence Peter later defended himself before the other apostles, saying: "*What was I, that I could withstand God?*" (Acts 11:17).

While, as we say, Peter did not know the secret purpose which God had in mind, we do find here further distinct departures from the program of prophecy and the "great commission" coming, significantly, after the conversion of Saul.

We have already pointed out that Peter was sent to these Gentiles, not under the "great commission," but by a *special* commission, not because Israel had now accepted Messiah, but in spite of the fact that Israel went on stubbornly rejecting Him. And now Cornelius and his household are saved and receive the Spirit; again, *not* because Israel had first been saved; *not* as the next step in the program of prophecy and the "great commission," but by divine intervention, by divine *grace*. These Gentiles were saved and received the Spirit without having first been baptized--another distinct departure from the "great commission"--but God Himself had done it, and for His own good reasons, later to be revealed through the Apostle Paul.

Those of the circumcision were astonished, of course, that these Gentiles had received the gift of the Holy Spirit, but the more so because this had taken place without their first having been baptized. This was certainly a departure from what Peter had preached at Pentecost (Acts 2:38). Hence Peter's response:

"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" (Ver. 47).

Here is still another departure from the program of the "great commission" which should be carefully noted. Gentiles, from here on and for some time to come, under Paul's ministry, were to be baptized, since God had not yet fully and officially set Israel and the kingdom program aside, but water baptism was never to be required of Gentiles for salvation, as it was to have been under the "great commission." Nor were they to receive the Holy Spirit only after being baptized

as outlined in the "great commission" ([Mark 16:16-18](#); [Acts 2:38](#)). Thus Paul could challenge those saved under his ministry:

"Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Gal. 3:2).

As far as the Scriptures are concerned, the twelve did not again minister to Gentiles. Thus the ministry of Peter, the chief of the twelve, to this one Gentile household, coming as it did, after the stoning of Stephen and the conversion of Saul, was designed by God to cause Peter and the church at Jerusalem to give public recognition and endorsement to Paul's subsequent ministry among the Gentiles when the issue was later brought up (See [Acts 15:7-11, 22-29](#)).

### **PETER CALLED TO ACCOUNT**

"And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the Word of God.

"And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,

"Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

"But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,

"I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came! even to me:

"Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

"And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.

"But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.

"But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

"And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.

"And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me.



"And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house:

"And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;

"Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

"And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

"Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

"Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

"When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

--Acts 11:1-18.

### **THEY OF THE CIRCUMCISION CONTEND WITH PETER**

Some, who have found it difficult to understand how Peter could have been sent to bring salvation to a *Gentile* household before *Israel's conversion*, have concluded that Cornelius and those gathered with him must have been "proselytes of the gate," and have cited ancient writers to show that the Jews did recognize such a class of men. But while the ancient Hebrews may indeed have placed such as Cornelius in this category of second degree proselytes, those who look to the Scriptures alone to settle the matter will see at a glance that in God's sight no uncircumcised male was considered a proselyte of any kind, but rather an alien from the commonwealth of Israel.

Certainly the believing Jews at Jerusalem did not consider Cornelius and his household proselytes, for when they heard that the "*Gentiles*" had received the Word of God, they "*contended*" with Peter, saying: "*Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.*"

Little wonder that "they of the circumcision" contended with Peter about this matter, even though he was the chief of the apostles, for "they of the circumcision" who had accompanied Peter on his mission had themselves been astonished at what had taken place (Acts 10:45) and Peter himself no less so.

Here we must remind our readers that it had been "an unlawful thing" for Jewish believers to enjoy full fellowship with Gentiles under the then present circumstances. Had all Israel been saved and become "a *kingdom* of priests and an holy *nation*," the gospel of the kingdom would then have been legitimately sent to Gentiles *as such*. We have ample assurance that the apostles understood this, for our Lord had showed that He labored in harmony with the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 22:17,18) when He said: "*Let the children first be FILLED*" (Mark 7:27 cf. [Matt. 10:5,6](#); [15:24](#)) and when He sent the apostles to all nations "*beginning at Jerusalem*" (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). Indeed, Peter had but recently cited the Abrahamic covenant to the house of Israel, declaring that God had raised His Son Jesus from the dead to turn *them first* from their iniquities (Acts 3:25,26).

Those who hold that the believers at Jerusalem contended with Peter because they were prejudiced against the Gentiles may well ask: If these Jewish believers were *not* prejudiced against the Gentiles, why did they not follow up the evangelization of the Gentiles? The answer is: because they had no orders rescinding their "great commission," nor any revelation as to the ushering in of a new program. Peter's mission to Cornelius was a unique case designed by God for a purpose then still unrevealed.

A passage from J. N. Darby's *Bible Synopsis* may be helpful here:

"Now the mystery had been hidden in all former times; and in fact it needed so to be; for to have put the Gentiles on the same footing as the Jews would have been to demolish Judaism, such as God had himself established it. In it He had carefully raised a middle wall of partition. The duty of the Jew was to respect this separation; he sinned if he did not strictly observe it. The mystery set it aside. The Old Testament prophets, and Moses himself, had indeed shown that the Gentiles should one day rejoice with the people: but the people remained a separate people. That they should be co-heirs, and of the same body, all distinction being lost, had indeed been entirely hid in God ..." (*Acts to Phil.*, Pp. 431,432).

The objection of the circumcision saints at Jerusalem, then, was simply that Peter had departed from the revealed order and program of God, for he, like they, had been sent to carry out a program consistent with the Abrahamic covenant and with prophecy.

### **PETER'S DEFENSE BEFORE HIS BRETHREN**

It must be further noted that Peter, in his defense before his brethren, did not indicate that he had received any revelation as to a new program to be ushered in. Indeed, his explanation indicates that he did not even yet fully understand what God was doing. He merely "*rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them*"; that is, he related the simple and unvarnished

facts, explaining how he himself had said: "Not so, Lord," but how the Lord Himself had ordered this departure from the revealed program, had commanded him to accompany the Gentile messengers "nothing doubting,"<sup>22</sup> and had interrupted his message as he *began* to speak. "Moreover," he added: "these six brethren accompanied me." These six Jewish brethren had entered with him into the Gentile house and had been as astonished as he at what God had done there. Thus Peter sums up his defense by saying, simply: "What was I, that I could withstand God?"

Nor did Peter's critics conclude, as some suppose, that a new program of world evangelization was now to be launched, for had they concluded this, we should have to charge them with gross disobedience for not immediately beginning to carry it out. But neither Peter nor they had received any revelation as to a new program. Peter alone had been sent to one Gentile household and he and his brethren now rejoiced together that God had now apparently granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life.

All this emphasizes again the fact that this special incident was meant by God to ensure recognition of Paul's subsequent ministry among the Gentiles by the church at Jerusalem, and we shall see how this proved to be the case when we consider the record of the great council at Jerusalem in Acts 15.

The reason why God did not instruct the circumcision apostles to continue ministering to Gentiles was evidently because, while Paul was soon to begin working among the Gentiles, God was not yet to close His dealings with Israel. The circumcision apostles were to go on laboring with the favored nation for some time, so that God could say, as He finally set her aside:

"All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Rom. 10:21).

Surely Verse 18 of the passage we are considering proves that the apostles and brethren at Jerusalem were not prejudiced against Gentile salvation, for when Peter had related his experience to them, they not only "held their peace" but also "glorified God" for granting salvation to the Gentiles.

### **THE BAPTISM OF THE GENTILES WITH THE SPIRIT**

One item in Peter's testimony deserves special attention. It is that which concerns the baptism of these Gentiles with, or in, the Holy Spirit.

---

<sup>22</sup> Because the Greek word *diakrino* often means to *try* or *judge*, the *Revised Version* renders *diakrino* as: "making no distinction" (i.e., between himself and these Gentiles). *Diakrino* however may also mean to *doubt*, *waver*, *hesitate*, *vacillate*, and this seems to be the thought here. At least it is so in James 1:6, where *the Revised Version* renders the same word *diakrino* as: "nothing doubting."

It is supposed by some that their speaking in tongues (10:46) proves that their conversion was strictly a kingdom matter and not connected in any way with the present dispensation or the Body of Christ.

In support of this view Peter's words are cited: "Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

"Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?" (11:16,17).

But the Corinthians, who were converted under *Paul's* ministry and were *called* members of the Body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12,13,27) were *also* given "the like gift" and freely spoke with tongues. Here were members of the Body, then, speaking with tongues.

What we must remember here is that this gift of miraculous power by the baptism with the Spirit was the only way in which Peter, still ignorant of the mystery, could tell that these Gentiles had been accepted of God apart from circumcision and baptism. This is one reason why even the Gentiles under Paul's ministry were given miraculous powers while God still continued to deal with Israel as a nation. In this way Jews, believing and unbelieving alike, were given evidence that this was indeed a work of God.

As we progress in our studies in Acts we shall see many indications of an overlapping of the two dispensations, for while God had, with Paul's conversion, *begun* to usher in the dispensation of grace the new program was only gradually revealed, and meantime the signs must continue to prove to Israel and the Jewish believers that the new dispensation was *the purpose of God*.

## **Chapter XIX - Acts 11:19-30**

### **THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH**

#### **GENTILES SAVED AT ANTIOCH**

"Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the Word to none but unto the Jews only.

"And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

"And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

"Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

"Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

"For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

"Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:

"And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."

--Acts 11:19-26.

Too little attention has been paid by theologians to the important fact that from the time when the eleven first received their great commission until the conversion of Cornelius, the Word was preached *"to none but unto the Jews only."* This is a fact which ought to be faced frankly by those who hold that the so-called "great commission" concerned "the gospel of the grace of God" and that the joint body of Eph. 3 began at Pentecost.

At Pentecost, regardless of any Gentiles who may have been present, only *"Jews... out of every nation under heaven"* were taken into account, so that the Spirit-filled Peter addressed only the *"men of Judaea,"* the *"men of Israel"* and *"all the house of Israel."*

From here on until after the conversion of Saul, when Peter was sent to Cornelius, we do not find the slightest deviation from this procedure. In Peter's second great Pentecostal address he again includes only the children of Israel, saying: "*Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers . . .*" (Acts 3:25). Before the Jewish Sanhedrin we find him declaring that God had exalted Christ "*to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins*" (Acts 5:31) and, with the other apostles, he continues "*daily in the temple*" preaching Christ (Acts 5:42). At "the daily ministrations," shortly before the stoning of Stephen, we find "*a murmuring of the Grecians [Greek-speaking Jews] against the Hebrews*" because their widows were being neglected, but no Gentiles are included in the company.

And now, in Acts 11:19, we read that even those who had been scattered by the "great persecution" of Acts 8:1, had gone "*preaching the Word TO NONE BUT UNTO THE JEWS ONLY.*"

As we have seen, this was not because they were prejudiced against the Gentiles or did not wish to see them saved, but rather because according to the covenants, the prophecies and the "great commission," Israel must first be brought to Messiah's feet before salvation and blessing could flow to the Gentiles (See [Mark 7:27](#); [Luke 24:47](#); [Acts 3:25,26](#); [13:46](#); [Rom. 15:8,9](#)).

But<sup>23</sup> some of these scattered disciples, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, coming to Antioch, now preach the Lord Jesus to the Greeks (not *Grecians*, as we shall presently show).

## **GRECIANS AND GREEKS**

Every student of Acts should know the difference between *Grecians* and *Greeks*. *Grecians* were *Jews* living, or having lived, outside of Palestine among the Gentiles, where the Greek language was spoken and Greek culture prevailed. Thus they became *Grecianized*, but were *Jews* nevertheless--Grecianized Jews. The *Greeks* on the other hand, were *Gentiles*. Thus we find *Grecians* among the believers before the conversion of Saul, while *Greeks* are not included until after. The word *Grecians* (Gr. *Hellenistes*) is found twice in early Acts (6:1; 9:29) and not again after that, while the word *Greeks* (*Hellenes*) is not found in early Acts but occurs twelve times from Acts 11:20 on.

It is unfortunate that the *Authorized Version* employs the word *Grecians* in Acts 11:20, for there is abundant evidence that *Greeks* is the correct rendering.

## **THE BELIEVERS AT ANTIOCH GREEKS NOT GRECIANS**

---

<sup>23</sup> The *Revised Version* commences, Ver. 20, with the word "But."

That the believers at Antioch were Gentiles, not Grecianized Jews, is amply confirmed by the following facts:

1. Most texts read "Hellenes," not Hellenistes." Also, the great majority of translations favor the rendering "Greeks," and the great majority of Greek scholars, at least those whose writings are at our disposal, favor the rendering "Greeks."

2. The immediate context demands the rendering "*Greeks*." If those in question were Grecian Jews what was there to be noted, for in that case the disciples were *still* ministering to "Jews only"? Grecian Jews had long been included among the believers. In fact, the disciples who witnessed to these at Antioch were doubtless themselves Grecians, for they were "*men of Cyprus and Cyrene*." As we have seen, Grecians were numbered among the believers in Acts 6:1 and even at Pentecost, for there the apostles ministered to "Jews, devout men, *from every nation under heaven*." But now, among those who *had* preached the Word to none but unto the Jews only, there were some who began preaching Christ to the Greeks at Antioch.

3. The larger context confirms this view. Evidently something out of the ordinary had taken place, for upon hearing of it the leaders at Jerusalem immediately sent Barnabas to look into the matter. In the remainder of the record of this assembly at Antioch nothing is said to indicate that Barnabas and Saul still, like those of Verse 19, ministered to the "Jews only," or that *later on* some Gentiles among them *also* believed. From the start their program differed from that which had prevailed at Jerusalem (Acts 11:29 cf. 4:32). It was this church that became the first great center of Gentile evangelism. It was this church from which Paul and Barnabas later travelled to Jerusalem to preserve Gentile freedom from the bondage of the Mosaic law. And significantly, it was no one from among themselves but "*certain men which came down from Judaea*" who sought to bring these Gentiles under the law. And note: "*Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation WITH THEM*" (Acts 15:2).

At the close of the great Jerusalem Council, the elders sent letters to "*the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia*" (Acts 15:23). And when Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch with the news, "*THE MULTITUDE,*" hearing the epistle, "*rejoiced for the consolation*" (Acts 15:30,31) indicating that the congregation there was overwhelmingly Gentile.

All this militates against the view that the church which was established at Antioch, and to which Paul ministered for "a whole year," was made up of Grecians, or Greek-speaking Jews. It even precludes the idea that the church *began* as a Grecian church and became predominantly Gentile later on.

The able Barnes says of this passage:

"This word [Hellenists] usually denotes in the New Testament those Jews residing in foreign lands, who spoke the Greek language .... But to them the gospel had been already preached; and yet in this place it is evidently the intention of Luke to affirm that the men of Cyprus and Cyrene preached to those who were *not* Jews and that thus their conduct was distinguished from those (Verse 19) who preached to the Jews only. It is thus manifest that we are here required to understand the *Gentiles* as those who are addressed by the men of Cyprus and Cyrene. In many MSS the word used here is *Hellenas, Greeks*, instead of *Hellenists*."

More than a century ago, John Kitto, also a thorough Bible scholar, wrote as follows on Acts 11:19,20 in his *Daily Bible Readings*:

"But in the current texts, those to whom the gospel is preached in the second instance are described as Hellenists, not Hellenes. Yet, if this were the case, the second preaching could not have differed from the first, and the Cyrenian and Cyprian brethren would have done no more than had already been done by the brethren from Jerusalem. It is hence the opinion of the best critics and commentators that the word Hellenes, not Hellenists, is here the right reading, especially as it is to be found in some very ancient manuscripts, versions and Fathers; and it has accordingly been adopted in most of the recent critical editions of the Greek text."

Vincent, in his *Word Studies in the New Testament* says:

"There would have been nothing remarkable in these men preaching to the Hellenists who had... formed a large part of the church at Jerusalem .... Note, also, the contrast with the statement in Verse 19, *to the Jews only*. There is no contrast between Jews and Hellenists, since Hellenists are included in the general term *Jews*."

The *Companion Bible* says:

"Most texts read *Hellenes, Greeks*. There was nothing strange in speaking to Greek-speaking Jews."

## **THE ANTIOCH BELIEVERS AND PAUL**

Some, especially among those who hold that Cornelius was a proselyte, have defended the *Authorized Version* in its use of the word *Grecian* here, arguing that if those in question were *Gentiles*, we have *Gentiles* saved before and apart from the ministry of Paul as the apostle of the *Gentiles*. Those who acknowledge the Scriptural fact that Cornelius and his household were *Gentiles*, however, cannot very well raise this objection. It is significant that the household of Cornelius and these *Gentiles* at Antioch were *all* saved after *the first step in God's new program: the conversion of Saul of Tarsus* (See [I Tim. 1:12-16](#)).



It is further significant, in this connection, that the church at Jerusalem, hearing what had happened, sent Barnabas to investigate. Surely God was in this, for Barnabas was the one who had befriended Paul when others had distrusted him on his first return to Jerusalem as a believer in Christ. It is evident that Barnabas knew of Paul's original commission to go to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15,27). He doubtless also knew how the Lord had again appeared to Paul, in the temple, insisting that he leave Jerusalem immediately and reaffirming His purpose to send him far hence unto the Gentiles, for Barnabas was among those who had then "sent him forth to Tarsus" (Acts 22:17-21 cf. 9:27-30).

How natural, then, to read that when Barnabas had arrived at Antioch and "*had seen the grace of God,*" he "*was glad*" and exhorted them simply to "*cleave unto the Lord,*" while he "*departed ... to Tarsus for to seek Saul,*" who then came to Antioch and taught there for "*a whole year*" (11:23-26).

Again, it is significant that it was from *this* assembly that Paul was sent with Barnabas on his first great apostolic journey among the Gentiles, and that it was to this assembly that he returned to report the results (Act 13:2,3; 14:26, 27).<sup>24</sup>

Finally, it is significant that "*the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch*" (Acts 11:26) especially since so many confuse the *Judaism* of Jerusalem and Pentecost with *Christianity*. This title is found only three times in the New Testament: here, in Acts 26:28, and again in I Peter 4:16. One fact is clear from these three passages: that the name was given to the believers by *others*. It is even Latin, rather than Greek, in its termination, which may mean that the Romans first applied the name to those who made so much of Christ. Peter's reference to the name *Christian* in I Peter 4:14-16 strongly emphasizes the fact that it assumed the *rejection* of God's Anointed One<sup>25</sup> and we must remember that this rejection of Christ by those over whom He was to reign was *not* assumed until God had answered the stoning of Stephen by raising up Paul to go to the Gentiles.

Thus while, as we have said, the Jewish believers from Jerusalem had no revelation as to the inauguration of a new program, nor any *command* to go to the Gentiles while Israel still remained unrepentant, God had given them a precedent for their action by sending Peter to Cornelius and his household. All this, of course, had significantly taken place *after* God had manifested His grace in saving Saul, but before Paul's great campaigns among the Gentiles, so that his proclamation of salvation to the Gentiles apart from Israel might be the more readily recognized by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.

---

<sup>24</sup> While Antioch was a great center of Gentile evangelization, we do not call it "the headquarters of the Gentile Church." Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome also became great centers of Gentile evangelization but the true *headquarters* of the Gentile Church is in heaven (Phil. 3:20).

<sup>25</sup> *Christ* means simply: *Anointed*.

How wonderful to trace the hand of God in the working out of His plans!

### PROPHETS FROM JERUSALEM

"And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

"And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

"Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:

"Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."

--Acts 11:27-30.

The fact that prophets were being sent from Jerusalem to Antioch and being recognized there,<sup>26</sup> is a clear indication that the Pentecostal program and the authority of the twelve as representatives of Messiah and His kingdom had not immediately ceased with Israel's rejection of the proposition made to them at Pentecost, nor even with the raising up of Paul. After all, the first Gentile believers at Antioch had been won to Christ through believing Jews who had fled from Jerusalem during the persecution which had followed Stephen's death. Furthermore, it was the church at Jerusalem ([Acts 11:22](#)) that had sent Barnabas to look into the situation.

However, it must not be overlooked that the *reason* the believers at Jerusalem had sent Barnabas to Antioch was that it had come to their ears that *Gentiles--having* neither circumcision nor the law--had come to trust Christ in that city. It is not strange, then, and a natural step in the unfolding of God's program, that Barnabas simply exhorted these believing Gentiles "that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (a very *general* exhortation) while he went to Tarsus to find Saul.

Nor must it be overlooked that this brief passage (Acts 11:27-30) which begins with the Antioch believers recognizing prophets from Jerusalem, closes with the Jerusalem believers at least beginning to recognize the church at Antioch as they receive its help. And the transition is perfectly natural, for it was one of the prophets from Jerusalem who had predicted the famine which was to require help from Antioch! And this continues to be the trend in the succeeding chapters of Acts.

---

<sup>26</sup> The confidence which the Antioch believers placed in these prophets from Jerusalem is readily seen in the fact that they took immediate action upon Agabus' prediction of the approaching famine.

## RELIEF FROM ANTIOCH

Doubtless the reader has already noticed that Agabus predicted a *worldwide* famine: "*great dearth* [Lit. *hunger*] *throughout all the world* [Lit. *inhabited earth*]." Why should *they*, then, be singled out for special help? This question deserves careful consideration.

Most commentators have concluded that the action of the church at Antioch implies that the famine was to be most severe in Judaea, and that Agabus must have intimated this in his prophecy. Some of these same commentators have dug into history and have found records of several famines occurring about that time and have advanced arguments to prove that one of them was probably most keenly felt in Judaea, though there has not been full agreement as to *which one!* Other commentators, again, have concluded that Agabus' term *oikoumene* probably means all of Judaea or Palestine in this case.

The fact is, however, that while the Greek word *ge* is used to denote either *earth* or *land*, the word *oikoumene* is consistently used to denote the inhabited earth and never one particular country, much less could the phrase "*all the world*"<sup>27</sup> refer to *one particular country*.

But then the question remains: Why did the believers at Antioch determine to send relief to those of one particular country?

The answer to this question is a dispensational one.

First it must be noted that the relief was to be provided, not for all the people of Judaea, but for "*the brethren* which dwelt in Judaea." This was not only because it was proper for these Antioch Christians to care for their brethren first, but because the *believers* in Judaea were to feel the effects of the famine and the accompanying high prices far more keenly than others, whether in Judaea or anywhere else.

These Judaeans believers, it must be remembered, had sold their houses and lands and had brought the proceeds to the apostles for distribution among the needy, in conformity with the standards of the kingdom which they had hoped soon to see established on earth. Not some, but *all* who followed Messiah had done this (Acts 2:44,45; 4:34, 35) "*neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common*" (Acts 4:32). Even Peter could truthfully say to the lame man at the temple: "*Silver and gold have I none*" (Acts 3:6). Two who tried to join that company while deceitfully holding back part of their belongings were stricken dead (Acts 5:5,10) "*and of the rest durst no man join himself to them*" (Acts 5:13). Thus the kingdom program was maintained. Indeed, even when it seemed that the Hebrews were being favored above the Grecians in "the daily ministrations," the apostles took

---

<sup>27</sup> The same original phrase is found in Matt. 24:14.

immediate action to see that all were equally provided for. Of the Pentecostal believers we read: "*Neither was there any among them that lacked*" (Acts 4:34) and this condition was to be maintained by the apostles as one of the blessings associated with the kingdom soon, they hoped, to be established by Messiah's return.

But now the crisis had passed in Israel. The nation had refused the offer of mercy from the risen, glorified Christ. She had threatened, beaten and imprisoned His highest representatives. She had stoned Stephen and waged war upon the Church at Jerusalem. Now, in infinite grace, God had responded by *saving* Saul, the chief blasphemer and persecutor, and by saving Gentiles *notwithstanding Israel's refusal to become the channel of blessing*.

But while this was indeed the unfolding of a gracious purpose, it must not be forgotten that this new program meant the (temporary) setting aside of Israel, the postponement (from man's viewpoint) of Messiah's reign, and the withdrawal of kingdom blessings which the Jewish believers had already begun to enjoy.

Whereas not one of the Pentecostal believers had lacked heretofore, they were now bound to be the first to lack, having already disposed of their property. And this was only the beginning. Through the following years, not only the church at Antioch, but "the churches of Galatia" (I Cor. 16:1-3) "the churches of Macedonia" (II Cor. 8:1-4) the churches at Achaia (II Cor. 9:2) and perhaps others. including even Rome, a long list of Gentile congregations, were to send material help to "the poor saints . . . at Jerusalem" (Romans 15:26). Indeed, it was one of the specific agreements between the heads of the Jewish and Gentile churches at the great Jerusalem council, that the Gentile believers should "remember the poor" of the Judean church (Gal. 2:10).<sup>28</sup>

All this indicates that the kingdom program was being gradually set aside and that the new dispensation had already begun to dawn. The careful reader will note that the believers at Antioch did not have "all things common." They contributed, "*every man according to his ability,*" to the need of the Judaeans. They belonged to the new dispensation and their giving sets the pattern for our giving under the dispensation of grace. If we, in this present age, disposed of all our property for the common good until we had nothing of our own, we should be acting directly *contrary* to God's will and program for us, for *our* apostle (Rom. 11:13) writes, by the Spirit:

"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, HE HATH DENIED THE FAITH, AND IS WORSE THAN AN INFIDEL" (I Tim. 5:8).

---

<sup>28</sup> That the Jewish leaders referred to *their* poor is self-evident. They would have had no reason to ask for a promise that the Gentile church help its own poor or the poor in general.

Few believers today, however, even among those who cry: "*Back to Pentecost,*" are tempted to dispose of all their earthly possessions, either for the Lord or for their brethren, sensing that if they did so they would soon be in trouble. But if believers in this economy of grace would only give proportionately, "*every man according to his ability*" (Acts 11:29) "*as God hath prospered him*" (I Cor. 16:2) "*according to that he hath*" (II Cor. 8:12) "*not grudgingly, or of necessity*" (II Cor. 9:7) the work of God would go on apace, unhampered by financial lack, and the givers themselves would be spiritually enriched by their faithfulness, for it is *Paul*, not Peter at Pentecost, who says by the Spirit: "*he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully . . . for God loveth a cheerful giver*" (II Cor. 9:6,7).

It is true that many of God's servants have become "greedy of filthy lucre," in disobedience to I Tim. 3:3, and this is not to be condoned, yet this is perhaps a natural, though sinful, reaction to the failure of believers engaged in secular work to do their financial part. Whatever our financial status in life, let us give of our means according to the rule laid down *for us today* by the Spirit:

".. . SEE THAT YE ABOUND IN THIS GRACE ALSO.

".. . PROVE THE SINCERITY OF YOUR LOVE.

"FOR YE KNOW THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THAT, THOUGH HE WAS RICH, YET FOR YOUR SAKE HE BECAME POOR, THAT YE THROUGH HIS POVERTY MIGHT BE RICH" (II Cor. 8:7-9).

This is giving under grace and is, of course, a distinct departure from the Pentecostal program. And mark well this departure is first to be noted in Paul's *early* ministry, in connection with his labors at Antioch, before leaving on his first great apostolic journey or writing the first of his letters to the churches.

## **PAUL AND JERUSALEM**

The question has been raised whether Paul and Barnabas actually visited Jerusalem on this occasion. The record in Acts says of the collection taken up for the Judaeans, that the believers of Antioch "*sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.*" This would seem to imply that Barnabas and Saul went to Jerusalem, yet in Gal. 1:18--2:1 Paul himself says that he did not go up to Jerusalem again to see the other apostles until fourteen years after his first return to Jerusalem recorded in Acts 9:26.

This problem has led some to conclude that Paul and Barnabas must not have gone all the way to Jerusalem with their gift, but had only seen to it that the matter was taken care of. The passage under consideration (Acts 11:30) might well admit of this interpretation, but Acts 12:25 completes the record with the

statement: "*And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.*"

This appears to make it conclusive that Paul did go to Jerusalem on this occasion, and this is confirmed by the fact that John Mark was from Jerusalem (cf. [Acts 13:13](#)).

But how, then, shall we explain Paul's solemn declaration to the Galatians that he had not been in contact with any of the apostles from the time of his visit with Peter, three years after his conversion, until fourteen years later when he went to Jerusalem to defend Gentile liberty?

The solution to this problem is probably not as difficult as it appears at first, for the apostle's argument in the Galatian letter is *not* that he had visited Jerusalem so seldom in all that time, but that he had seen so little of any of the Jerusalem apostles in that time.

First he points out that he had not, immediately upon his conversion, "conferred with flesh and blood," and goes on to say:

"Neither went I up to Jerusalem TO THEM WHICH WERE APOSTLES BEFORE ME" (Gal. 1:16,17).

Then, explaining that three years later he had stayed with Peter for fifteen days, but had seen none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother (an apostle only in a secondary sense) he goes on to tell how he had not contacted the apostles again until "fourteen years after" (Gal. 1:18--2:1).

Thus it was not for want of candor on the apostle's part that he omitted mention of an errand to Jerusalem in which he had *not* seen any of the twelve, since the question was simply whether or not he had gotten his message and authority from the twelve. In Acts 24:17, in his defense before Felix, the apostle passes over *all* but the last of his visits to Jerusalem, saying: "*Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.*" This was necessary for the sake of brevity, and was in no way dishonest.

But it may be asked whether it was very likely that the apostle could have visited Jerusalem without seeing any of the twelve. The answer is that this was quite likely and, in the light of the whole record, exactly what happened.

First, it will be remembered that on Paul's *first* return to Jerusalem he stayed with Peter for fifteen days, yet saw *none* of the other eleven ([Gal. 1:18,19](#)). James, the Lord's brother, as we have proved, was not one of the twelve. Where were the other eleven? They may well have been out laboring among the churches of Judaea. Though their *headquarters* were at Jerusalem, it does not necessarily follow that they remained in the city all the time. In fact it is more

probable that they were away a good deal of the time and quite as natural that Peter himself, as their head, should remain at Jerusalem.

Second, on the occasion now being discussed, it is quite possible that Peter was in prison, for the story of his imprisonment immediately follows the statement that Barnabas and Saul were sent to Judaea with the offering from Antioch. Or, Peter may already have escaped to Caesarea (Acts 12:19). On this occasion Paul may have missed seeing the other apostles because they were greatly preoccupied by the persecution of Herod, but more probably they were again absent from the city, for it is plain that they were not among the group gathered in prayer for Peter's release at John Mark's home, nor at the next places to which Peter, after leaving this group, made his way (Acts 12:12,17,19).

Third, the apostle plainly and solemnly declares to the Galatians that he did not see any of the twelve again until "fourteen years after" his first return. This should settle the matter, for it would violate a fundamental rule of Bible interpretation to use an obscure or difficult passage so as to make it contradict a declaration so plain and so solemn as that of Paul to the Galatians. But the passage in Acts 11 should not even be classed as obscure or difficult, for a little examination yields a full explanation to the problem. It is of basic importance that the passage *does not say* that Barnabas and Saul saw or had any contact with the apostles on this visit, and it may be reasonably assumed that had they had contact with them mention would have been made of it. The "elders" to whom the gift was sent formed a larger group, as is evident from such passages as Acts 15:2.

Some have felt that since the Lord had instructed Paul to depart from Jerusalem at the time of his first return (See [Acts 22:17-21](#)) it was wrong for him now to return again. The apostle surely understood, however, that he was being sent "far hence unto the Gentiles" rather than being permitted to *preach* at Jerusalem because, as the Lord said: "*They will not receive thy testimony concerning Me*" (Acts 22:18,21).

Paul was not violating this command by bringing alms to the believers there. Nor was he violating it when later he went up to communicate to the leaders of the church there that gospel which he had been preaching among the Gentiles and to defend the Gentile believers' freedom from the law Of Moses. We know he was not violating it at that time, for he says, by the Spirit: "*I went up by revelation*" (Gal. 2:2).

His last visit to Jerusalem was a different matter. On that occasion his ministry to "the poor saints at Jerusalem" was only incidental. Hoping the offering would be accepted of them (Rom. 15:31) and that they would thus stand with him, he really went "*to testify the gospel of the grace of God*" (Acts 20:24).

The apostle unquestionably desired to do this out of love for his Lord (Acts 20:24) and his unbelieving kinsmen, for whom he experienced "*great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart*" (Rom. 9:2) and whose salvation was ever his "*heart's desire and prayer*" (Rom. 10:1). But it is possible to disobey God's commands out of a good motive. Hence we must be careful to give Him what He says He wishes, not what we think He ought to desire. In this case Paul had already been informed that his kinsman would not accept his testimony concerning Christ, and it is significant that the same prophet, Agabus, who had first indicated that the saints at Jerusalem were to suffer need, indicated in this case that Paul should not enter the city, warning him of what was to happen to him at the hands of the Jews there (Acts 21:10,11).

The record of this last visit gives no indication that Paul did proclaim "the gospel of the grace of God," or that in this case his offering for the saints produced the desired result. Certainly the believers did not stand by him in his persecutions at the hands of the Jews. Instead he was taken to Rome to become "*the prisoner of Jesus Christ*" for the Gentiles (Eph. 3:1). In this, of course, God was graciously overruling for the good of Paul and for His own glory.

We will deal with this more fully later on, but we touch upon it here to point out the fact that Paul had been instructed to depart from Jerusalem only because God knew that they would not receive his testimony concerning Christ and had called him for a special ministry among the Gentiles. This command did not imply a prohibition against his sending or bringing financial help to the *believers* at Jerusalem. Indeed, this repeated material aid from so many Gentile churches, in such a time of need, was well calculated to touch the hearts of the Jewish believers and make them ready for the great revelation that before God they were one in Christ with the Gentile believers ([I Cor. 12:13](#); [II Cor. 5:16,17](#); [Gal. 3:26-28](#); etc.). The raising up of Paul, the conversion of Cornelius' household and these Gentiles at Antioch, in spite of Israel's rejection of Christ, and now this offering sent from Antioch to the saints at Jerusalem were the beginnings of the historical breaking down of the middle wall of partition, made possible through the Cross.



## ***Chapter XX - Acts 12:1-24***

### **PERSECUTION REKINDLED AT JERUSALEM**

#### **HEROD PERSECUTES MESSIAH'S FOLLOWERS**

"Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.

"And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

"And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)

"And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quarternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

"Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

"And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and the keepers before the door kept the prison.

"And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

"And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

"And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

"When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

"And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews."

--Acts 12:1-11.

## THE MURDER OF JAMES

It seems strange at first sight that more than a chapter (68 verses) of the book of Acts is devoted to the martyrdom of the deacon Stephen, while only one verse is given to the martyrdom of the Apostle James. If the book of Acts were no more than the inspired story book that most Christians suppose it to be this would surely have been otherwise, for not only was James the first of the twelve apostles to die as a martyr, but his death broke up the famous trio of men closest to our Lord during His earthly ministry. What a stunning blow, then, his execution by the sword must have been to the Messianic Church and what a story could have been written about it! Indeed, an early tradition, cited by Eusebius, has it that James' accuser was himself converted through the apostle's conduct at his trial and was led out to execution with him, asking and receiving James' forgiveness on the way.

But Acts is more, far more, than a story book of spiritual victories recorded to inspire and challenge us. It is rather the account of Israel's fall and of God's overruling grace, teaching us why the nation Israel has now been temporarily set aside in God's dealings, and why salvation through the cross is now being offered to all men apart from Israel and the covenant promises.

In Matthew 2 we find "Herod the king," an Idumean stretching forth his hands against Christ, the *rightful* King of Israel. Here we find another "Herod the king" stretching forth his hands against the *followers* of Israel's rightful King. Mark well: Herod does not stretch forth his hands against the Jews; he stretches forth his hands against "certain of the church" and, sad to say, Israel is pleased to have it so. She prefers the reign of this part Edomite<sup>29</sup> to that of her own Messiah. Hence God answers Israel's apostasy by further departures from the program outlined for the establishment of Messiah's kingdom on earth.

After the murder of Stephen in Chapter 7 and the intense persecution of Messiah's followers in Chapter 8, we have the conversion and commission of Paul as *another* apostle, separate from the twelve, in Chapter 9 (Cf. Acts 22:14-15; 26:16-18); the first departure from the prophetic kingdom plan, and the first step in the ushering in of a new dispensation.

Then, upon returning to Jerusalem and hoping that *his* testimony for Christ will turn the tide in Israel, Paul is told by the Lord:

---

<sup>29</sup> The Edomites, the descendants of Esau, were Israel's hereditary enemies. Indeed, Herod's right to the throne was forfeited by the mere fact that he was not of the royal Davidic line nor even a full Israelite (Deut. 17:15).

"Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: FOR THEY WILL NOT RECEIVE THY TESTIMONY CONCERNING ME" (Acts 22:18).

After this, in Chapter 10, Peter, by a special vision, is sent to preach Christ to Gentiles, not because Israel has accepted Christ and the next step in the "great commission" can now be carried out, but because Israel has persisted in her *rejection* of Christ, and God is now to bless the Gentiles apart from her. Regarding this experience Peter simply explains: "*What was I, that I could withstand God?*" (Acts 11:17).

Another departure from the kingdom program takes place as Cornelius and his household receive the Holy Spirit without having first been baptized (Acts 10:44-48, cf. 2:38 and [Mark 16:15,16](#)). Peter and his brethren are astonished at this change in procedure (10:45) but learn by it that God is now putting no "difference" between the Jew and the Gentile in the matter of salvation, purifying the Gentiles' hearts by faith (Acts 15:9).

In Chapter 11 another phase of the kingdom program disappears as it becomes necessary for the Gentile believers at Antioch to send material relief to the Church at Jerusalem, of which it was once said: "*Neither was there any among them that lacked*" (Acts 4:34,35; 11:27-30).

And now, in Chapter 12, we have, next to the raising up of Paul himself, the greatest indication of all that the earthly establishment of the kingdom is to be held in abeyance, as the Apostle James is killed with the sword.<sup>30</sup>

We have seen how our Lord had promised the twelve apostles that they should occupy twelve thrones in the kingdom and should reign with Him over the twelve tribes of Israel ([Matt. 19:28](#)). We have seen how the number was brought up to twelve again after Judas' fall, by the appointment of Matthias, and how God sanctioned the appointment (Acts 1:15-26; 2:4). We have further seen how, at Pentecost, "Peter, standing up with the eleven," appealed to Israel to repent and receive her Messiah (Acts 2) and how God protected and sustained the twelve in the midst of the most violent persecutions, so that even when *all* the other believers had to flee from Jerusalem for their lives, the twelve alone remained in the city, divinely protected.

But now one of the twelve is slain; nor can any attempt be made to replace him by another, for he, unlike Judas, has a legitimate claim to one of the twelve

---

<sup>30</sup> It was not the death of James, however, that, even partly, *brought about* the so-called "postponement" of the kingdom, for our Lord had previously predicted the death of Peter, another of the twelve (John 21:18,19). But how fully this prediction was understood at the time is open to question, for our Lord did not actually *say* that Peter would die or be killed, though this is what He had in mind (Ver. 19). The human reason for the postponement of the kingdom was Israel's unbelief; the divine reason, God's own purpose and grace.

thrones. Thus it becomes evident that the kingdom is not yet to be established on earth<sup>31</sup> and that a new dispensation has already begun, as God removes His protecting hand from one of the twelve and allows Herod the king to slay him with the sword. Meanwhile the depth of Israel's declension is seen in the fact that the Jews are pleased with Herod for killing James.

This is why Dr. Arno C. Gaebelein, in his book, *The Gospel of Matthew*, said:

"The testimony which was begun by the apostles up to the time when Israel rejected once more the offers of mercy from the risen Lord, when He was still waiting for their repentance as a nation, is an *unfinished* testimony" (Vol. I, Pp. 209, 210).

And this is why Sir Robert Anderson, in his *Silence of God*, calls Acts "a book which is primarily the record, not, as commonly supposed, of the founding of the Christian Church, but of the apostasy of the favored nation" (P. 177).

Little wonder that after this chapter Paul, the apostle of the new dispensation, dominates the scene completely.

### THE IMPRISONMENT OF PETER

It appears that this Herod who killed James was Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the great, who had slain the children of Bethlehem; the nephew and brother-in-law of Herod Antipas, the "tetrarch" of Galilee, who had beheaded John the Baptist, and the brother of Herodias, who had asked for John's head and had lived in adultery with Herod Antipas.

From the account in Acts 12 it is clear that the present Herod was no less depraved than his royal relatives. His wily and wicked uncle, called "*that fox*" by our Lord, had spared John the Baptist's head for a time, only because he feared the Jews over whom he reigned (Matt. 14:3-5). Now this present Herod, no less wily and wicked, slays James with the sword, evidently to *please* the Jews. And when he sees that it *does* please the Jews, he proceeds further to take Peter also (Acts 12:3). He will increase his own popularity as king, he thinks, by bringing Peter to public trial and execution.

Thus Herod had Peter arrested and put in prison; very possibly the same prison he had been committed to before. One would wonder why, in addition to being locked in a cell, four quarternions<sup>32</sup> of soldiers were needed to guard him, but it was probably well known that on a previous occasion when Peter was supposed to have been in prison he was found in the temple preaching instead, while the officers who had been sent to bring him to court explained: "*The prison*

---

<sup>31</sup> Though those of that day probably did not yet understand this.

<sup>32</sup> Four shifts of four each.

*truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors; but when we had opened, we found no man within" (Acts 5:23).*

*This time, Herod would make sure that no such escape was possible. He would have two guards at a time locked in the cell with Peter and two sentinels standing guard without. These precautions seemed the more necessary because Herod, making sure not to displease the Jews by profaning a holy feast, had decided to wait until afterward to try Peter, "intending after Easter<sup>33</sup> to bring him forth to the people" (Acts 12:4). Mark well the note of hope in the record: "intending."*

"Peter therefore was kept in prison" (Verse 5).

We wonder whether his experience brought back to his mind the boast he had once made: "*Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee*" . . . "*I will lay down my life for Thy sake*" (Matt. 26:35; John 13:37). If it did, we know he was ready to make good that boast now, for he had nobly accounted for himself since the base denial of His Master some time before. Yet, he may also have remembered the Lord's prediction: "*... When thou shalt be OLD, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not*" (John 21:18) and have felt confident that his execution could not yet possibly take place.

## **A PRAYING CHURCH**

"Peter therefore was kept in prison: BUT . . ." (Ver. 5).

Glorious "BUT"! and with it a precious lesson for us all.

There are times in the believer's experience when the outlook is so dark and hopeless that it is perfectly evident that there is nothing whatever to do but to cry directly and only to Him who controls all. This was such a time. Appeals to the wicked king would do no good, nor is there any evidence that Peter's friends took any measures to influence him in Peter's behalf.

"... BUT PRAYER WAS MADE WITHOUT CEASING OF THE CHURCH UNTO GOD FOR HIM" (Ver. 5).

True, we are to "*pray with the understanding also*" (I Cor. 14:15) and the miraculous demonstrations of the Pentecostal era have now passed away, but God is no less interested in us when we cry to Him in times of extremity, nor any less able to help us in time of need, even though He chooses to help in what we might call *providential* ways rather than by direct intervention in the affairs of men.

---

<sup>33</sup> The name by which the heathen referred to the Passover.

But wait: Peter's friends are praying--without ceasing--through that Passover week. Unquestionably they are praying for his deliverance, though in submission to the will and wisdom of God they may also have prayed that if it was necessary for Peter to die he might bear a worthy testimony.

But the seeming futility of their prayers for deliverance is strikingly brought out in the record as we find Peter:

1. On "the same night," with the time for his trial and execution almost up.
2. "Sleeping,"
3. "Between two soldiers,"
4. "Bound with two chains"--probably *bound to the soldiers*.
5. "And the keepers before the door."
6. "The first and the second wards of the prison" lying beyond (Ver. 10).
7. Enclosed by the main "iron gate."

It speaks well for Peter that he could sleep at such a time, but it certainly did not add hope of deliverance to the picture.

But "the same night," "when Herod would have brought him forth," "an<sup>34</sup> angel of the Lord" entered his prison. But note again all that was involved in fully rousing Peter from his sleep:

1. "A light shined in the prison:"
2. "And he smote Peter on the side, and roused him,"
3. "Saying, Arise up quickly."
4. "And his chains fell off"
5. "And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals."
6. "And he saith, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me."
7. "And he went out, and WIST NOT that it was true... but thought he saw a vision."

---

<sup>34</sup> Not "*the*"

Indeed, Peter had slept so soundly that it was not until they had "passed the first and the second ward," had come to the "iron gate," which "opened to them of his own accord," had walked "through one street" and the angel had disappeared, that he was fully awake, and said: *"Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews"* (Ver. 11).

Thus Peter was spared for a time. He still had an important role to play in the purposes of God in the setting aside of Israel and the recognition of Paul as the apostle of the new dispensation.

### **ANSWERED PRAYER**

"And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.

"And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.

"And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.

"And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, it is his angel.

"But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished."

--Acts 12:12-16.

### **PRAYER AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD**

In the case of Peter and his praying friends we have a good example of what prayer was meant to be and to accomplish.

Theologians who have gone to one-sided extremes on the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty have frequently found their arguments used by unbelievers as a means to ridicule the practice of prayer.

"If God has everything planned beforehand," they say, "and works all things after the counsel of His own will, how foolish these Christians are to pray! Do they think they can change the mind of God, whose will and plans are fixed and unchangeable?"

Those who argue thus, of course, fail to understand that God has instituted the practice of prayer *not*, first of all, as a means of obtaining things from Him,

but rather that we might in this way be drawn into closer fellowship with Him. Moreover, His plans were made with the interest of His people in view. Hence we read not only that God works all things *after the counsel of His own will* (Eph. 1:11) but also that He works all things out *for good to them that love Him, to them who are the called according to His purpose* (Rom. 8:28).

God is sovereign, to be sure, and does indeed work all things after the counsel of His *own* will, but we must not conclude from this that His acts are arbitrary and unreasoned, or that love and mercy have no place in them. God does not manipulate us as machines. He *loves* us and desires our love in return. Our love and faith, our prayers and thanksgiving, all have a place in His great plan. Even though He has already, according to His foreknowledge, planned to grant some specific deliverance or victory, we do not know this, and He would have us come to Him in prayer so that He might grant that deliverance or victory as an answer to our prayer.<sup>35</sup>

The deliverance of Peter is a case in point. As we have seen, our Lord had *already predicted* that Peter would live to be an old man ([John 21:18](#)). Thus Herod's plan to put him to death at this time *could not succeed*. Perhaps this is why Peter slept so soundly the night before he was to have been executed.

It has been said that had Peter's praying friends believed John 21:18 they would all have been home and asleep instead of praying for his deliverance. But we must not assume that they knew of this prediction by our Lord, or that they remembered or understood it if they had once heard of it. Certainly there is no intimation in the record of this story that they had any knowledge of this promise. Whatever the case may be, God *did* answer their prayer as well as fulfil His own purpose.

## FAITH AND UNBELIEF

It is strange how faith can be mingled with unbelief in the human heart. Certainly it was faith in God that led the church to cry to Him without ceasing for Peter's deliverance. Certainly it was faith that kept Peter's friends praying day after day, so that, almost at the last moment we still find "many... gathered together praying" at the house of Mary, John Mark's mother.

Yet, now what unbelief they display--all except one--as Peter stands and knocks at the door! The exception is "a damsel named Rhoda [Rose]." She had gone to answer "the door of the gate."

---

<sup>35</sup> Indeed, even when, for His glory and for our good, He has already planned *not* to grant our requests, prayer still brings us closer to Him, and we rest in the assurance that He will do what is wisest and best for us. Thus God permitted Herod to slay James with the sword, while He sent His angel to rescue Peter. Faith would approve *both* actions on God's part, and trust Him to work out His own gracious design.



"And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate" (Ver. 14).

Mark well, *she* opened not the gate *for gladness!* It was not unbelief, but pure joy that caused her to leave Peter standing outside the gate while she "ran in" to tell the others that their prayers had been answered.

So often young people put older believers to shame by their simple, humble faith, and it was so in this case, for as Rhoda told the others how Peter stood without,

"... THEY SAID UNTO HER, THOU ART MAD" (Ver. 15).

After having prayed long with no apparent results, it seemed too much to believe that here, suddenly, Peter himself now stood knocking at the door.

Rhoda seems to have been the only one who had no questions about it, for "*she constantly affirmed that it was even so.*"

"THEN SAID THEY, IT IS HIS ANGEL" (Ver. 15).

Whether they meant that Peter's disembodied spirit or his guardian angel ([Matt. 18:10](#); [Heb. 1:14](#)) had appeared, or whether they even knew what they meant, is hard to say, but the significant fact is that they still lacked faith to believe that God had actually answered their prayers.

"But Peter continued knocking: AND WHEN THEY HAD OPENED THE DOOR, AND SAW HIM THEY WERE ASTONISHED" (Ver. 16).

Astonished as they saw the answer to their prayers! So meagre had been their faith! It reminds us of the Christian friend who once made a petition in prayer and added: "Lord *surprise* us and grant our request"!

Such manifestations of unbelief surely do not honor God, and Peter's friends doubtless berated themselves now for their lack of appreciation of the love of God. Nevertheless, the whole experience had served to draw them closer to Him.

It must here be emphasized again that the time of miraculous, or supernatural *demonstrations* in answer to prayer has long since passed away. During the present dispensation God has indeed delivered many of His servants from prison and death in answer to prayer, but always in *providential* ways, not by angels, as He did twice in early Acts. This fact should be remembered by those who would avoid frustration and disillusionment in their prayer life, for God would have us pray in intelligent conformity with His revealed program for the day in which we live. "*I will pray with the spirit,*" says the Apostle Paul, "*and I will pray with the understanding also*" (I Cor. 14:15).

As this present dispensation is the dispensation of *grace*, it is also the dispensation of *faith*. In the epistles of Paul grace and faith are exalted to their highest levels. Hence the highest form of believing prayer is taught us in the Pauline epistles, and nowhere more beautifully than in his epistle to the Philippians, where he says:

"BE CAREFUL [ANXIOUS] FOR NOTHING; BUT IN EVERYTHING BY PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION, WITH THANKSGIVING, LET YOUR REQUESTS BE MADE KNOWN UNTO GOD.

"AND THE PEACE OF GOD, WHICH PASSETH ALL UNDERSTANDING, SHALL KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS, THROUGH CHRIST JESUS" (Phil. 4:6,7).

In other words: Take your problem to the Lord and leave it *wholly* to Him to work things out for you.

### **PETER REPORTS TO HIS FRIENDS**

"But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

"Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.

"And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode."

--Acts 12:17-19.

How graciously this prayer meeting<sup>36</sup> at Jerusalem had been interrupted! What a time for thanksgiving and fellowship, as Peter himself stepped into their midst! His miraculous deliverance from prison and death, and his restoration to his praying friends at almost the last moment must have brought many exclamations of wonder and praise, and they must have had much to tell him.

But there was no time for such fellowship now. Herod and his soldiers were as yet unaware of what had taken place, but all too soon the search for Peter would be on for, remember, this was the day on which Herod intended to please the Jews by leading Peter out to public execution.

---

<sup>36</sup> There were doubtless other groups gathered in other homes, for the whole Church was praying without ceasing for Peter.

Indicating, therefore, that he was in haste and did not wish to be interrupted, he beckoned to them to come to silence, and related to them the story of his remarkable deliverance, adding: "Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren."<sup>37</sup> And with this he departed again and went "*into another place*," perhaps not even telling them where, so that they might have no information to give if questioned by Herod's soldiers.

### **JAMES THE LORD'S BROTHER**

But why did Peter ask his friends to report these things to *James* and the brethren?

To understand this we must bear in mind the position Peter had hitherto held in the Church at Jerusalem.

It is to be feared that unfounded claims made in behalf of Peter by a corrupt church for the promotion of its own ambitions, have created in many minds a reluctance to recognize his actual prominence among the followers of Messiah, or to acknowledge his just claims to authority over them, and even over the other apostles.

Peter had been by far the most conspicuous person in the Pentecostal Church, and rightly so. Our Lord had designated *him*, not James, as the chief of the apostles and had committed to him "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:17-19). Hence in the early chapters of Acts we read consistently of *Peter* and the other apostles (Acts 1:15; 2:37; 5:29; etc.).

But now all this is to be changed, for after Israel's bloody rejection of the offer of Christ's return to establish the promised kingdom, not only is another apostle raised up by God to usher in a new dispensation, but Peter loses his place of leadership among the apostles and believers at Jerusalem, to be replaced by the James referred to in the passage we are considering.

This James to whom Peter sends his report here in Acts 12 is not, remember, the one of the famous trio, Peter, James and John, for that James had but recently been slain (Acts 12:2). Nor, evidently, was it James the son of Alphaeus, for we nowhere read that he attained a place of prominence among the apostles. This James was evidently not one of the twelve at all, but "James, the Lord's brother" (See Pp. 55,56)<sup>38</sup> of whom we shall read several times in connection with both Peter and Paul.

---

<sup>37</sup> The reason he did not report directly to James or to the apostles may have been because his enemies would be apt to look for him there first.

<sup>38</sup> A thorough discussion on the identity of this James may be found in John Kitto's famous *Daily Bible Illustrations*, on pp. 163, 164 and 171,172 on *The Apostles and the Early Church*.

That this James was an apostle only in a secondary sense, and not one of the twelve, is clear from the fact that the twelve were made up of men who had faithfully "followed" Christ during His earthly ministry (Matt. 19:28; Acts 1:21,22) while this was not so of "James, the Lord's brother."

We are distinctly told that our Lord's brethren did not believe on Him during the time of His earthly ministry ([Psa. 69:8](#); [John 7:5](#)). Indeed, on one occasion, when His "friends" thought Him mad ([Mark 3:21](#)) and those of His family came to call for Him (Ver. 31) He declined to even recognize them (Vers. 33,34).

Later, however, His brethren did come to believe on Him and we find them praying with the believers after His ascension, and listed *separately* from the apostles, including the two named James (Acts 1:13-14).

So now, along with the other departures from the Pentecostal program, we find the exercise of authority in the Church at Jerusalem gradually passing from Peter to "James, the Lord's brother," probably because of his physical relationship to our Lord.

Here Peter reports to him (Acts 12:17).

Later Paul mentions him alone as present with Peter at Jerusalem, during one of his earlier visits there ([Gal. 1:19](#)).

It was James who brought the great council at Jerusalem to a close with the words: "*Wherefore my sentence is . . .*" (Acts 15:19). This, although Peter and other apostles were present (Vers. 4,7).

At Antioch Peter was intimidated by "certain [who] came from James," into separating himself from the Gentile believers, with whom he had previously enjoyed fellowship ([Gal. 2:11,12](#)).

The book of Acts does not mention any of the twelve after the 15th chapter. At Paul's last visit to Jerusalem not even Peter is mentioned. We read simply that "*Paul went in . . . unto James; and all the elders were present*" (Acts 21:18). Thus "Peter and the apostles" finally give place to "James and the elders," in Jerusalem.

As we have said, James' growing influence was probably due to his *physical* relationship to our Lord, for Peter, *not* he, had been designated by the Lord Himself as chief of the apostles and of the Messianic Church. This is doubtless why Paul called the leaders at Jerusalem: "*these who seemed to be somewhat,*" and named the leading three, in the order of their *exercise* of authority: "James, Cephas [Peter] and John," calling them those "*who seemed to be pillars*" (Gal. 2:6-9).

It is a remarkable fact, however, that in spite of all this *both* James and Peter, with John, perceived the grace given to Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles, and gave to Paul and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, agreeing that Paul and Barnabas should go to the Gentiles while they, who had at first been sent to "all the world" and "every creature" (Mark 16:15) now confined their ministry to "the circumcision" (Gal. 2:9). Thus Peter, whom the Lord had chosen as leader of the Hebrew Church, and James who had now become its actual leader, *both* joined in a solemn, public recognition of *Paul* as God's apostle to the nations.

### **PETER NOT TO BE FOUND**

As morning light appeared Peter's absence from his cell naturally caused "no small stir among the soldiers," especially because, as Roman soldiers, they were responsible with their lives to hold him in custody until the time of execution. But Peter was nowhere to be found, and the hapless guards, after "examination" (i.e., by scourging) were themselves executed. Meanwhile Herod "went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode."<sup>39</sup>

Striking contrasts have been noted between the prison deliverance of Peter, and that of Paul some years later at Philippi (Acts 16). Peter was sleeping just before his deliverance, while Paul and Silas were praying and singing. An angel delivered Peter secretly, while an earthquake shook open the doors of the Philippian jail. Peter was led to freedom at the cost of the keepers' lives. Paul and Silas refused to flee and saved the keeper from death by crying: "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here." Peter fled from Herod, while Paul and Silas were escorted from Philippi by the magistrates. Peter's deliverance brought no word of salvation to his captors, while the Philippian jailor and his household were gloriously saved through Paul's deliverance. Throughout, the story of Peter's deliverance emphasizes the stern righteousness associated with the kingdom, especially with the kingdom *rejected*, while Paul's emphasizes the "grace and truth" associated with *"the gospel of the grace of God."*

### **THE DEATH OF HEROD**

"And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country.

"And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.

"And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.

---

<sup>39</sup> Until smitten to death by God.

"And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory, and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

"But the Word of God grew and multiplied."

--Acts 12:20-24.

The attempt of the infamous Herod to enhance his position with the Jews by publicly trying and executing Peter had been thwarted, but God was not yet through with Herod. Herod himself was to be publicly executed--by God.

It appears from the record that the people of Tyre and Sidon had in some way incurred Herod's displeasure to such a degree that he was about to make war on them. The rulers of Tyre and Sidon, however, *needed* peace for economic reasons and came, or sent ambassadors, to seek acceptable terms of the king, approaching him through Blastus, his chamberlain.

Whatever the exact outcome, satisfactory peace terms were evidently agreed upon, and Herod decided to make a public speech in connection with the matter.

Upon the day appointed, therefore, Herod appeared in royal apparel and, from his throne, spoke to the people, who shouted in response: "*It is the voice of a god, and not of a man!*" This pleased Herod greatly and he accepted the blasphemous adulation without remonstrance.

Herod was not, of course, the first ruler in Scripture to accept worship as a god from his subjects, but none who had gone before had been so guilty as he, for he well knew that there was but one God--the God of Israel--and that the true God was a "jealous God," who would in no wise give His glory to another.

Thus "an<sup>40</sup> angel of the Lord" smote Herod, and he died a far more ignominious death than that which he had planned for Peter. Josephus tells us that the attack took hold of him suddenly as he stood receiving the worship of the people, and that he had to be carried away, writhing and groaning in pain.

And thus, God had disposed of the matter. Peter, the condemned prisoner, was free, while Herod, who had "intended" to slay him, was himself put to death. When the angel "smote" Peter (Ver. 7) he brought deliverance and life; when he "smote" Herod (Ver. 23) he brought destruction and death. And whereas Herod's words were silenced by judgment, "the Word of God grew and multiplied" (Ver. 24).

### ISRAEL'S GROWING APOSTASY

It is evident from the record in Acts that Herod's speech was delivered not merely to the princes of Tyre and Sidon, but to the general public, and the fact

---

<sup>40</sup> Not "*the angel.*"

that the throng in Jerusalem could extol this false "king of the Jews" as "a god" while continuing to reject their own Messiah, indicates the length to which Israel's apostasy had gone.

But the homage paid to Herod as a god by his hearers at Jerusalem was not only significant of their apostasy at that time; it was also typical of the future result of their apostasy; their subjugation to the "Man of Sin" in the end time. Our Lord had well said:

"I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (John 5:43).

### **HEROD A TYPE OF THE COMING MAN OF SIN**

Herod, whose reign over Israel was backed by Caesar's power rather than by royal right, was, of course, a type of Antichrist, who, backed by the power of a future world-ruler, called "the Beast," will one day pose as Israel's divine King and receive the worship of mankind. Like Herod, he too will be suddenly slain by the Lord Himself.

Daniel says of this coming "Herod":

"... He shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god... and shall prosper til the indignation be accomplished . . ." (Dan. 11:36).

Paul, by the Spirit, says of him:

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day [the day of the Lord] shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

"Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

"And then shall that Wicked [one] be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming" (II Thes. 2:3,4,8).

### **PETER'S EXPERIENCE COMPARED WITH PAUL'S LATER EXPERIENCES**

This experience of Peter's may be further compared with experiences which Paul later went through. In this experience, as on former occasions, Peter was miraculously and completely delivered from the hands of his persecutors. By

comparison, while an *earthquake*<sup>41</sup> did open the doors of Philippi's prison for Paul and Silas, they declined to accept the opportunity to escape (Acts 16:27,28) and later we find Paul in Rome as "an ambassador in bonds," with neither angel nor earthquake to save him. What greater proof could there be of the evil character of this age and of the infinite grace of God toward His enemies, than this ambassador of Christ sending forth a message of grace and reconciliation from his prison cell?

It should also be noted that whereas Peter, upon his previous deliverance by an angel, had been commanded to go back into the temple at once and continue preaching, he now withdraws from the scene and throughout the rest of Acts Paul is the chief actor. Surely all this indicates a change in dispensation, as do the other departures from the kingdom program which we have already noted, beginning with the conversion of Saul.

---

<sup>41</sup> More *providential* in character than the direct interventions by which God sent His angel to deliver Peter (Acts 5:19; 12:7).



## **Chapter XXI - Acts 12:25—13:13**

### **PAUL BEGINS HIS APOSTOLIC JOURNEYS**

#### **BARNABAS AND SAUL SENT FORTH BY THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH**

"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

"Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work where-unto I have called them.

"And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."

--Acts 12:25--13:3.

#### **THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH FIRMLY ESTABLISHED**

Upon the completion of their ministry to the needy Judaeen saints, Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John Mark, Barnabas' nephew ([Col. 4:10](#)) and son of the Mary at whose home the prayer meeting for Peter had been recently held (Acts 12:12). We will learn more about John Mark later.

The church at Antioch had by now become well established. We have already learned concerning Barnabas and Saul that prior to their departure for Jerusalem, *"a whole year they assembled themselves with the church [at Antioch] and taught much people"* (11:26). Now, upon their return, we read of three others ministering with them, and the "as" of 13:1 implies that there were still others. Among those named we even find Manaen, the foster brother<sup>42</sup> of the Herod who had beheaded John the Baptist.

---

<sup>42</sup> See R. V.

BLACK SEA



PAUL'S  
FIRST  
APOSTOLIC  
JOURNEY

## THE DISPENSATIONAL SETTING OF ACTS 13:1-3

Even so, this was but the *beginning* of the new work which God was doing among the Gentiles, nor had God as yet concluded His dealings with the nation Israel. Through the rest of Acts, therefore, we shall see the old program fade out gradually as the new is gradually ushered in.

That the old program had only *begun* to give way to the new is evident from several of the details here recorded.

First, we read of *prophets* at the head of the church at Antioch.

A prophet was not necessarily, as is commonly supposed, one who predicted the future - though prediction is one element frequently found in prophecy--but rather *one who spoke for God*. The prophet, in both the Old and New Testament sense of the word, was God's *spokesman*. Thus the one phrase which we most naturally associate with prophecy is: "*Thus saith the Lord*." At Pentecost, of course, the *gift* of prophecy was *widely* bestowed in connection with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

It must not be supposed that those who now proclaim the *written* Word of God are prophets in the proper Scriptural sense, for both the Old and New Testaments indicate that prophecy was a *supernatural* means by which God made known His will while as yet the written Word remained incomplete.<sup>43</sup> In Old Testament times the prophets frequently received their messages by visions or other means of divine communication. In the passage we are considering this much is still so, and more, for at Pentecost God gave to certain of His saints the supernatural "*gift*" of prophecy (Rom. 12:6; I Cor. 12:8-10 and cf. I Cor. 13:8-13).<sup>44</sup>

As to *The Revelation*, this was doubtless written by John considerably after Paul's death, but *The Revelation* simply develops further the *details* of the *prophetic* program, for the special enlightenment of those who will be living when these things come to pass. Thus it is *Paul*, not John, who declares that it was given to him to "fulfil [complete] the Word of God," i.e., *doctrinally*, with the revelation of the mystery (Col. 1:24-26).

Saul, one of the prophets mentioned in the passage we are considering was, of course, *more* than a prophet. He was *also* an *apostle*, and that in the *primary*

---

<sup>43</sup> This is not to say that teaching or exhortation from the written Word was not *included* in their ministry.

<sup>44</sup> It may be argued, of course, that the written Word was not complete even at Acts 28, but basically it was, for the foundation of the great revelation to Paul had by then been laid. The prison epistles simply develop further the theme introduced in the early epistles: the mystery of God's purpose *concerning* the Joint body which had already been brought into being. Even Eph. 3:5 employs the perfect tense in the phrase "as it *hath now been* revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit" (R.V.). It does not seem, therefore, that the *gift* of prophecy would continue to be necessary after Acts 28.

sense of the word, for he had received his message by the revelation of Jesus Christ Himself (Gal. 1:11,12).<sup>45</sup>

It was appropriate, then, that God should give "prophets" as well as teachers to the church at Antioch, for this was but the commencement of the great work God was about to do among the Gentiles, and besides Paul himself, who spoke with peculiar authority, it was necessary that there should be others who, by revelation of the Spirit, could confirm his word and thus help to establish the saints in the grace of God (Cf. here Eph. 3:1,3,5).

In connection with the gift of prophecy, we read further that "*the Holy Ghost said ...*" (13:2) that is, He revealed His will to the leaders at Antioch by *direct communication*. This was in perfect harmony with the gift of prophecy. We remember how, in the case of the other Saul, Israel's first king, the prophet Samuel received divine instructions in the same way, as "*the Lord said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of!*" (I Sam. 9:17).

It must be clearly understood, of course, that these supernatural gifts of "prophecy" and of "knowledge" have long since passed away. With respect to these gifts the Apostle Paul specifically stated, while they were still in existence:

"... WHETHER THERE BE PROPHECIES, THEY SHALL BE DONE AWAY; WHETHER THERE BE TONGUES, THEY SHALL CEASE; WHETHER THERE BE KNOWLEDGE, IT SHALL BE DONE AWAY (I Cor. 13:8, R. V.).

"BUT NOW ABIDETH FAITH, HOPE, LOVE, THESE THREE; AND THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE" (I Cor. 13:13, R. V.).

Thus the Holy Spirit has withdrawn the gifts of "prophecy" and "knowledge" along with the other supernatural gifts. Today we are to beware of those who claim to speak by the authority of some special revelation, nor must we expect the Holy Spirit to speak to us in direct communication. Many a wrong step has been taken by sincere believers because emotional reactions have been mistaken for facts, and it has been unscripturally supposed that "*The Lord told me*" to do this or that. Even with respect to the understanding of the Scriptures the gift of knowledge has been withdrawn. The Spirit does not miraculously communicate the knowledge of His Word to certain individuals, or to those who may ask for it. It is only by prayerful and diligent *study of the Word* that the Holy Spirit enlightens and equips us to be workmen approved of God, not needing to be ashamed and rightly dividing the Word of truth (II Tim. 2:15).

---

<sup>45</sup> Who had already appeared to him on the road to Damascus (I Cor. 15:8,9; Acts 26:16) at Jerusalem (Acts 22:17,18) and probably again and again during his stay in Arabia (Gal. 1:17).

As to John himself having the "*gift*" of prophecy so long after Paul's death, we do not believe this to be a fact. There is a difference between the "gift" of prophecy and the Holy Spirit's work in moving men to write the Scriptures.

There are three other terms in this passage which should also be considered in the light of dispensational truth, though they fall into a somewhat different category:

"*They ministered unto the Lord*" (13:2). The original word for "ministered" (*leitourgeo*) is used in connection with the service of the priests in Old Testament times, and it is therefore supposed by some that the thought here is that the leaders of the church at Antioch were engaged in the observance of Judaistic ceremonies.

But the word *leitourgeo* itself does not have a ritualistic connotation. It means simply *service*, and is used of financial aid (Rom. 15:27; Phil. 2:25, 30) of angelic succour (Heb. 1:14) of gospel ministry (Rom. 15:16) etc. Nor does the fact that our English word *liturgy* is derived from this word affect its Scriptural significance, for the original does not get its meaning from the derivative, but the derivative from the original. Thus our word *liturgy* comes from the Greek *leitourgeo*, which simply means *service*. These believers at Antioch, then, were simply *servicing* the Lord. There is no point in bringing them farther back into the old program than they were!

The *fasting* here, too, is thought by some to belong to the law of Moses, whereas in fact Moses' law does not command fasting. There are numerous cases of voluntary fasting in the pre-Pauline Scriptures, however, and it is also evident that those who sat in "Moses' seat" had prescribed periods of fasting and had added them to the law. Thus the practice acquired a Judaistic flavor. In general, however, fasting was a very natural thing. Frequently it was simply the burden of prayer for some deep need that caused the supplicants to neglect or even to deliberately put off their meals. At other times it was occupation with the Word of God. Job said: "*I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food*" (Job 23:12). There is nothing in this that is inconsistent with the dispensation under which we live, and it is surely pleasing to God at any time, if His people are so deeply exercised about spiritual things, so intensely occupied with prayer or the study of the Word, that they neglect or put aside the thought of food for a time.

On the other hand, no believer in this dispensation of grace can *subject* himself to *prescribed fasts* without coming under the bondage and condemnation of legalism (Gal. 4:9,10; 5:1,13; Col. 2:20,21). Nor will fasting accomplish anything as a means of increasing our spirituality or obtaining blessings from God (Col. 2:20-23).<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> As we write this, the newspapers report the death, by starvation, of a pastor in Missouri, after 51 days of fasting. A note, explaining his purpose, reads: "*I am seeking the more perfect will of God for my own life and asking God to show me why the signs do not follow my ministry as Jesus said they would.*" This is but one of the pathetic results of the popular teaching that the commission to Peter and the eleven, rather than that of II Cor. 5:14-21, constitutes our "marching orders."

The laying on of hands in this passage is still another matter which should be considered in the light of dispensational truth.

It is true that during the Acts period the Holy Spirit, or some special gift of the Spirit, was frequently imparted by the laying on of hands (Acts 8:18, etc.). Nevertheless the laying on of hands in itself did not necessarily involve anything miraculous. The practice, in Old and New Testaments alike, simply signified *identification*.

Surely the "laying on of hands" referred to in Heb. 6:2 involved nothing miraculous. It was simply the high priest identifying himself and his people with the scapegoat and placing their sins, symbolically, upon the head of the goat (Lev. 16:21). Nor is there any indication that the leaders at Antioch imparted to Barnabas and Saul, their superiors, any miraculous powers by laying their hands upon them. Nor, even, do we see anything *ritualistic* about the laying on of hands here, any more than there was in the extending of "the right hand of fellowship" to Paul and Barnabas by James, Cephas and John in Gal. 2:9. What the leaders at Antioch did here was simply to identify themselves publicly with Barnabas and Saul in the ministry which these two were now to undertake, signifying in this way that they recognized their call into this ministry and that they would stand behind them in it.

### **PAUL NOT WORKING UNDER THE "GREAT COMMISSION"**

*"The Church is at length prepared, after more than sixteen years, to begin formally and deliberately its work among the heathen."* This is the view held by one commentator<sup>47</sup> on the opening verses of Acts 13 and this is the view popularly held by Fundamentalists. This view, of course, springs from the unfounded notion that under the so-called "great commission" the eleven (later made twelve) were sent to proclaim *"the gospel of the grace of God"* but that they proved unfaithful to their charge because of their "narrow prejudice against the Gentiles," and that therefore it became necessary for God to raise up Paul and send *him* to the Gentiles.

This, even though Peter earnestly besought Israel to repent *so that salvation and blessing might go to the Gentiles!* (Acts 3:19-26). This, though the Judaeans elders *"glorified God"* when Peter had explained how the household of Cornelius had been saved! (Acts 11:18). This, though the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to foster the new Gentile work at Antioch (Acts 11:22) and though Barnabas, "when he came, and had seen the grace of God, *was glad*, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11:23). This, even though Paul's report to the Jerusalem leaders as to "the conversion of the Gentiles... *caused great joy unto all the brethren*" (Acts 15:3).

---

<sup>47</sup> Stifler in *Introduction to The Acts*, P. 112.

In his *Silence of God*, Sir Robert Anderson says regarding the fact that the Pentecostal believers had thus far gone to Jews only:

"... if any are prepared to account for it by Jewish prejudice and ignorance, they may at once throw down this volume, for it is here assumed that the apostles of the Lord, speaking and acting in the memorable days of Pentecostal power, were divinely guided in their work and testimony" (Pp. 76,77).

Strange it is that the same commentators who tell us that the twelve failed to carry out their commission because they were "carnal" and "unfaithful," usually *also* tell us that if we were but as spiritual and faithful as the twelve, we could have the same power as they!

Regarding the Pentecostal ministry of the twelve, Anderson says again:

"The apostles were divinely guided to declare that if, even then, the 'men of Israel' repented, their Messiah would return to fulfil to them all that their own prophets had foretold and promised of spiritual and national blessing.

"To represent this as *Christian doctrine*, or the institution of 'a new religion,' is to betray ignorance alike of Judaism and of Christianity. The speakers were Jews--the apostles of One who was Himself 'a minister of the circumcision.' Their hearers were Jews, and as Jews they were addressed. The Pentecostal Church which was based upon their testimony was intensely and altogether Jewish" (*The Silence of God*, Pp. 74,75).

Mark well, Anderson says they were "divinely guided" in all this. The contention that the twelve were delinquent in their duty and *did not wish* to bring salvation to the Gentiles is little better than the view of the Modernist minister who recently wrote: "The Master himself was at first narrow and confined in his outlook. Recall how he bade his disciples: '*Go not into the way of the Gentiles ... but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*' But later on he too broadened by experience and directed these same disciples: '*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations.*'"

This Modernist makes the same blunder with respect to Matt. 10:5,6 that our Fundamentalist brethren make with respect to the "great commission." *Both* forget that before the raising up of Paul *all* was based on the great Abrahamic Covenant and the Old Testament promises that *through Israel* the nations should be blessed ([Gen. 22:17, 18](#); [Isa. 60:1-3](#); etc.). This is why our Lord concentrated on bringing Israel to repentance and salvation, and this is why the apostles' ministry under the "great commission" commenced with Israel ([Luke 24:47](#); [Acts 1:8](#)). The one great difference between the commission in Matt. 10 and that given after the resurrection is that the one given after the resurrection assumed that Israel would now repent and that salvation could then be proclaimed among the Gentiles.

But this is all separate and distinct from the commission later given to the Apostle Paul. The glorified Lord had not called Paul to fulfil a mission which the twelve had failed to carry out. He had raised up Paul to do *another* work, a work which the commission to the twelve did not at all contemplate. *The twelve* had been commissioned to bring all nations to Messiah's feet, *beginning with Israel* (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 3:25,26). *Paul*, under a new program, was sent to proclaim grace to the Gentiles *on account of Israel's rebellion* (Acts 22:17-21; Acts 13:45-47). The ministry of *the twelve* was based on the hope of Israel's response to the call to repentance and Messiah's speedy return to reign as King. *Paul's* ministry was based upon Israel's continued impenitence and the outpouring of grace from the rejected--and glorified--Lord.

In I Cor. 15:5,8 Paul speaks of himself as separate from the twelve. He had first been called as an apostle on the road to Damascus, far from Jerusalem, entirely apart from the authority of the twelve and independent of their "great commission." And now he is sent to go "far hence" into Gentile territory, *by the church at Antioch*, again entirely apart from the authority of the twelve and independent of their "great commission." Indeed, one of the twelve had already died.

### **THE BEGINNING OF THE PRESENT DISPENSATION**

Much has been written on the question of the historical beginning of the dispensation of grace and of the Body of Christ,<sup>48</sup> but it is well that we take careful account of doctrinal and spiritual consequences in this matter, lest we confuse majors with minors and so become indifferent to serious errors on the one hand or quibble about trivialities on the other.

As we have already pointed out, it is *serious error* to hold that the new dispensation began at Pentecost with Peter and the eleven working under the "great commission."

This error denies the absolute distinctiveness of Paul's apostleship and makes his ministry a perpetuation of that of the twelve. It makes of him simply an *additional* apostle, also called to work under the "great commission," although he is supposed to have "developed further" the truths the twelve were sent to proclaim.

---

<sup>48</sup> There is no warrant for divorcing the mystery of the Body from the dispensation of grace, for the mystery is the dispensation of grace, as is clear from Eph. 3:2,3: "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation de made known unto me the mystery." Thus the Body (the subject of the mystery) is the *product* of the dispensation of grace. Believing Jews and Gentiles, by grace and on the basis of Christ's finished work, are reconciled to God in one body (See Rom. 11:32; Eph. 2:16; 3:1-11).



This error lies at the root of the confusion that has gripped the Church ever since it turned away from Paul at the close of the apostolic era. It accounts for the debating among Fundamentalist leaders of our day, as to "which of the commissions" (in The Gospels and The Acts) is for our obedience. It explains why, after nineteen hundred years, *the leaders of Fundamentalism are still disagreed as to what our commission is, or exactly what we are to do and teach.*

It has resulted in endless strife and division over water baptism, the work of the Holy Spirit and the return of Christ--matters soon clarified once the distinctive ministry of Paul is recognized. The most conspicuous modern product of this error has been the Pentecostal fanaticism which has swept the "Christian" world on the wings of the Fundamentalist argument that we are to obey the "great commission" and in response to its cry: "*Back to Pentecost!*"

Mr. A. E. Bishop, in his pamphlet, *Tongues, Signs and Visions*, has well asked:

"Is it the Spirit of God or Satan who turns the eyes of sincere Christians back to Pentecost and away from the goal placed before them in Ephesians, Philipplans and Colossians?"

And Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer has rightly reasoned:

"... How much of the present sectarian confusion and sin might have been obviated had there been a clear and primary emphasis upon the Pauline doctrine of the true Church cannot be determined..." (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. IV, P. 147).

But the teaching that the present dispensation, or the Body of Christ, did not have its historical beginning until after the close of Acts is no less serious an error, for whereas Satan has succeeded in *confusing* and *obscuring* the great revelation from the glorified Lord on the one hand, he has succeeded in *dividing it in two* on the other, so that Paul's early epistles are supposed not to be addressed to members of the joint Body, but are "largely Jewish," having "the kingdom reign of Christ in view." In our book *The Fundamentals of Dispensationalism*, we have dealt at length with this blunder and have shown not only that Paul's early ministry, according to the Acts record, was primarily among the *Gentiles*, not the Jews,<sup>49</sup> but also that *all* his early epistles were *addressed to Gentiles* in the flesh. But here suffice it to say that the seriousness of this error lies in the fact that it denies that Paul's early epistles have the mystery and the joint Body in view; indeed, that they have particularly to do with us at all Thus the believer is robbed of the very truths which form the foundation of the mystery and were meant for his instruction and obedience as a member of the Body of Christ.

---

<sup>49</sup> He went to the Jew first in his early ministry, but that is a very different thing. God was not to leave Israel with excuse when He set the nation aside.

*Acts 28 marks an ending, not a beginning.* There God, through Paul, pronounces the sentence of doom upon that generation in Israel (Acts 28:25-28). But it does not follow from this that the new dispensation began at this time. Those who suppose so fail entirely to see the development, the sweep of progress, in the unfolding of God's wonderful plan. The early epistles of Paul and the latter half of Acts afford an overwhelming mass of evidence that the new dispensation emerged *gradually* as the old *gradually* disappeared (See Acts 13:38-41,46,47; 15:1-29; 18:6; 20:24,32; 28:28; Rom. 1:13-16; 3:21-28; 11:32,33; I Cor. 1:17,18,23; 2:6,7; II Cor. 5:14-21; Gal. 2:2,7,9; etc.).

To divide Paul's ministry into two (as the Acts 28 theory does) is fully as serious as to confuse it with that of the twelve (as the Acts 2 theory does). Both theories tamper with the Scriptural doctrine of Paul's distinctive ministry and authority.

Whereas the Acts 2 theory denies the absolute distinctiveness of Paul's apostleship and ministry by its assumption that the twelve under the "great commission" preached "the gospel of the grace of God" as Paul later did, the Acts 28 theory does the same by its assumption that Paul preached "the gospel of the circumcision" as the twelve had done. But nowhere do we read that Paul had "*two gospels*," one proclaimed before the close of Acts and the other after. In both the earlier and later epistles it is "*my gospel*," in the singular (Rom. 2:16; II Tim. 2:8) and it seems to us that the curse of Gal. 1:8,9 must rest as heavily upon those who divide his gospel in two as upon those who confuse it with the Pentecostal message.<sup>50</sup>

It is true that Paul *confirmed* the message of the twelve; so do we, because what they preached was true; and so did Peter confirm Paul's message (II Pet. 3:15,16). It is also true that Paul was saved under the old dispensation and emerged from it gradually, but from his conversion on he was specially called to proclaim, more and more fully, *one* great message: "*the gospel of the grace of God*" (Acts 20:24). He was to be a minister and a witness of the things *which he HAD SEEN*<sup>51</sup> and of those things in which the Lord was still to APPEAR to Him (Acts 26:16; cf. Gal. 1:11,12).

In the light of their mutilation of the great Pauline message, it is not without significance that the doctrinal confusion among those who hold that the

---

<sup>50</sup> Dr. Arno C. Gaebelein wrote with regard to this anathema by Paul: "He spoke of this Gospel which he preached as 'my gospel.' In defense of that Gospel, the dispensation of the grace of *God*, he wrote to the *Galatians*, 'But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if anyone preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.' These are solemn words. They have occasionally *been* termed a passionate outburst of Paul, when he found his authority belittled by the Judaizing teachers who troubled the Galatians. They were not that at all the curse of God must surely rest upon those who pervert or counterfeit that Gospel" (*God's Masterpiece*, P. 117).

<sup>51</sup> At his conversion.

dispensation began at or after Acts 28 is fully as great as it is among those who hold that it began at Pentecost.

There is one position, with regard to the beginning of the Church of this dispensation which stands the test of the Word rightly divided. It may be stated as follows:

The Body of Christ had its historical beginning with Paul, before he wrote his first epistle.

Among those who hold this position there may be some difference of *opinion* as to the precise time of beginning, but here is where we must take care to distinguish between majors and minors, lest we "strain at a gnat and swallow a camel."

The "Acts 2" and "Acts 28" theories are not only technically incorrect but *both do violence to the Pauline revelation and both affect our doctrine and program* as members of the Body of Christ. But neither the Pauline message nor our doctrine and practice as members of the Body are in any way affected by the views that the Body began at Acts 9, Acts 13 or somewhere between. This difference affects only the interpretation of the chapters between and such individual verses as may be related. Hence the difference of opinion here is not a vital one and should not be made a serious point of issue.

Or look at it in another way. Can we *prove* by the Scriptures that the Body did not begin at Pentecost with Peter and the eleven? Yes, we can. Can we *prove* by the Scriptures that it did *not* begin at or after Acts 28? Yes, we can. Can we *prove* by the Scriptures that it began with Paul before he wrote his first epistle? Yes, we can. But do the Scriptures say, in so many words, exactly when it began? No, not in so many words. Is there any Scripture passage which might leave a clear implication as to the historical beginning of the dispensation of grace and of the Body of Christ? As to this there may be some difference of opinion but, be it remembered, the difference is *technical*, in no way affecting either our doctrine or our practice. Let us therefore not make an issue where God does not make one.

True Bereans, however, will consider even these minor differences with open minds, in the light of the Word, for every individual passage of Scripture is related to the whole, and a clearer understanding of any one will help to clarify our understanding of the entire plan.

### **WHEN DID THE PRESENT DISPENSATION BEGIN?**

Many able Bible teachers believe that the Body, or the new dispensation, had its historical beginning here in the passage we have been considering (Acts 13).

Generally speaking, they hold this view on the grounds that here Paul was separated to begin his Gentile ministry, that the wording indicates the commencement of a new program and that Saul's name was changed to Paul in connection with an incident which all dispensationalists look upon as dispensationally significant.

In the light of the Scriptural background, however, we have not been convinced that these arguments are valid or, for the most part, even correct.

First, this passage does not say anything about the beginning of the Body or of a new dispensation any more than Acts 9 does. In fact we have already pointed out no less than *eight significant departures* from the old dispensation prior to Acts 13.

Furthermore, Paul was not here separated to *begin* his Gentile ministry. He had already labored for a considerable time among the Gentiles in this very city for, as we have shown, the word "*Grecians*" in the Authorized Version of Acts 11:20 should have been rendered "Greeks" (Gentiles) as in the Revised Version. The larger context amply confirms this, for it was this church the Judaizers sought to bring under the law (15:1) and whose liberty as a body of Gentiles Paul went to Jerusalem to defend ([Acts 15:1-3, 7-10, 13-19, 23-31](#)).

Moreover, this "separation" of Saul was not his *call* as an apostle or a minister among the Gentiles. He had already been called to this ministry by "*the revelation of Jesus Christ*" ([Acts 26:16-18; 22:17-25; Gal. 1:11,12](#)). This was rather the *Spirit* leading *the church at Antioch* to give him up for the "work" to which he had *already* been called; i.e., going "*far hence*" among the Gentiles. Paul, like the twelve, was appointed an apostle by the Lord Jesus Christ, not primarily by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, a personal commission by Christ was the prerequisite of apostleship ([Rom. 1:5; I Cor. 9:1](#)).

But the mere quotation of Acts 13:2 brings another pertinent question to mind: If this passage marks the beginning of the new dispensation to be ushered in by Paul; the dispensation of which he, preeminently, is to be the apostle, why is he not mentioned *alone* or why do we not at least read: "Separate me Paul *and Barnabas* [as his helper]" rather than "Separate me Barnabas *and Saul*"?

This passage does not refer only to Paul, or even to Paul and Barnabas, as one would gather from many a commentary. The passage reads: "*Separate me Barnabas and Saul.*" It was Barnabas who had first brought Saul into this ministry among the Gentiles (Acts 11:25,26) and "Barnabas and Saul" are again referred to in that order until Acts 13:13, where we read of "*Paul and his company.*" However, twice in Acts 14 and again twice in Acts 15 we find "*Barnabas and Paul,*" with Barnabas again mentioned first. We do not believe, therefore, that the wording of this passage indicates that a new order or dispensation is being ushered in here.

Again, we do not read that Saul's name was *changed* to Paul. If it *had* been, and the change *did* signify a change in dispensation, then, it seems to us, it should have been changed to Paul, and Paul should have been mentioned alone, or at least first, in verse 2, where the "Separate me" is also supposed to signify the ushering in of the new dispensation. But it is in Verse 9, after "Barnabas and Saul" had already begun their ministry in Paphos, that we read that Saul was "*also called Paul.*" It is entirely possible that he had been called *Paul* by the Grecians and Gentiles from his youth for, remember, he was a born citizen of Rome.

The fact that from Acts 13:9 on Luke, by the Spirit, calls him Paul and that before long his name consistently *precedes* those of Barnabas and Silas, when it is mentioned with theirs, is, of course, significant, but *not* necessarily significant of the historical beginning of the Body of Christ, for neither of these things happened when he was "separated" from the church at Antioch. What all this signifies is simply Paul's ascendancy over others as God's minister to the Gentiles.

We believe that Paul's *conversion and call to apostleship* marks the beginning<sup>52</sup> of the new dispensation and of the Body of Christ. We believe his *conversion* is the natural, logical and Scriptural place for its beginning, for the following reasons:

1. As the twelve apostles represented the twelve tribes of Israel so Paul, as *one* apostle, represents the Body of Christ, the *oneness* of which is consistently emphasized in Scripture ([Rom. 12:5](#); [I Cor. 12:13](#); [Eph. 4:4](#); etc.).

2. Especially is this so since Paul, like the Body, was two-in-one. He was a *born Hebrew and a born Roman* (and intensely both) in one person ([Phil. 3:5](#); [Acts 16:37](#); [21:39](#); [22:25,28](#); [25:9,11](#)). Moreover he was an *enemy, reconciled to God* by abundant grace. In this he is the natural representative of the *joint* Body, composed of Jews and Gentiles *reconciled to God* by grace ([Eph. 2:16](#)).

3. Several Scripture passages clearly imply, if they do not actually say, that the new dispensation began with Paul's *conversion*. We quote:

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

"HOWBEIT FOR THIS CAUSE I OBTAINED MERCY, THAT IN ME FIRST<sup>53</sup> JESUS CHRIST MIGHT SHOW FORTH ALL LONGSUFFERING, FOR A PAT-

---

<sup>52</sup> We stress the word *beginning* for until the close of Acts the old dispensation is but *gradually* displaced by the new.

<sup>53</sup> Same word as "chief" in Verse 15.

TERN TO THEM WHICH SHOULD HEREAFTER BELIEVE ON HIM TO LIFE EVERLASTING" (I Tim. 1:15,16).

It has been supposed that the apostle's conversion was a pattern, or type, of Israel's future conversion because the Lord appeared to Saul, as He will one day appear to Israel. But some circumstances in connection with Paul's conversion seem far from typical of Israel's conversion, neither does I Tim. 1:16 say that *Christ appeared to him as a pattern*, but rather that *Jesus Christ showed all longsuffering to him as a pattern*<sup>54</sup> to those who should thereafter believe on Him to life everlasting. Thus he prefaces his statement with the words: "*And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant.*"

All this should certainly be compared with one verse which specifically deals with the ushering in of the new dispensation. We refer to Rom. 5:20:

"Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. BUT WHERE SIN ABOUNDED, GRACE DID MUCH MORE ABOUND."

To this passage many others might be added which confirm the fact that "*all longsuffering*" and "*the riches of His grace*" particularly characterize the present dispensation (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; etc.) And this "*grace . . . exceeding abundant*" was first shown to *Paul* in his conversion, as "*a pattern*" to those who after him should believe on Christ to life everlasting.

It is true that in I Cor. 15:8 Paul speaks of himself as one born "*out of [lit. before] due time*" but this associates him more closely with the members of the Body than it does with Israel. The "due time" for Israel's conversion, according to prophecy, is still future. The "due time" for the Gentiles' conversion is also future, for according to prophecy the Gentiles are to be saved *through* Israel (Gen. 22:17,18; Rom. 15:8,9). We, whether Jews or Gentiles, are saved, like Paul, *before* the due time, not on the basis of any covenant but by *pure grace*; not according to prophecy, but according to *the mystery*.

4. In Acts 9 attention is focused entirely on *Paul*, first as "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" and then as gloriously saved, commissioned and filled with the Spirit. Nor is the emphasis on Paul in any way modified. It is not "Saul and Barnabas," much less "Barnabas and Saul," but *Saul*.

5. Perhaps the most important indication that the new dispensation began before Acts 13 and at Paul's *conversion and call to apostleship*, is the number of significant departures from the old program to the new that took place in the period covered by Acts 9 to Acts 13.

---

<sup>54</sup> Note: Even the details associated with his conversion are not said to be a pattern to *us*, but only the Lord's longsuffering and grace to him.

The call of Paul as an apostle, separate from the twelve, is in itself an indication that God was about to launch a new program: indeed Paul's call was *the launching of it*.

Further departures: Paul was not saved as a repentant Jew seeking baptism for the remission of sins. He was baptized three days after his conversion. Then Peter was sent to Gentiles even though Israel had not yet repented. The Holy Spirit interrupted his message and these Gentiles received salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit *apart* from baptism (cf. [Mark 16:15-18](#); [Acts 2:38](#)). They were baptized *after* being saved and receiving the Holy Spirit. Then Gentiles were saved at Antioch, not because of Israel's conversion but because of the persecution at Jerusalem which drove disciples into their vicinity. Next the "kingdom prosperity" ([Acts 4:34,35](#)) broke down and the Gentile believers at Antioch sent help, "every man according to his ability," to the needy saints in Jerusalem. Then James was slain with the sword and the other James, the Lord's brother in the flesh, began to take the precedence even over Peter.

These are some distinct indications that the old dispensation was already *beginning to pass away* and that the new had already *begun to dawn*.

In the opening verses of Acts 13, then, we have simply another step in the development of the ministry to which Paul had already been called. Indeed, in the original there is a particle following the imperative "Separate me," which has no exact equivalent in English and has therefore been overlooked or ignored by most translators. The nearest translation would probably be: "*Separate me then Barnabas and Saul,*" as though it was the next step in an already revealed program and was doubtless expected by the leaders of the Church as they engaged in prayer and service to the Lord.

### **PAUL'S FIRST APOSTOLIC JOURNEY**

"So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

"And when they were at Salamis, they preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

"And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus:

"Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the Word of God.

"But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

"Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,

"And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

"And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

"Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

"Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem."

--Acts 13:4-13.

## PAUL'S APOSTLESHIP

We have called this journey on which Barnabas and Saul were sent by the Spirit, Paul's first *apostolic* journey, for the reason that the more popular phrase, "Paul's first *missionary* journey," has left many with the false impression that Paul was simply a foreign missionary as we think of foreign missionaries today. Paul, it is supposed, merely *travelled farther* than the twelve, with the message *they* had been sent to proclaim. And thus our adversary has scored another victory in his attempt to obscure the fact that Paul was an *apostle* as fully as were the twelve, chosen and commissioned by the ascended Lord independently of them; that in view of Israel's rejection of *their* offer of the kingdom, God had raised up *Paul* to proclaim a *new* message, "*the gospel of the grace of God,*" among all nations.

Further, we have called this journey "*Paul's* first apostolic journey," rather than that of Barnabas and Saul, because it is at the very outset of the record of this journey that the Spirit first uses Saul's other name, Paul, and begins referring to "*Paul and his company*" (Ver. 13) "*Paul and Barnabas*" (Vers. 43, 46, 50) etc. Indeed, rarely after this do we find Barnabas mentioned before Paul. Now it is *Paul* who pronounces blindness upon Elymas (13:9-11). It is *Paul* who rises to speak in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (13:16). And from here on until the close of Acts the ascendancy of Paul as God's man for the day becomes more and more pronounced.

As to the significance of the name *Paul*, it is generally agreed to be his Roman name, being the Latin word for *little*. It may also, however, be derived from the Greek word *Pau*, meaning pause, or *interval* with, of course, the masculine ending. Either would be significant, for again and again the apostle



insists that *he* is nothing, while the message he is sent to proclaim deals with a pause, or interval of grace, in the program of God as outlined by the Old Testament prophets.

## TO THE JEW FIRST

So far as the record goes, the first ministry in which Paul and Barnabas engaged on this journey was at Salamis, on Barnabas' native island, **Cyprus**.<sup>55</sup> The careful reader will observe that while Paul and Barnabas had been sent to labor chiefly among the Gentiles, they went first to the synagogues of Salamis, to minister the Word of God to their Jewish kinsmen. This became, and continued to be, Paul's practice in all his journeys among the Gentiles until the close of the period covered by the Book of Acts. Consistently he went "to the Jew First," until, from his prison in Rome, he pronounced the sentence: "*Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is [Lit. has been] sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it*" (Acts 28:28).

There were at least three reasons why Paul made it a point to minister to the Jew first all this time. *First*, so that individual Jews outside of Palestine might be given an opportunity to place their trust in the rejected Messiah and be saved. *Second*, so that the nation as a whole, including Jews of the dispersion, might be without excuse before God when He set them aside for rejecting Christ. *Third*, so that they might have no reason to complain that salvation was being sent to the Gentiles apart from their instrumentality, since everywhere, from Jerusalem to Rome, salvation had been sent to the Gentiles *because the Jews refused it*, thereby disqualifying themselves as the agents of God's blessing to the nations.

In the three most prominent passages in Acts, where Paul declares his purpose to go to the Gentiles, he makes it clear that he will do this because the Jews have spurned the message themselves.

Acts 13:46, "... SEEING YE PUT IT FROM YOU, AND JUDGE YOURSELVES UNWORTHY OF EVERLASTING LIFE, LO, WE TURN TO THE GENTILES."

Acts 18:6, "... YOUR BLOOD BE UPON YOUR OWN HEADS; I AM CLEAN: FROM HENCEFORTH I WILL GO UNTO THE GENTILES."

Acts 28:27,28, "FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE IS WAXED GROSS, AND THEIR EARS ARE DULL OF HEARING, AND THEIR EYES HAVE THEY CLOSED; LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART..."

"BE IT KNOWN THEREFORE UNTO YOU, THAT THE SALVATION OF GOD IS SENT UNTO THE GENTILES, AND THAT THEY WILL HEAR IT."

---

<sup>55</sup> See Acts 4:36.

Thus it is that the apostle writes to the Romans:

"... THROUGH THEIR FALL SALVATION IS COME UNTO THE GENTILES, FOR TO PROVOKE THEM TO JEALOUSY" (Rom. 11:11).

As we have already pointed out, the fact that Paul went to the Jew *first* during his Acts ministry, does not mean, as some have concluded, that Paul's ministry at that time was *primarily*, or *chiefly*, to the Jew, for the record of his journeys in Acts, as well as his epistles written during that time, bear abundant witness that his ministry was principally to the Gentile, not the Jew.

### THE STORY OF BAR-JESUS

And now we come to another of those story-types with which the book of Acts abounds -- a story-type which fits just here. It is a deeply significant account of two Pauls; of a Gentile who desired to hear the Word of God and a Jew who sought to keep it from him; of a Gentile who was saved because a Jew was blinded.

At the other end of Cyprus from Salamis lay **Paphos**, apparently the island's seat of government. In this city lived Sergius Paul, the governor of the island. This Sergius Paul had as his adviser a Jew named Bar-jesus. This in itself is significant, for the Gentiles *should* have received help and light from the Jews, and Sergius Paul was a Roman deputy, a proconsul, representing the Gentile world, while Bar-jesus (Lit., *Son of Jehovah-Savior*) was a prophet, aptly representing Israel, through whom the Gentiles should have found salvation and blessing.

But Israel did *not* bring light and salvation to the Gentiles -- indeed, even sought to keep it from them, and in the light of this fact the story becomes all the more significant.

Bar-jesus, though probably born of pious parents (to have been so named) had become a sorcerer,<sup>56</sup> a *false* prophet. Sergius Paul, on the other hand, is said to have been "a prudent man," and he surely *was* prudent in calling upon Barnabas and Saul to teach him the Word of God.

But when Bar-jesus, or Elymas (Lit. *The Knowing One*) learned of the governor's desire to hear the Word of God, he realized immediately that his own influence over Sergius Paul was imperiled, and "withstood" Barnabas and Saul, "seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith" (Ver. 8).

It was then that Paul showed the deceiver up for what he was and pronounced judgment upon him. Calling the supposed "Son of Jehovah-Savior" a

---

<sup>56</sup> Many ancient heathen rulers had such sorcerers as advisers.

"son of the devil," and charging the trusted adviser with being "full of all subtilty and all mischief," the apostle demanded: *"Wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?"* adding: *"And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season"* (Vers. 9-11).

With this the one who was supposed to have possessed an insight into the unknown was enveloped in "a mist and a darkness" and he who had wielded so great an influence over the governor was rendered powerless, seeking helplessly for someone to lead him by the hand.

Meanwhile Sergius Paul, the Roman deputy, *"when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord"* (Ver. 12).

What a picture we have here of exactly what was taking place with Israel and the Gentiles as recorded in Acts--some of it recorded even in this very chapter!

In this same chapter we find the Gentiles asking to hear the Word of God (Ver. 42) and the Jews, who should themselves have been the instruments of Gentile blessing, withstanding Paul and Barnabas and seeking to turn away the Gentiles from the faith (Ver. 45). Israel, the supposed Son of Jehovah-Savior, God's appointed prophet to the Gentiles is found instead to be a false prophet, a son of the devil, and is given up to judgment (Ver. 46) while the Gentiles receive the truth and rejoice in it (Ver. 48).

Thus again the apostle writes to the Romans:

"What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded

"(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear) unto this day" (Rom. 11:7,8).

One fact that is often overlooked, however, is that Elymas was blinded only "for a season" (Ver. 11). This is significant of the fact that Israel's blindness will some day pass away, for we read again in the epistle to the Romans:

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:25,26).

One more fact, too remarkable to pass over in this account, is that here we have *two Pauls*--two men called "Little." One is a heathen by birth, the other a

member of the chosen race, God's covenant people. But--the member of the chosen race had become a bitter enemy of God and a blasphemer of His Son, so that his position before God was no better--rather worse--than that of the heathen idolator. Now *both* the heathen and the Hebrew must be saved *by grace*, as "little" in themselves, but great to the heart of the Savior who died for them. The religious Hebrew as well as the ungodly heathen must take his stand with the chief of sinners and say: "I too am a sinner, but I will trust Christ as my Savior."

This all has its bearing on the blinding of Elymas and of Israel for a season, for in the present dispensation God is demonstrating that Jew and Gentile must *both* be saved by pure grace and that even when the covenant nation is finally saved, it will only be by grace, through the merits of the Crucified. Thus the mystery had to be revealed before the prophecy could be fulfilled, so that Israel, when finally exalted, might not glory in herself, but in Christ.

### **MARK'S DEPARTURE**

As we know, John Mark had set out with Paul and Barnabas on this journey, but when they reached Perga in Pamphylia he suddenly "departed from them," the record supplying no definite information as to either his activities on the journey or as to his reason for suddenly returning to Jerusalem.

Some have thought that the perils of heathen surroundings may have frightened him. Perhaps the lad simply became homesick. We know he had lived with his mother in Jerusalem in the sheltered surroundings of a large and apparently comfortable home ([Acts 12:12](#), etc.). It would not, therefore, be strange if on so extended a trip into strange and heathen territory, he did become afraid or homesick or both. But more of this in a later lesson.

## **Chapter XXII - Acts 13:14-52**

### **AT ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA**

#### **IN THE SYNAGOGUE IN PISIDIAN ANTIOCH**

"But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.

"And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."

--Acts 13:14,15.

After the departure of John Mark, Paul and Barnabas travelled on to Antioch in Pisidia, a city far to the northwest of Antioch in Syria, from whence they had recently been sent. The **Pisidian Antioch** was situated in what is now called Asia Minor, across the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea from the other Antioch. In this city Paul and Barnabas were to be used of God for the salvation of a multitude of people, especially Gentiles, but were also to face the wrath of the unbelieving Jews, and finally to be driven out of that region.

Finding the Jewish synagogue,<sup>57</sup> they went in on the sabbath day and sat down. Whether they took their place in some special seat reserved for any who were willing to speak if invited, or whether they were recognized as rabbis by their dress or demeanor, or whether they were already somewhat known, having arrived at the city before the sabbath - whatever the reason, they were invited by the rulers of the synagogue to address the people.<sup>58</sup>

Let us carefully observe the circumstances, however, and note what was expected of them, should they accept the invitation to speak.

It was "*after the reading of the law and the prophets*" that the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, inquiring whether they had some word of "*exhortation*" for the people. This fact is most important to an understanding of the message which Paul brought in response.

Many people can think of the prophets only as those who *predicted* things to come. As we have already pointed out, however, the prophets were simply God's

---

<sup>57</sup> The word *synagogue* is found 26 times in the Acts but not once in the epistles of Paul, even though six of his epistles were written during the Acts period. This is confirmation of the fact that Acts is primarily the story of Israel's apostasy, while Paul's epistles contain the doctrine and practice of the Body of Christ.

<sup>58</sup> The fact that the rulers "sent" the invitation to them indicates an audience of considerable size.

*spokesmen*. They did not only predict future events; they challenged and exhorted the people as well. Hence the law and the prophets went well together in the reading of the Scriptures in any Jewish synagogue, and any speaker after such a reading would be expected to use the prophetic Scriptures to *exhort* the people with respect to obedience to the law.

Paul *did* have a "*word of exhortation*" for them from "*the law and the prophets*," though *what* he was to say about the law, and *how* he was to use the prophetic Scriptures to exhort them with regard to it, was doubtless to surprise them not a little.

## PAUL'S ADDRESS

### ISRAEL'S HISTORY RECALLED

"Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience, "The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought He them out of it,

"And about the time of forty years suffered He their manners in the wilderness.

"And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He divided their land to them by lot.

"And after that He gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet,

"And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.

"And when He had removed him, He raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also He gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after Mine own heart, which shall fulfill all My will.

"Of this man's seed hath God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus."

--Acts 13:16-23.

It was a typical Jewish synagogue at which Paul now rose to speak. Gesturing with his hands, the apostle had to call for order and request those present to "give audience."

From the outset it is interesting to compare this, Paul's first recorded address, with Peter's first recorded address, delivered at Pentecost. Paul's sermon

included much that Peter had said at Pentecost, but the direction and conclusion were by no means the same.

To begin with, Peter had addressed his hearers: "*Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem*" (Acts 2:14) and had closed his sermon with the words: "THEREFORE LET ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL KNOW ..." (Acts 2:36). He was clearly dealing with Israel as a *nation, in Jerusalem, the seat of their government*.

Paul could not thus address his hearers. Indeed, when he had first returned to Jerusalem after his conversion, the Lord Himself had appeared to him, saying:

"Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me" (Acts 22:18).

While some mistakenly suppose that Israel's kingdom hopes were set aside at the cross and that the Church of today, the Body of Christ, began with Peter at Pentecost, others suppose that Paul, like Peter, offered the kingdom to Israel during his Acts ministry. This is also a mistake, for nowhere is there any record of such an offer by Paul, though he did indeed confirm the fact that Christ was Israel's rightful King.

Paul could not offer the kingdom to Israel, for he had been ordered to depart from Israel's capital city. How could the Jews in one synagogue far outside of Palestine represent "the house of Israel"? How could he offer *them* the establishment of Messiah's kingdom? What would such an offer mean while Jerusalem and Israel's government persisted in their rejection of Christ? Could Christ come to some other city to reign?

Thus the apostle addresses his hearers simply as "*Men of Israel, and ye that fear God.*" But the latter part of this salutation is even more significant of Paul's ministry than the former, for the phrase "*ye that fear God,*" used as it is along with the phrase "*men of Israel,*" does not refer to Jews but to Gentiles who, like Cornelius, had *not* become proselytes to Judaism by circumcision, but did join with the Jews in recognizing Israel's God as the true God (See [Acts 10:1,2](#)). Outside the Scriptures these are frequently called "proselytes of the gate," but that they were Gentiles, not Jews, is amply confirmed not only by a comparison with the case of Cornelius but also by the *usage* of the term and related statements here in Acts 13 (See Vers. 16, 26 and cf. Vers. 42,44,45). Peter at Pentecost did not thus preach to Gentiles (See [Acts 10:28](#)).

The apostle begins his message by pointing out that in all the history of the children of Israel God had unfailingly worked with them and for them.

*He had chosen their fathers* (Ver. 17).

*He had exalted the people when they had dwelt as strangers in Egypt (Ver. 17).*

*He had brought them out of Egypt with an "high," or uplifted, arm (Ver. 17).*

*He had nursed them during their wilderness wanderings and murmurings<sup>59</sup> (Ver. 18).*

*He had destroyed their seven enemies in Canaan (Ver. 19; cf. Deut. 7:1).*

*He had divided the land of Canaan to them (Ver. 19).*

*He had given them judges (Ver. 20) and when this did not satisfy them,*

*He had given them a king after their own heart (Ver. 21) and when that king had failed them*

*He had removed him (Ver. 22) and*

*He had given them a king after His own heart (Ver. 22).*

*And now, the God who, in His faithfulness, had done all this for them, had "raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus" (Ver. 23).*

But in sharp contrast to the unfailing faithfulness of God the apostle's message brings out the utter faithlessness of His people.

How unworthily the favored people, so marvelously delivered, so wondrously preserved and blessed, had responded to God's goodness! For forty years they doubted, murmured and complained, rashly declaring that they had rather remained in Egypt! For forty years they tried the patience of Moses--and of God. This period of Israel's history is called "*the day of temptation in the wilderness*":

"When your fathers tempted ME, and proved ME, and saw my works forty years" (Heb. 3:8,9).

And concerning this generation in Israel God had said:

"Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart and they have not known my ways" (Heb. 3:10).

As to the period of the judges, the mere mention of it by Paul would remind his Jewish hearers, as it does even us, of a phrase repeatedly found in the record of that time: "*And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord.*" Paul's hearers well knew the pattern of Israel's history under the judges

---

<sup>59</sup> The A. V. fails to express the beauty of the original. There is an evident allusion to Deut. 1:31.



as: apostasy, divine discipline, cries for deliverance and God's gracious intervention, in constant recurrence.

Finally, says the apostle, "*they desired a king*" (Ver. 21). This, of course, was Israel's rejection of the theocracy. Concerning it God said: "*they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them*" (I Sam. 8:7). But God gave them a king, the king they wanted, until he had failed so dismally that God had to remove him. It was then that God raised up David as a savior of Israel and the one from whose royal line *the Savior* should arise. And thus the apostle comes to the point:

"Of this man's seed hath God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus" (Ver. 23).

But did Israel accept this Savior-King? No. The monarchy had begun with the cry: "*Make us a king!*" (I Sam. 8:5) and had ended with the cry: "*We have no king but Caesar!*" (John 19:15). The demand for a king had ended in the betrayal and crucifixion of *the King*, the long-promised *Messiah*. This, the greatest of all Israel's sins, the apostle now begins to drive home to the hearts of his hearers, together with the fact that God had not failed *them*, that Christ was still ready to be their Savior if they would but accept Him.

### **GOD'S OVERRULING GRACE PROCLAIMED**

"When John had first preached before His coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

"And as John fulfilled his course he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not He. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of His feet I am not worthy to loose.

"Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.

"For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him.

"And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that He should be slain.

"And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre.

"But God raised Him from the dead:

"And He was seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses unto the people.

"And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,

"God hath fulfilled the same unto us their Children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee.'

"And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.

"Wherefore He saith also in another Psalm, Thou shalt not suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.

"For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:

"But He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption."

--Acts 13:24-37.

### **THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST DISCUSSED**

In connection with Christ, the apostle first recalls the fact that John the Baptist, His forerunner, had preached the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. The phraseology here is important. Many preachers who hold to water baptism today, say apologetically: "*We do not preach baptism.* Like Paul, we preach Christ, and Him crucified." All such should remember at least that John "the Baptist" *did preach baptism* -- "*the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*" This is plainly stated, not only in Paul's sermon here, but also in such passages as the following:

"John did... preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4).

"And he came... preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3).

"... the baptism which John preached" (Acts 10:37).

Nor did John's hearers come to his baptism with the feeling of joy that possesses the hearts of many who come to be baptized today, supposing that

they are now to symbolize to the world that they have been buried and raised with Christ. Rather, they came pale and shaken to confess their sins and to ask for the cleansing signified by baptism. They came to a *"baptism of REPENTANCE for the REMISSION OF SINS"* (Mark 1:4) and *"were baptized of him in Jordan, CONFESSING THEIR SINS"* (Matt. 3:6).<sup>60</sup>

But the apostle, in his address here, emphasizes the fact that John's ministry was but an introduction to *Christ*. John, though immensely popular for a time, was not the Christ, as some suspected. He merely called upon the people of Israel to repent that they might be ready to receive Christ.

### **SALVATION STILL BEING OFFERED**

As we know, Israel as a nation rejected John's message, their Messiah and the remission of their sins. Yet now Paul says not only to the Jews but also to the God-fearing Gentiles in his audience: *"To you is the word of this salvation sent"* (Vet. 26). Does this mean that Paul, like John the Baptist and Peter, also preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins," offering Christ as King? Not at all. Nowhere, ever, do we find Paul proclaiming repentance and baptism for the remission of sins and in this sermon in Pisidian Antioch he certainly did not do so if Verses 38 and 39 mean anything at all.

The apostle is simply speaking about *salvation* here, not about the terms on which it might be obtained. Is it not true that Israel was offered salvation and rejected it, and that "the salvation of God" was therefore "sent unto the Gentiles"? (See [Acts 4:12](#); [13:46](#); [28:28](#)). *The terms*, of course, were changed, but nevertheless *salvation*, which the nation Israel refused, was later sent to the Gentiles. At the time of Paul's address in this Pisidian synagogue, it had already begun to go to the Gentiles and here, addressing not only the Jews in the synagogue but also the God-fearing Gentiles among them, the apostle declares: *"To you is the word of this salvation sent."* The favored nation's rejection of her Savior was not to keep Him from blessing the Gentiles.

Careful note should be taken as to how and why salvation was now being sent to these Jews of the dispersion and the God-fearing Gentiles among them.

"To YOU is the word of this salvation sent," says Paul, "For THEY that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers... condemned Him." It was not, then, because Jerusalem and Israel's rulers had *accepted* Christ and therefore the kingdom could now be proclaimed in the regions beyond. The very fact that Paul, rather

---

<sup>60</sup> This was not changed at Pentecost for, filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter also demanded of his hearers: *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"* (Acts 2:38). Those who practice water baptism on the basis of the so-called "great commission," holding that the Church of today began at Pentecost, should practice *this* baptism, the baptism of John the Baptist, the "great commission" and Pentecost (Mark 1:4; 16:16; Acts 2:38). The fact is, however, that the Church of today did *not* begin at Pentecost under the "great commission." It began with Paul, under whose administration water baptism passed off the scene.

than one of the twelve, is the preacher here would refute this idea. It was rather because Jerusalem and Israel's rulers had *rejected* Christ. *They* had rejected Christ, so now Paul offers Him to these dispersed Jews and God-fearing Gentiles.<sup>61</sup>

The reason he could thus offer salvation to his hearers apart from Israel's conversion was because though those at Jerusalem neither knew Christ nor understood the prophets, they had nevertheless *fulfilled the prophetic Scriptures in condemning Christ!* While they carried out their own evil designs, they unknowingly carried out God's great plan for the redemption of sinners as well! Israel's rulers had broken the law and turned deaf ears to the prophecies which had just been read in this synagogue; yet they had unwittingly fulfilled them too. And when they had fulfilled all that was written with regard to the crucifixion they *"took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre, but God raised Him from the dead; and He was seen many days ..."* (Vers. 29-31).

Thus God's gracious plans had not been thwarted, nor His Word broken. The God who *"according to His promise"* had *"raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus"* (Ver. 23) had now *"fulfilled"* the *"promise ... made unto the fathers ... in that He raised up Jesus again"* (Vers. 32,33).

Paul's quotation from the second Psalm here is most appropriate, for it was not by our Lord's incarnation but by His resurrection that the Father officially declared the decree: *"Thou art My Son."* This is brought out in the opening verses of Romans, where we read that He was

"... declared to be the Son of God with power... by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4).

The term, "the sure mercies of David" (cf. Isa. 55:3) refers to those promises assured to David by divine covenant, and as for the quotation from the sixteenth Psalm, Paul's argument, like Peter's in Acts 2, is that since David's body *had* gone into corruption and Christ's *had not*, David must have prophesied concerning Christ.

Thus, while Israel, as a nation, had crucified Christ and was even now standing by that awful deed, *all* had progressed according to God's immutable plan. Christ was alive in spite of His enemies, and gloriously able and ready to save.

## PAUL'S CLOSING EXHORTATION

---

<sup>61</sup> At first, according to Acts 10:36, the Word of God was "sent unto the children of Israel." Here in Acts 13:26 "the word of this salvation" is "sent" to the "children of the stock of Abraham" *and* Gentiles among them who "feared God." In Acts 28:28 "the salvation of God is sent unto the *Gentiles*."

"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:

"And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

"Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets;

"Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare; it unto you."

--Acts 13:38-41.

The closing words of great addresses are often the most important of all--certainly they were in *this* address. They were the conclusion toward which the apostle had been moving from the beginning, and show, clearly and emphatically, just what it was he wished them to know.

We find the law and the prophets referred to at both the *beginning* and the end of this synagogue service (Vers. 15,39,40). At the beginning the law and the prophets are read and Paul and Barnabas are asked if they have some word of *exhortation* for the people. Paul has a word of exhortation from *both* the law and the prophets. After showing how the Savior, though crucified and rejected by His people, is alive again, he exhorts his hearers: Through Christ they may enjoy the FORGIVENESS of sins, for BY HIM all that BELIEVE are JUSTIFIED FROM ALL THINGS from which they could NOT be justified by THE LAW OF MOSES.

And to this the apostle adds a final exhortation not to despise the gracious offer, lest they find themselves in the position of Christ-rejecting Israel. "Beware lest that come upon you" or, "lest you find yourselves in the situation," of those to whom God must now speak in the same way as He had spoken in Hab. 1:5 (though with regard to a different matter).

How applicable were the words of Hab. 1:5 to Israel's situation at this time! They had despised God's goodness, now God was doing a work which they could not believe. They said in effect: "But He *cannot* save the Gentiles apart from us! What about all the Old Testament promises?" Yet He was blessing the Gentiles apart from them--through the Christ whom they had rejected, and they could only "*Behold . . . and wonder, and perish.*" Now Paul exhorts, especially his Jewish hearers, to beware lest that come upon them.

And thus the Spirit-led apostle used the opportunity to exhort his hearers from both the law and the prophets. From the law: "Do not trust in the law; trust in Christ." From the prophets: "Do not despise the gracious invitation."

How striking the difference between Peter's first recorded address, delivered in Jerusalem at Pentecost, and Paul's first recorded address, delivered in this Pisidian synagogue!

Peter had pleaded with Israel and her rulers to repent and accept Christ. Paul now says to this group of dispersed Jews and God-fearing Gentiles: "*They* have rejected Christ; *you* accept Him, lest you share their condemnation." Peter had declared that God had raised Christ from the dead to sit on David's throne ([Acts 2:29-31](#)); Paul now declares that God raised Christ from the dead *that through Him men might receive justification by faith apart from the law* ([Acts 13:38,39](#)). The hope of the present earthly establishment of the kingdom is disappearing from view and the dispensation of grace is dawning.

But the most striking difference is seen in the two conclusions.

The record of Peter's Pentecostal address to "all the house of Israel" closes with the demand:

"REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS . . ." (Acts 2:38).

Paul's address closes with the declaration that

"THROUGH THIS MAN IS PREACHED UNTO YOU THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS:

"AND BY HIM ALL THAT BELIEVE ARE JUSTIFIED<sup>62</sup> FROM ALL THINGS, FROM WHICH YE COULD NOT BE JUSTIFIED BY THE LAW OF MOSES" (Acts 13:38,39).

Surely Paul's message, and especially his concluding words, constitute a definite departure from the program of prophecy and the "great commission." Paul did not offer the kingdom to these people. He offered them salvation by grace, lest they perish with the nation Israel.

We have frequently been charged with teaching error in pointing out that Peter, working under the "great commission" at Pentecost, did not proclaim "the gospel of the grace of God" but "the gospel of the kingdom." Yet no less a Bible scholar than Dr. James M. Gray, former President of Moody Bible Institute, wrote in his *Christian Worker's Commentary*:

"Peter addressed the Jews distinctively, and before the final offer of the kingdom was withdrawn from them for the time being, and hence he offered forgiveness on the ground of repentance and baptism. But Paul, speaking to

---

<sup>62</sup> The word *remission* in Acts 2:38 means *to let go, to release*, but the word *justified* here in Acts 13:38 means *to be declared righteous*, a great advance on remission.

Gentiles as well as Jews, and proclaiming the gospel of grace, as distinguished from that of the kingdom, 'utters a truth for the first time which Peter did not declare'" (P. 352).

### THE MEETING DISMISSED

"And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.<sup>63</sup>

"Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God."

--Acts 13:42,43.

Ancient manuscripts vary greatly as to Verse 42. Some support the above translation, others read "when *they* were gone out... *they* besought . . ." etc., which would mean simply that Paul's hearers wished to hear him again. Still others have the *Jews* beseeching Paul that the *Gentiles* might hear these words on the next sabbath. *Textus Receptus*, however, supports the above and in view of the context this at least seems to be the sense. From Verses 16 and 26 we know that there were those present who, while they feared God, at least to some extent, were *not* Jews and probably not proselytes in the Scriptural sense. We know also, from Verses 44,45 that the next sabbath day almost the whole city came together to hear the Word of God and that the Jews were provoked to jealousy to see so many Gentiles gathered together to hear Paul preach.

Some of what Paul had said in the synagogue did not apply directly to the God-fearing Gentiles present. They did not belong to "this people Israel" and could not regard the Jewish patriarchs as "our fathers," but little matter: Paul included them in his salutation because his offer of salvation through Israel's rejected Christ *did* apply to them (Vers. 16,26,38,39). It would be natural, therefore, that they should be eager to have the other Gentiles hear these things. This also corresponds to the expressed desire of the Gentile, Sergius Paulus, to hear the Word of God, in the type which precedes the passage now under consideration. Finally, it corresponds with the fact that after the congregation had left the synagogue, many of the "Jews and religious proselytes" (mentioned separately) followed Paul and Barnabas. It should be observed that in harmony with Paul's address, Paul and Barnabas now urged these Jews and proselytes to "continue in the grace of God" (Ver. 43).

A comparison will be helpful here to show how the dispensation of grace was gradually beginning to emerge. The word *grace*, in the original (*charis*) appears less than 20 times in the four Gospel records, and then seldom with respect to

---

<sup>63</sup> Gr. *Intervening sabbath*. Used only here. There is some question as to whether this expression might refer to their meeting day or the *week* intervening before the next sabbath, but Ver. 44 seems to fix the sense.

the *doctrine* of grace, while in the Epistles of Paul - much smaller in volume - it appears well over 100 times and nearly always in connection with the doctrine of grace. Similarly, in the book of Acts the word appears (in the original) only 5 times before the raising up of Paul, and not once with regard to the *doctrine* of grace, while *after* the raising up of Paul it appears 15 times, *mostly* with regard to the doctrine of grace.

Shortly after the conversion of Paul Christ was preached to the Greeks at Syrian Antioch, and Barnabas, having been sent to look into the matter, "*when he had seen the grace of God, was glad*" and urging them simply to "*cleave unto the Lord,*" he "*departed to Tarsus for to seek Saul*" (11:23-25). Here in Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas urge the believers to "*continue in the grace of God*" (13:43). In 14:3 they abide a "*long time,*" testifying to "*the word of His grace.*" In 15:11 even Peter agrees that "*through the grace of the Lord Jesus*" even the Jews will one day be saved like the Gentiles. In Acts 20:24 Paul says of his afflictions:

"But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might FINISH MY COURSE with joy, and THE MINISTRY, WHICH I HAVE RECEIVED OF THE LORD JESUS, TO TESTIFY THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD."

How can we divorce this all from Paul's words in Eph. 3:1-3:

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

"If ye have heard of THE DISPENSATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH IS GIVEN ME TO YOU-WARD:

"HOW THAT BY REVELATION HE MADE KNOWN UNTO ME THE MYSTERY .... "

Paul's proclamation of salvation by grace, through faith, *apart from the law*, in the Pisidian synagogue was in harmony with his own special commission to proclaim grace. It was a *departure* from the program of prophecy and the "great commission" and a step in the unfolding of "the mystery."

It was but a step, however. God had not yet completely set aside the nation Israel, and there was still much more to be revealed of God's eternal purpose and His grace.

### **PAUL TURNS TO THE GENTILES**

"And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the Word of God.



"But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

"For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set Thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that Thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

"And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the Word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

"And the Word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.

"But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.

"But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.

"And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost."

--Acts 13:44-52.

### **THE STORY OF BAR-JESUS RE-ENACTED**

And now the story of Bar-jesus proves to have been representative of the situation then existing as it is re-enacted on a larger scale. The Gentiles ask to hear the Word of God. The Jews, jealous of their own position, seek to keep it from them. The Jews, therefore, are given up to judgment, while the Gentiles receive the truth and rejoice in it.

The fact that on the next sabbath nearly the whole city gathered together to hear Paul, lends support to the *Authorized* rendering of Ver. 42 that it was God-fearing *Gentiles* in the synagogue who had requested Paul to address them. The gathering of almost the whole city was evidently in response to an announcement that he would do so.

### **JEWISH OPPOSITION**

As usual, however, this stirred up the enmity of the Jews. Paul addressing them in their synagogue, with a few Gentiles present was one thing, but Paul addressing a throng overwhelmingly Gentile was quite another. Forgetting that they were to be the agents, not only the objects, of God's blessings, they were

moved to envy at the sight of this great throng. This had long been their attitude where the Gentiles were concerned (See [Luke 4:27, 28](#); [Acts 21:29-31; 22:21,22](#)).

And now, as Bar-jesus had done in the case of Sergius Paulus, these Jews sought to turn the Gentiles from the faith, contradicting "those things which were spoken by Paul" and blaspheming.

Their contradiction and blasphemy was a particularly serious matter in the light of our Lord's warning that whosoever should blaspheme or speak against Him might be forgiven, but whosoever blasphemed or spoke against the Holy Spirit would *never* be forgiven, neither in that age, nor in the age to come ([Matt. 12:31,32](#)). This was not, of course, because the Holy Spirit was a more important member of the Trinity than the Father or the Son, but simply because the Holy Spirit was the *third* member of the Trinity to deal with them. They had rejected the Father in the Old Testament. Then the Father had sent the Son and they had rejected, contradicted and blasphemed Him. Now the Son was to send the Spirit and, "Beware," says our Lord, for "if you contradict or blaspheme Him, it will *never* be forgiven you."

The Holy Spirit had come at Pentecost, mightily confirming the witness of the apostles to Christ, but the unbelieving Jews, especially the rulers, had bitterly opposed them, contradicting and blaspheming. Now, here at Antioch in Pisidia, we find them doing the same thing. Later, at Corinth again the Jews "opposed themselves, and blasphemed" (18:6) and while that precise phraseology is not always used, this is what we find them doing from Jerusalem to Rome. Thus it was that that rebellious generation in Israel committed the unpardonable sin, never to be forgiven them. As a nation, however, Israel is typified by Bar-jesus who was blinded "for a season" (Acts 13:11 cf. [Rom. 11:25,26](#)).

In view of the Jews' bitter opposition to Paul's proclamation of the truth, and of the Gentiles' eagerness to receive it, there was now but one course of action to take; they must boldly turn from the Jews to the Gentiles. They must bring the gospel to the Gentiles in spite of the fact that the Jews were rejecting it. And this was exactly in line with the long hidden purpose for which God had raised Paul up, for how could God's revealed purpose to bless the Gentiles through Abraham's multiplied seed be fulfilled through *this* generation of Abraham's seed, who rejected Christ and were jealous when the Gentiles showed an interest in Him?

Thus we come now to another distinct *departure* from the prophetic program, so plainly stated that we wonder how any could possibly fail to see it. Let us examine the passage carefully, one detail at a time:

"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, IT WAS NECESSARY THAT THE WORD OF GOD SHOULD FIRST HAVE BEEN SPOKEN TO YOU . . ." (Acts 13:46).

So that we may understand the apostles' declaration fully, let us first ask: Why was it necessary that the Word of God should first be preached to the Jews? The answer is, because according to the Abrahamic covenant and all prophecy, *they* were to be the channels of blessing to the Gentiles. Peter had made this very clear in his Pentecostal address, saying to the "men of Israel":

"Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

"Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:25,26).

It was necessary to preach the Word of God to the Jews first, then, because according to covenant and prophecy *they* were to be the channel through which God should bless the Gentiles. But let us continue with Paul's declaration to the Jews at Antioch:

"It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you, BUT .... "

Does not this "but" indicate a change in the program, a departure (even if a temporary departure) from the procedure outlined in prophecy?

But does this indicate that God was forced to change His plans because of Israel's rejection of Christ? By no means, for the apostle informs us--and proves it--that this departure from His prophesied program had been planned, but kept secret, since "before the world began" ([Eph. 1:4](#); [3:1-11](#); [Col. 1:24-27](#)).

Does it mean, then, that God could not, or would not, keep His word? No indeed. First, this same Paul, by the Spirit, insists that all Israel will yet be saved and the covenant promises fulfilled ([Rom. 11:25-29](#)). Thus the *departure* from the prophetic program proves to be but a temporary one, an *interruption* of it. Second, *this generation* of Abraham's seed failed to become a blessing to the Gentiles, not because of God's unfaithfulness to them, but because *they* refused to accept the blessing themselves. Paul is most emphatic as to this, saying:

"BUT SEEING YE PUT IT FROM YOU, AND JUDGE YOURSELVES UNWORTHY OF EVERLASTING LIFE, LO, WE TURN TO THE GENTILES."

This passage has lost some of its force in translation. The word "put" should be "thrust" as in the R. Y. While the Gentiles eagerly desired the truth the Jews

had violently rejected it. Also, the words "*judged yourselves unworthy*" means that by their violent opposition to the Word of God and their blasphemy against it they had "*passed sentence upon themselves*" that they were "unworthy" of everlasting life. The word "unworthy" is a strong one, carrying the thought of baseness and dishonor. Finally the exclamation, "*Lo,*" confirm the fact that something sensational is taking place as Paul announces that he will turn from the Jews to the Gentiles.

Those who still question that we have here a departure from the prophetic program should carefully and candidly answer the following questions: Is salvation here being sent to the Gentiles because of Israel's acceptance of Christ, or because of her rejection of Christ? Is it going to the Gentiles on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant or by grace? Is it going according to prophecy or according to the mystery?

There is but one answer to each of these questions. Paul at Pisidian Antioch departed from the prophesied procedure and did something *never once prophesied*, for the blessing of the Gentiles through Israel's *rejection* of Christ is never anywhere predicted in the prophetic Scriptures (See [Rom.11:11,12,15,25,32,33](#)).

Here we have the very core of what Paul elsewhere calls "the mystery," God sending salvation and blessing to the Gentiles *through Christ* despite His people's failure, *indeed, through their fall* (See [Rom. 11:11-15](#)). God had not been handicapped by human failure. What *seemed* an obstacle proved but the means by which He unfolded His eternal purpose and grace.

With regard to this precious mystery Dr. H. A. Ironside said:

"May we enter more fully into what is so precious to His great heart of love" (*Mysteries of God*, P. 60).

"Christ's ministers are to be stewards of the mysteries of God, not merely preachers of what people so often call 'the simple gospel'" (*Ibid.*, P. 15).

And William R. Newell added his testimony:

"Would that we had grace to defend as vigorously this great message today, whether from its enemies, or its real friends who do not see it clearly as yet; who, like Peter (Gal. 2) through fear of others, are ready to compromise and tone down the Gospel of Christ" (*Paul vs. Peter*, p. 15).

And regarding the general ignorance of this precious truth, Dr. Ironside wrote again:

“Unquestionably the onus of blame rests upon the guides who, professing to be Christ’s ministers, are anything but stewards of the mysteries of God” (*Mysteries of God*, Pp. 17, 18).

Would that these men had themselves continued in these truths and led the Church “more fully ... into what is so precious to His great heart of love.”

But it may be asked: If we have here a departure from prophecy, why does Paul add:

“FOR SO HATH THE LORD COMMANDED US, SAYING, I HAVE SET THEE TO BE A LIGHT OF THE GENTILES, THAT THOU SHOULDEST BE FOR SALVATION UNTO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH” (Acts 13:47).

The apostle does not mean here that the Gentiles are now to receive salvation according to the program outlined in prophecy, for he has just announced a departure from this program. The blessing of the Gentiles *through Israel* will have to wait until a future day.

Paul simply points out here that God had "set" Christ to be "a light to the Gentiles" and "for salvation to the ends of the earth" and that He would have it so, *Israel notwithstanding*. Since Israel refused to be the channel of blessing to the nations, God was now to bless the nations directly through Christ, apart from Israel, and Paul had been "commanded" to proclaim this fact.

It is true that this incident at Pisidian Antioch was but a local matter, but it was nevertheless a representative one. To the nation Israel had been offered, in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, the high privilege of being the channel through which all nations of the earth should be blessed. When Israel rejected that offer, salvation and blessing were sent to the Gentiles simply by grace, through the finished work of Christ, and Israel, like Bar-jesus, was blinded. Paul had warned his hearers in the Pisidian synagogue to "beware" lest that come upon them which had already begun to come upon the nation as a whole. But they had not heeded the warning and, like their rulers, were without excuse.

The Gentiles were glad to have Paul and Barnabas come to them with the gospel and many of them were genuinely saved. Indeed, the truth gained such ground that it was "published throughout all the region" (Ver. 49). But the Jews stirred up such opposition and persecution against Paul and Barnabas that they were finally forced to leave that region and go to Iconium, first shaking off the dust from their feet against their persecutors, as a sign that the responsibility for their attitude was wholly theirs and that God would judge them for their rebellion (Cf. [Matt. 10:14,15](#); [Mark 6:11](#); [Luke 9:5](#)).

This persecution at Pisidian Antioch is doubtless referred to in II Tim. 3:11, where the apostle writes of "*persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at*

*Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me."*

But the Lord is not only strong to deliver *from* affliction; He is also faithful to help *in* affliction. The disciples Paul had been forced to leave behind were far from dejected. Rather, they were "*filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost*" (Ver. 52). It is always a joy to suffer for Christ. Only a short while previously the circumcision apostles at Jerusalem, having been beaten in the most cowardly fashion, had "*departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name*" (Acts 5:41). The Thessalonians later "*received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost*" (I Thes. 1:6). Indeed, the Apostle Paul, by the Spirit, says:

"For unto you it is GIVEN in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also TO SUFFER FOR HIS SAKE" (Phil. 1:29).

He calls our present suffering for Christ "*the fellowship of His sufferings*" and longs to experience it (Phil. 3:10) "rejoicing" in it because it is the filling up of that which still remains of the afflictions of Christ (Col. 1:24).

What a blessed thought! Though Christ is still "rejected of men," He yet declines to judge them, but in grace remains away, a Royal exile, sending us, His ambassadors, forth to proclaim reconciliation, and the light suffering we bear is *His* suffering --that which still remains of His afflictions as the rejected Christ. How sweet is the fellowship of His sufferings!

## **Chapter XXIII - Acts 14:1-28**

### **ICONIUM, LYSTRA AND DERBE**

#### **THE WORK AT ICONIUM**

"And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.

"But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

"Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands,

"But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

"And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them,

"They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about:

"And there they preached the gospel."

--Acts 14:1-7.

#### **A GREAT COMPANY OF JEWS AND GREEKS BELIEVE**

God was to leave Israel no excuse for rejecting Christ. The twelve had been sent *exclusively to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* during our Lord's earthly ministry (Matt. 10:5,6). After His resurrection He had sent them to preach "repentance and remission of sins" to "all nations," but "*beginning at Jerusalem*" and then to "*all Judaea and in Samaria*" before going to "the uttermost part of the earth" (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). This was, as we have seen, because according to covenant and prophecy, Israel was to be the channel of blessing to the nations.

With the stoning of Stephen and the great persecution which had followed it, there could scarcely be any further doubt that Jerusalem and Israel's rulers had determined *not* to accept Christ. Yet God continued to deal with them through the apostles who were left there and the disciples who were already beginning to return from the places whither they had been scattered ([Rom. 10:20,21](#) cf. [Isa.](#)

65:1,2).<sup>64</sup> Indeed, even Paul, laboring in the regions beyond Palestine, went to the Jews first wherever it was possible; not, indeed, with the *older* or *program* of the kingdom, as the circumcision apostles did in Jerusalem, but nevertheless with Israel's *Christ*.

Yet we do not believe that Paul's *only* purpose in going to the Jewish synagogues first was that he might contact the Jews. It must be remembered that before Israel was set aside by God the favored nation still exerted considerable influence, spiritually, upon the Gentiles. Hence, in the synagogues Paul would also find those Gentiles who had at least come to recognize the true God. These would naturally be most open to the Word of God and the message of grace and, if won to the truth, would give him a nucleus of believers around which to build. It is *intimated* that there were Gentiles present in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch, from whence Paul and Barnabas had just come, and it is definitely *stated* that Greeks as well as Jews were present in this one in Iconium (Ver. 1).

And so it was that in Iconium Paul and his companion again first made their way to the synagogue. As at Antioch, this synagogue and its congregation must have been of considerable size for we read that a "great company"<sup>65</sup> believed their message.

Those who would be truly used of God in public ministry should take careful note that it was not superb organization, a "snappy" program, beautiful music or sparkling entertainment, provided by Paul and Barnabas, that had such an effect upon their audience. It was *the power of their message*. They "*so spake* that a great company of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed." Let us, whom God has set before the public to proclaim His Word, make it our constant prayer and aim that we may "so speak."

### A CALL TO BOLDNESS

Nearly all the persecutions of the Acts originated in the hostility of the Jews. Probably the case of Demetrius (Acts 19:24) is an exception.

At Iconium the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, poisoning their minds against the believers. Paul and Barnabas, however, recognized their responsibility to those who had embraced the truth and to those who might do so,

---

<sup>64</sup> "God's mercy was still lingering over Jerusalem. These Hebrew-Christian believers had hopes that the nation would yet receive their testimony and accept Him whom they had rejected. They were persecuted, beaten, some killed, their goods spoiled, cast out of the synagogues and the temple, and still they continued in their faithful testimony. It was a transition period, passing out of the old into the new" (*The Jewish Question*: by Arno C. Gaebelin, Pp. 26,27).

<sup>65</sup> Not a "*great multitude*." In Acts 28:3 the word *plethos*, here rendered *multitude*, is translated *bundle*. The word itself does not necessarily mean a very great number. With the article it may simply mean a group or company. In this case, however, the word is preceded by the adjective *polu* meaning *great* or *numerous*, so that the meaning of the phrase is simply a *great company*. The synagogue at Iconium could hardly have accommodated what is generally thought of as "a great multitude."



and courageously stayed where they were. Indeed, from the phraseology of Ver. 3 it would appear that they took the opposition of the Jews as a call to boldness; a challenge to make the truth known where it was being misrepresented: "Long time *therefore* abode they speaking boldly in the Lord<sup>66</sup> .... "

This boldness consisted in a direct--though not yet complete--proclamation of the gospel of God's grace through Christ as compared with the Judaism, or even the Christo-Judaism, of the believers at Jerusalem (Cf. [Acts 13:38,39; 21:20](#)). That this is so is evident from the declaration that the Lord "gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (Ver. 3).

But, it may be asked, why would the Lord give testimony to "the word of His grace" by signs and wonders? We believe the answer is three-fold, centering around the fact that God was only *beginning* to make the message of grace known. First, miraculous signs were the credentials of apostleship ([II Cor. 12:12](#)). Second, these signs were wrought primarily for the sake of the Jews who would recognize them as a proof of divine endorsement ([I Cor. 1:22; Acts 15:12](#)). Third, they were wrought, while Israel's kingdom hopes had not yet been officially withdrawn, to "make the Gentiles obedient" (Rom. 15:18,19). This last is no contradiction to I Cor. 1:22, for there, in contrast to the Jews, which require a sign, it is said that the "*Greeks* seek after wisdom." The Greeks were the highest type Gentiles, intellectually.

Thus the apostles' ministry at Iconium continued until the whole city was divided, part holding with the unbelieving Jews and part with Paul and Barnabas. So does the truth cause division wherever it goes, and those who would water down their God-given message so as *not* to cause division are simply unfaithful to their call, for our adversary will always see to it that the *truth* is never preached unopposed. The Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul were probably the greatest "dividers" of all history, yet weak Christians will frequently condemn faithful men of God because their preaching causes division. Actually, of course, it is not the truth, but unbelief in the hearts of some that causes the division.

### **PAUL AND BARNABAS FLEE FOR THEIR LIVES**

The word rendered "assault" in the A.V. is misleading. If there had already been an actual *assault* it would be superfluous to say that "they were ware of it." The word means, literally, a *rush*, and signifies a violent motion or an impetuous impulse. The meaning is doubtless that there was a *strong movement* on the part of "the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them."

The term "use despitefully," in the original, is a strong one meaning to insult and outrage. Paul uses the same root with regard to his own former life in I Tim.

---

<sup>66</sup> I.e., with confidence in the Lord.

1:13, where it is translated "*injurious*," and we know how wantonly he had persecuted Messiah's followers (See e.g., [Acts 8:3](#); [9:1, 2](#)). At Iconium, then, there was a strong movement on foot to insult and outrage Paul and Barnabas and to stone them, and the hostility of the Jews is again seen at the root of it, for stoning was a Jewish form of execution.

It was when Paul and Barnabas were aware of all this that "they fled to Lystra and Derbe." It would be folly now to remain at Iconium, for at the very least their public ministry would be brought to an end if they stayed. Hence they fled to Lystra and Derbe "and there they preached the gospel."

It is touching to see these truly great men forced to flee for their lives, but thrilling and inspiring to see them immediately preaching the gospel in another place! Such courage comes from more than a sense of duty. Paul himself says it comes from an overwhelming appreciation of the love of Christ. "*For the love of Christ constraineth us.*"

### AT LYSTRA

"And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked.

"The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,

"Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.

"And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.

"And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

"Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.

"Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,

"And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:

"Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.

"Nevertheless He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

"And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them."

--Acts 14:8-18.

### **THE LAME MAN HEALED**

Nothing is said about the apostles entering into any synagogue at Lystra. We are told simply that they "fled unto Lystra and Derbe" and that "there they preached the gospel" (Vers. 6,7). Nor do we read of any work being done among the Jews there. The setting is entirely pagan.

Probably there were not enough Jews in the city to have a synagogue. We cannot say that there were *no* Jews present, however, for we shall presently see that one of the most outstanding of Paul's future helpers was won to Christ here at this time.

As Paul preached the gospel at Lystra, he could not help but take note of one of his hearers<sup>67</sup> who listened with special interest. He was a cripple who had been unable to walk since his birth, and as Paul looked at him intently he perceived that he had faith to be healed.

It is not strange that he should gather from Paul's words that he might be healed, for we must remember that Israel had not yet been completely set aside, hence the Pentecostal era had not yet drawn to a close. The apostle would naturally tell his hearers of what had so recently come to pass: how Christ had come to earth as Israel's Messiah, what wonders He had wrought and how He had been rejected, even after having been raised from the dead and having worked still greater miracles from His exile in heaven - all this, of course, as a preliminary to his special message of salvation by grace through faith.

Thus, perceiving the man's desire and his faith to be healed, the apostle addressed him personally, saying in a loud voice: "*Stand upright on thy feet.*" And immediately he leaped to his feet and walked.

### **THE LYSTRICIANS SUPPOSE PAUL AND BARNABAS ARE GODS**

It was an amazing thing to have a man who had never walked a step suddenly leap to his feet and begin walking about, and the effect upon the Lystricians was instantaneous.

---

<sup>67</sup> From the tense of the verb "heard," probably a regular attendant at Paul's discourses.

When they saw what had been done "*they lifted up their voices... in the speech of Lycaonia.*" Though they had evidently understood Paul, speaking in Greek, they now did what is so natural when excitement runs high: they raised their voices and reverted to the use of their native tongue.

The people of Lystra were not idolaters of the type of the cultured Greeks. They were rude, unsophisticated pagans. The miraculous restoration of the lame man had convinced them that supernatural power was at work, but they did not know the one true God who had been manifested in the flesh to save them. In their heathen blindness they supposed, rather, that *Paul and Barnabas* were gods come down to them in the likeness of men. This is what they were exclaiming to each other "in the speech of Lycaonia," as they called Barnabas *Jupiter*, the supposed father of gods and men,<sup>68</sup> and Paul *Mercurius*, the supposed messenger of the gods, "because he was the chief speaker."

It is clear from Verses 14,15 that Paul and Barnabas did not understand what the Lystrians were saying. Had they understood it they would, of course, have objected immediately, nor, probably, would the worship of Verse 13 have been attempted. As it was, the apostles were very evidently surprised when the Lystrians sought to offer sacrifices to them.

### **THE ATTEMPT TO OFFER SACRIFICE TO THE APOSTLES**

It would seem from the record that Paul and Barnabas had now retired from the crowd to their lodging or to some other more private place, or perhaps that for some reason the crowd had largely withdrawn from them. At any rate, the priest of Jupiter, whose image or temple stood at the entrance of the city,<sup>69</sup> now brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and was about to offer sacrifices with the people.

Since the record speaks of "oxen and garlands," in the plural, we conclude that there were at least two, so that sacrifices could be offered to both Jupiter and Mercurius. Nor is it strange that the priest of *Jupiter* should offer these sacrifices, since Jupiter, in their eyes, held the highest rank. Whether "the gates" referred to were those of the apostles' lodging (Cf. [Acts 10:17](#)) or whether they were the gates of the city, or of a temple dedicated to Jupiter, it is perhaps difficult to determine with certainty, but since we read that "Jupiter... was before the city" we would assume that the city gates are referred to and that the sacrifices were now about to be offered at the entrance to the city, where the statue or temple of Jupiter was located.

The apostles' utter abhorrence of the very thought that they might be worshipped as gods--and so usurp the place of God--is seen in the account of

---

<sup>68</sup> Perhaps because he was the older and more venerable in appearance.

<sup>69</sup> The "which" of Ver. 13 refers to Jupiter, not the priest.

what they did and said upon learning what was taking place. *"They rent their clothes" -- "ran in among the people" -- "crying out" -- "Why do ye these things?" - - "turn from these vanities."*

Here we see by comparison that our blessed Lord was God, manifested in the flesh, for He freely accepted the worship of men. Paul and Barnabas, however, naturally revolted at being worshipped, protesting: *"We also are men of like passions with you."* Among those who have come to see the distinctive character of Paul's ministry and have come to rejoice in the message he proclaimed, there are some who have gone to extremes, supposing that after his conversion he was practically perfect; that he did nothing wrong. Such should at least accept his own testimony as recorded in this passage and his inspired confession in Rom. 7:18,19: *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing . . . For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."*<sup>70</sup>

To these pagan idolaters, about to worship him and Barnabas, the apostle did not cite passages from the law or the prophets. He simply appealed to them to "turn from these vanities unto *the living God,*" the Creator and Sustainer of all. Their gods were mere idols--and worse: behind them were the evil spirits who fostered the worship that the superstitious heathen lavished upon them.<sup>71</sup>

"In times past," says the apostle,<sup>72</sup> the true God, *"suffered all nations to walk in their own ways"* (Ver. 16). The word *nations here* (Gr. *Ethnos*) is generally translated *Gentiles* or *heathen*, as distinguished from the Jews, and refers to the nations *outside* of covenant relationship with God: all nations *except* Israel. It certainly does *not* include Israel *here*, for they were given the Law and commanded to walk in God's way. It was the Gentiles who, since Babel, had been given over to a reprobate mind, since "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge" (Rom. 1:28).

But this was "in times past," says the apostle. *"Now we call upon you to turn from these vanities to God."* Could there be a stronger testimony to the fact that God had again begun to work among the Gentiles? (Cf. [Acts 17:30](#)). Indeed, all the while God had, through creation, continued to bear witness to the Gentiles of His "eternal power and Godhead," providing for them and filling their hearts with food and gladness,<sup>73</sup> so that they were "without excuse" for indulging in "these

---

<sup>70</sup> Others have argued that we should "get out of the 7th of Romans into the 8th" and live "the victorious life," but we would remind such that Rom. 7 and 8 were written at the same sitting--not even divided by a chapter heading in the original.

<sup>71</sup> Psa. 82 is addressed to these evil spirits. Eph. 2:2 and 6:12 also refers to them.

<sup>72</sup> We take it that the actual words recorded are those of Paul since, as elsewhere, he was "the chief speaker."

<sup>73</sup> This beautiful figure of speech describes the feeling of well-being that results from being well fed. And in a remarkable combination of tact and power of argument he links himself and Barnabas with them in this. "Filling *our* hearts," he says, "with food and gladness." This would be most apt to win them and *at the same time* deter them from worshipping him and Barnabas.

vanities" (Vers. 16,17; cf. [Rom. 1:19,20](#)) and should now without delay, turn to God (Cf. [I Thes. 1:9](#)).

"And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them" (Ver. 18).

One would suppose that these people would now have been left with a deep sense of gratitude to the apostles, or at least respect for them. But human nature is fickle and treacherous.

### **PAUL STONED**

"And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.

"Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe."

--Acts 14:19,20.

How fickle is human nature! When our Lord entered Jerusalem on an ass's colt the people chorused: "Blessed is He!" A few days later they cried "*Away with Him!*" It was much the same here at Lystra.

But for Paul's own remonstrations the people of Lystra would have worshipped him and Barnabas as gods. Now suddenly, all was changed.

Jews from Pisidian Antioch, in their bitterness against Paul and his message, had pursued him to Lystra. There they placed a very different interpretation upon the miracle by Paul than the Lystrians had done and, being themselves Jews as Paul was, were able to "persuade" the Lystrians that the apostle was an evil person--so evil that he should be put to death without delay.

The manner in which the apostle was assaulted is worthy of our attention. Stoning was a *Jewish* form of capital punishment ([Lev. 20:2](#), etc.). Indeed, Paul and Barnabas had but recently fled from Iconium because the Jews had stirred up the Gentiles and were about to stone them (Acts 14:2,5). Now, at Lystra they had accomplished what they had failed to do at Iconium--at least in Paul's case.

With scarcely an exception Paul's persecutions by Gentiles were instigated by the Jews. On every hand it was they who "stirred up" (Ver. 2) the Gentiles and "persuaded" (Ver. 19) them to oppose Paul. Hence the apostle writes in I Thes. 2: 15,16, with regard to the Jews:

"Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:

"Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost."

This statement by Paul, in one of his earliest epistles, bears witness to the fact that Israel had already passed the great crisis in her history and that Paul did not, as some suppose, offer the kingdom during his early ministry. Together with the testimony of Acts it indicates further that Acts is primarily the story of the fall of Israel and of God's *reason* for sending salvation to the Gentiles apart from His chosen people and *not*, as some contend, the story of "the birth and growth" of the Church of the present dispensation.

That the Jews could thus persuade the Gentiles to change their minds so suddenly and to stone one whom they would but yesterday have worshipped, is an evidence of the depravity of human nature and of the superficial character of religious excitement.

Having stoned Paul, the people subjected him to further humiliation by dragging<sup>74</sup> him, bruised and bleeding, out of the city, and leaving him there for dead (Ver. 19).

### **WAS PAUL ACTUALLY STONED TO DEATH?**

Probably the apostle's stoning at Lystra was the only such experience he ever endured, for shortly before going to Jerusalem for the last time he wrote to the Corinthians: "*Once was I stoned*" (II Cor. 11:25). There has been a good deal of debate among commentators as to whether or not Paul was actually killed on this occasion, and then miraculously raised from the dead.

Those who believe that Paul was actually stoned *to death* and then raised again advance the following arguments among others:

1. The people evidently *meant* to put Paul to death, since stoning was a form of execution.
2. The word rendered "supposing," in Verse 19, comes from the Greek root *nomizo*, which has to do with the intellect, not the imagination. As used in the New Testament it means to hold or take for granted from custom, or to conclude from evidence, but never to imagine.
3. The suddenness with which Paul arose and came into the city seems to indicate a miracle.

---

<sup>74</sup> "Drew," in Ver. 19, is the Old English word for *drag*.

4. In II Cor. 12:1-5 the apostle relates how he had been caught up to the third heaven in an experience which had taken place approximately "fourteen years ago"--just about the time he had visited Lystra. Concerning this experience he says: "*Whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth*" (II Cor. 12:3).

While we do not contend dogmatically that Paul did *not* die on this occasion, yet we are not convinced that any or all of the above arguments prove conclusively that he did,

It is doubtless true that Paul's persecutors *meant* to put him to death and *thought* they had accomplished their purpose, but this does not prove that they *had* accomplished it. Nor does the suddenness with which he arose and walked about necessarily indicate he had been raised *from the dead*. He may merely have been stunned, rendered unconscious, by the stones hurled at him, and then suddenly have regained consciousness again. Many prize fighters of our own day have been "knocked out" for considerable lengths of time and then have "come to" again, rising up and walking about quite as instantaneously as Paul did on this occasion.

Paul's words in II Cor. 12, if they refer to this experience, as we are inclined to agree they do, should rather keep us from coming to any definite conclusion in the matter, for *he* says, by the Spirit, "whether in the body, or out of the body, *I cannot tell.*"

But let us return to our story. What emotions must have filled the hearts of the disciples who "stood round about" the body of their beloved apostle, broken-hearted and wondering what to do! Yet their very presence there was proof that his ministry had not been in vain. Here already was the beginning of a church, and a strong one, for they had seen the apostle offer his very life for them and the truth and, indeed, it must have taken no little courage on *their* part to remain standing this way around the apparently lifeless form of the one whom his persecutors had so hated. And Paul's own courage is further seen in the fact that no more had he risen up than he went right back into the city where he had been stoned, evidently grasping the opportunity to let his persecutors know that God was with him, if perchance they might yet turn to Christ.

The apostle's sufferings in this region later stood out in his memory as he wrote of the "*persecutions*" and "*afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium; at Lystra; what persecutions I endured;*" but these sufferings had not gone for naught. Indeed there was one outstanding individual won to Christ at this time who was to mean more to him as a companion in the work than Barnabas ever had. Paul addressed the above words about his persecutions and afflictions to one who had "*fully known*" about them (II Tim. 3:10, 11). This was none other than Timothy, his beloved son in the faith, begotten during his labors



and persecutions at Lystra (See [Acts 14:21; 16:1-3](#) and cf. [I Tim. 1:2; II Tim. 3:10,11](#)).

If, as we are inclined to believe, the experience referred to in II Cor. 12:1-5 took place at this time, there was still more to encourage and inspire the apostle, for as his body lay bruised and bleeding, surrounded by grieving disciples, his spirit soared heavenward. He was "caught up to the third heaven" to see the glory of the position that belongs to the members of the Body of Christ, and to hear things so far above human ken that he was not even permitted to utter them. Indeed, so glorious was the experience that measures had to be taken lest it hinder his usefulness on earth as a servant of Christ. With regard to this the apostle says:

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

"For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

"And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness . . ." (II Cor. 12:7-9).

What a demonstration of God's grace we have in the passage we have here considered! The Lystrians drag out and leave for dead the one who has been sent to bring them salvation but, raised up again, he continues to proclaim the good news of the grace of God.

The next day, after having returned to Lystra, the apostle departed with Barnabas to Derbe. Here, evidently, they preached unhindered, making many disciples.<sup>75</sup> This brings us to the geographical limit of Paul's first apostolic journey.

### **THE APOSTLES RETRACE THEIR STEPS**

"And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,

"Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

"And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.

---

<sup>75</sup> The phrase "taught many" is perhaps better rendered, "made many disciples."

"And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia:

"And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.

"And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

"And there they abode long time with the disciples."

--Acts 14:21-28.

The Apostle Paul was not, like many modern evangelists, satisfied with "decisions for Christ." Having won men to Christ he bore them daily upon his heart, praying for them, writing to them or, if possible, visiting them again that they might be established in the faith.

Thus it was that Paul and Barnabas began retracing their steps, returning to Antioch in Syria by the same route they had taken to get to Derbe. As they had arrived at Derbe by way of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, beset by opposition and persecution all along the way, so now they began the journey back from Derbe by way of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith, explaining that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Ver. 22). This "must" does not indicate a fatal necessity, as though no one could be saved without having suffered, but rather indicates that it is natural, the world being what it is, that believers should suffer as they enter, more and more fully, into the kingdom of God,<sup>76</sup> that they should not expect it to be otherwise (See [II Tim. 3:12](#); [Rom. 8:17](#)). Indeed God permits these things in order to keep His children separate from the world and close to Himself.

But Paul and Barnabas did more than simply exhort the believers in these cities to continue in the faith. They took steps to establish organized assemblies in each place. The word rendered "ordained" in Verse 23 actually means to vote by stretching out the hand. From this has come the secondary meaning: *to appoint by vote*. Thus other translations render this word "*selected*" or "*elected*" or "*appointed by vote*" or "*selected by a show of hands*."

In the light of Paul's character and his epistles it is unthinkable that he went about *arbitrarily* appointing elders for these assemblies of believers, or that he later expected Timothy or Titus to do this ([Tit. 1:5](#)). The many qualifications which elders and overseers were to possess could, of course, be fully recognized only

---

<sup>76</sup> Paul's use of this term is no indication that he *offered* the kingdom, i.e., *its earthly establishment*, until the close of Acts, for even *after* that he speaks of entering, or failing to enter the kingdom of God (Eph. 5:5). The kingdom is now in heaven, vested in the exiled Christ.

by those among whom they lived, and the very fact that these leaders in the work were to be men of "good report," indicates that Paul merely presided over formal elections in such cases as these. Indeed common sense teaches us that no leader can satisfactorily fulfil his office who does not enjoy the respect and backing of those over whom he has been placed. Paul himself, though appointed by God, yet was given this human backing (See 13:2-4).

This is a lesson which many a pastor needs to learn lest, arbitrary in his decisions and actions, he fail to win the hearty cooperation of the elders and members of his congregation.

But these measures to establish organized assemblies, though necessary, were not enough. As the apostles had begun by confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to remain steadfast in the faith, so they did not depart until with prayer and fasting they had committed them to the Lord, on whom they had believed (Ver. 23).

Continuing their return journey Paul and Barnabas passed through Pisidia and Pamphilia down to Attalia, a seaport. Before sailing from Attalia, however, they "preached the Word in **Perga**" a few miles off. This was the city where John Mark, "departing from them" had "returned to Jerusalem," during the early part of their journey. It is possible that due to the circumstances connected with John's departure they had not preached the gospel there at that time and so felt constrained to do so now.

Finally, taking ship from Attalia the apostles returned to Antioch in Syria "from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled."

What a reunion they must have had with the church there as they "rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles"! (Ver. 27). And again they abode a "*long time*"<sup>77</sup> with the believers in Antioch (Ver. 28, cf. 11:26).

Mark well that Antioch, not Jerusalem, was their base of operations. The return of Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, and their second prolonged stay there give added evidence that here was a work separate and distinct from that which our Lord had committed to the eleven after His resurrection, which had its headquarters at Jerusalem; that Paul's commission to go to the nations had already begun to supersede the so-called "great commission"; that God was now opening the door of faith to the Gentiles despite the fact that Israel would have kept it closed to them--indeed, would not enter it herself.

---

<sup>77</sup> Bible chronologists estimate the length of time to have been anywhere from two years to six years.

## **Chapter XXIV - Acts 15:1-12**

### **THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM**

#### **THE DISPUTE AT ANTIOCH**

"And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved,

"When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question,

"And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren,"

--Acts 15:1-3.

We come now to the record of the first great controversy between the followers of Christ, the inevitable clash between the believers at Jerusalem and Antioch, and of how it was used of God to settle once and for all the question of Paul's authority as the apostle of the new dispensation.

Peter's report to the brethren at Jerusalem regarding the conversion of Cornelius and his household had not dosed the matter. At the time Peter's explanation had seemed to satisfy them and they had at least "*held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life*" (Acts 11:18). But that had been some considerable time previous (Acts 15:7) and some had now begun to harbor doubts as to the status of such Gentiles. Had Cornelius and his household done right in *remaining in* uncircumcision? Was theirs an exceptional case? Who had any right to abrogate the law which God Himself had established? Furthermore, that law, given to Israel, had declared the principle and enforced the practice of national isolation. Was it right, now, for Jews to consider uncircumcised men as the people of God with them, even though they abandoned idolatry, worshipped Christ, and showed this in their conduct?

These and other such questions would naturally trouble some, for while Peter had indeed been sent to one household of Gentiles and had witnessed the evidences of their salvation, he could only explain that he had been commanded to go "*nothing doubting,*" adding: "*What was I that I could withstand God?*" Nor had any revelation as yet been given to them that the law, "the middle wall of partition" had been abolished by the cross.

The misgivings of these Judaeen believers were doubtless aggravated by the fact that great numbers of Gentiles were now being won to Christ under the ministry of Paul and Barnabas, who were establishing churches among them in which neither circumcision nor the Mosaic law had any place.

Finally there were some who could contain themselves no longer, taking it upon themselves to travel to Antioch and set the converts there straight. It should be noted that with them it was not merely a matter of *fellowship*: evidently they were genuinely concerned<sup>78</sup> about the *salvation* of these Gentiles, for they began teaching them: "*Except ye be circumcised after the manner [custom] of Moses, ye cannot be saved.*" They were not looking upon circumcision merely as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant, but as that which had been commanded by Moses, the principal rite of Judaism, indispensable to the rights and privileges of membership in the favored nation, and therefore necessary to salvation.<sup>79</sup>

But with all their evident sincerity in this matter they were wrong, for they had undertaken this mission without due authority, and, as it turned out, *unsettled* matters at Antioch instead of settling them. After the matter was finally settled at Jerusalem, the church there wrote to the Gentiles regarding these brethren:

"... certain which went out from us have TROUBLED YOU with words, SUBVERTING YOUR SOULS, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: TO WHOM WE GAVE NO SUCH COMMANDMENT" (Acts 15:24).

Years later when Judaizers sought to impose circumcision and the law upon the Galatians, Paul wrote almost the same thing about them:

"... there be some that TROUBLE YOU, and would PERVERT THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST" (Gal. 1:7).

While some Bible teachers whom we highly respect hold that these Judaizers preached a Spurious gospel, we do not concur in this idea, for then the apostle would doubtless have said in Gal. 1:6,7: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed . . . unto another gospel *which is not a gospel*" or "*which is not a gospel at all*" or "*which is not even a gospel.*" What he *did* say was: "Which is not *another.*"

Now it is true that the "another" of Verse 6 (*heteros*) is said by Thayer and others to mean "another of a *different* kind," while the "another" of Verse 7 (*allos*) is said to mean "another of the *same* kind," the former expressing *difference* and the latter *addition*.

Yet some of our best Greek scholars seem to hesitate here and some even give cause to suspect that their interpretation has been strongly influenced by

---

<sup>78</sup> The "false brethren" of Gal. 2:4 entered the scene later at Jerusalem.

<sup>79</sup> And it *was* indeed the basic ceremonial requirement of the law and that which separated them from the Gentiles, as the people of God (John 7:22; Lev. 12:2,3; Gal. 5:3).

their theological background. Thus W. E. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, says that this distinction "is to be observed in *numerous passages*" (our italics) while Vincent, in his *Word Studies*, says: "A *different* gospel is not another *gospel*. There is but one gospel."

But here Vincent is wrong, for it is not true that the Bible presents but one gospel. We are explicitly told that it was *gospel* that God preached to Abraham when he said: "*In thee shall all nations be blessed*" (See. [Gal. 3:8](#)). And this was different certainly, from the gospel which we are now commissioned to preach. And surely "the gospel of the circumcision" was *different* from "the gospel of the uncircumcision" (Gal. 2:7) but men have fallen so short in rightly dividing the Word of truth and have so long followed the tradition that the Bible presents but one gospel that Vincent doubtless thought that a different gospel could not be a gospel at all But if this is what Paul meant, why did he not say "a different gospel which is *not* a gospel"? Why did he insert the word *allos*, *another*?

As to the alleged distinction occurring in "numerous" passages, what about the rest? We have looked some of them up, and note the following:

Sometimes *heteros* and *allos* are used interchangeably, as, for example, in Matt. 19:9 and Luke 16:18, where putting away one's wife and marrying "another" is discussed.

Sometimes *heteros* means *additional* rather than *different* as in Acts 2:40, "many other words"; Matt 8:21, "another of His disciples"; Gal. 1:19, "other of the apostles"; Acts 20:15, "the next day" (lit "*next*").

On the other hand, *allos* sometimes expresses *difference* rather than *addition* as in Matt. 2:12, "they departed... another way"; Mark 12:9, "will give the vineyard to others"; John 4:38, "ye bestowed no labor; other men labored"; Acts 4:12, "Neither is there salvation in any other"; Acts 19:32, "Some . . . one thing, and some another"; Gal. 5:10, "otherwise minded."

In this connection those who argue that our word *heterodox* is derived from the Greek *heteros*, should take note that our word *else* is likewise derived from the Greek *allos* and both indicate difference, though the former probably more strongly so.

Thayer says: "Every *heteros* is an *allos*, but not every *allos* is a *heteros*." But here he is as wrong as Vincent, for the very passage before us is proof that not every *heteros* is an *allos* for the apostle says: "Ye are so soon removed . . . unto another [*heteros*] gospel which is NOT another [*allos*] ."

We see no ground, therefore, for the theory that the Judaizers at Antioch and Galatia proclaimed a spurious gospel or that which was not a gospel at all, else Paul would have said so.

While, perhaps, the emphasis on difference is usually somewhat greater in the case of *hereros* than in the case of *allos*, they are close synonyms used by Paul, evidently, to show that the gospel which the Judaizers had brought to the Gentiles was another, yet in a sense *not* another. That is to say, the difference was one of development rather than of contradiction, just as elsewhere Paul makes it clear that grace was no contradiction of the law ([Rom. 3:31](#)).

These Judaizers were not unscriptural; they were *undispensational*. What they taught was to be found in Scripture, but it did not recognize the *further* revelation given to and through the Apostle Paul. They sought to bring Gentiles, saved by a message of pure grace, back under the program of the kingdom with its circumcision and law--and thus they perverted the gospel of Christ.

This should be a lesson to us, for if we preach or practice that which does not belong to the present dispensation, however appropriate, Scripturally, it may once have been, we too pervert the gospel of Christ and come under the curse of Gal. 1:8,9, a curse which has already confused and divided the greater part of the professing Church.

Thus both the apostles at Jerusalem and the Apostle Paul called the Judaizers trouble makers.

He who had "wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision," had been "mighty in Paul toward the Gentiles" (Gal. 2:8) and the contention of these Judaizers that the Gentiles could not be saved apart from circumcision and the law implied that Paul and Barnabas had been teaching a soul-destroying heresy. Thus Paul's divine commission and apostleship was being called into question and his proclamation of grace threatened. Little wonder "*Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them*" (Ver. 2).

As a result of the controversy that had arisen, it was determined "that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question" (Ver. 2).

It is quite generally agreed that this visit of Paul to Jerusalem is identical with that referred to in Gal. 2, but since the agreement is not unanimous we give here some of the reasons why we believe this to be so.

The only other recorded visits of Paul to Jerusalem to which Gal. 2 could refer are those of Acts 11:30 and 18:22.

The arguments against the visit of Acts 11:30 being identical with that of Gal. 2 are as follows:

1. It seems impossible to fit the fourteen years of Gal. 2:1 into the period from Acts 9:27 (his first visit after his conversion) to Acts 11:30.

2. The purpose of his visit in Acts 11:30 is *stated* to be that of carrying financial "relief" to the poor saints of Judaea.

3. There is no record of the question of circumcision having been raised then and it is doubtful that it would have been so soon after the settlement of Acts 11:18.

4. Had the agreement of Gal. 2:9 been made during the visit of Acts 11:18, prior to the council of Acts 15, it would surely have been appealed to. In fact, the council of Acts 15 would then have been unnecessary.

The arguments against the visit of Acts 18:22 being identical with that of Gal. 2 are as follows:

1. The interval between the visits of Acts 9:27 and Acts 18:22 is doubtless considerably *more* than fourteen years.

2. It is not likely that the question of the circumcision of Gentiles would have been raised again after the written decision of the council of Acts 15.

3. If it had been, the previous decision of the Acts 15 council would surely have been appealed to.

For these reasons and because of the general similarity of the accounts of Acts 15 and Gal. 2 we believe they refer to the same visit. The main objection raised against this view is that in Gal. 1:18-2:1 Paul himself solemnly declares that after his visit with Peter, three years after his conversion, he had not gone up to Jerusalem to see the apostles again until "fourteen years after." But this difficulty is not insurmountable, for the apostle's argument in Galatians is not that he had been to Jerusalem so seldom, but that he had been in contact with the apostles so seldom,<sup>80</sup> and therefore could not have gotten his teaching from them. His omission of the visit of Acts 11:30 in the Galatians passage is evidently because he saw *none* of the apostles at that time, and does not indicate a want of candor (See our notes on Pp. 123-126 [Hardback copy], on the visit of Acts 11:30).

But does this sending Paul to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem to settle this matter indicate that he was subject to them? Not at all. It was not only the believers at Antioch who "determined" to send Paul to Jerusalem at this time; *the Lord sent him too*, and for a very special purpose, as he says in Gal. 2:2:

"AND I WENT UP BY REVELATION, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles..."

---

<sup>80</sup> "Neither went I up to Jerusalem TO THEM WHICH WERE APOSTLES BEFORE ME" (Gal. 1:17).



This was not the first such case, for at his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion his life had been in such danger that "the brethren" took him in hand and "sent him forth to Tarsus" (Acts 9:30). But in Acts 22:17,18 the apostle explains how on that same visit, while praying in the temple, he was in a trance:

"AND I SAW HIM [CHRIST] SAYING UNTO ME, MAKE HASTE, AND GET THEE QUICKLY OUT OF JERUSALEM: FOR THEY WILL NOT RECEIVE THY TESTIMONY CONCERNING ME."

Thus on these two occasions he was sent, first *from* Jerusalem and then *to* Jerusalem by *both* the brethren and the Lord. And the relation of these two visits is significant too. On the former occasion he was sent *from* Jerusalem by the brethren for his physical safety, but by the Lord because Israel was being concluded in unbelief (Acts 22:18). On the second occasion he was sent *to* Jerusalem by the brethren to settle a troublesome controversy regarding circumcision, but by the Lord that he might communicate to the leaders at Jerusalem that gospel which he had been preaching to the Gentiles and that they might acknowledge him officially and publicly as the apostle of the Gentiles, sent to proclaim "*the gospel of the uncircumcision*" (Gal. 2: 2,7,9).

Paul had full authority from the Lord entirely apart from the twelve. He had been, saved and ordained as an apostle on the road to Damascus, far from Jerusalem and the twelve. He had been sent on his first great apostolic journey from Syrian Antioch, also entirely apart from the twelve. Already he had been used to turn great numbers of Gentiles to the Lord, never once needing to look to the apostles at Jerusalem for directions or authority. The reason he was now sent to Jerusalem by the Lord was not for *his sake*, but for *their* sakes and for the sake of the program now being launched.

It must be remembered that the apostles at Jerusalem had first been sent to "all the world" and "all nations" (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15). It was their hope and expectation that Israel would receive Christ, the risen King, and that so salvation and blessing might flow through Israel to the Gentiles. But Israel had rejected her King and the long-promised "times of refreshing." The stoning of Stephen was, in the words of Sir Robert Anderson, "the secret crisis" in Israel's history and, preparing to set Israel aside temporarily and to hold the establishment of the kingdom in abeyance, God now raised up *another* apostle and sent him forth to proclaim *grace* to the Gentiles entirely apart from Israel's instrumentality; not because of her acceptance of Christ but because of her rejection and rebellion.

Naturally this affected the "great commission" to the eleven. Under this new program *Paul, not the apostles at Jerusalem*, was to become the apostle to "all nations" and "all the world" and the apostles at Jerusalem were henceforth to confine their ministry to those of the circumcision. Paul fully understood this, but *they* must understand and recognize it fully too, so that they might not be working at cross purposes.

Furthermore, under this new dispensation the middle wall of separation between Jew and Gentile was to be gradually broken down, and it was therefore necessary that the Jewish believers recognize the Gentile believers as their brethren in Christ. This was still but the beginning, of course. They could not yet comprehend their complete oneness in Christ, but before long they were to recognize each other for what they truly were: *"one body in Christ, and every one members one of another"* (Rom. 12:5; cf. [1 Cor. 1:2; 12:13](#)).

This all, in addition to the fact that it must be settled once and for all that at least the *Gentiles* must not be made subject to the law of Moses. Again, this was but a beginning, for the council at Jerusalem did not even consider the question whether or not the *Jewish* believers were to remain under the law. They assumed that they *were*, for no revelation had as yet been given by God to the effect that they were to be freed from it. As late as Acts 21:20 they were still *"all zealous of the law."*

Thus with the raising up of Paul and his early ministry among the Gentiles we have the gradual transition from the old dispensation to the new. God does not reveal everything at once, nor start churches among the Gentiles which remain unrelated to the believers at Jerusalem. The Jerusalem saints are expected to recognize the change in program, to move on with it, and to enjoy their oneness with the Gentile saints.

Of those who accompanied Paul on this journey to Jerusalem only two names are mentioned in the sacred record: *Barnabas* ([Acts 15:2](#)) and *Titus* ([Gal. 2:1](#)). The choice of these two could hardly have been more appropriate, for Barnabas had originally belonged to the company at Jerusalem and was a Levite by birth, while Titus was an uncircumcised Greek. With these two and some others besides, the apostle left for Jerusalem.

Years later Paul wrote from prison to the Philipplians like a soldier guarding a most precious treasure: *"I am set for the defence of the gospel"* (Phil. 1:17). Always he had stood faithfully to defend the purity of that good news which had been committed to him: *"the gospel of the grace of God."* Let us thank God for this. Already his "dissension and disputation" with the Judaizers at Antioch was showing results, for though "troubled," the church there still stood with Paul and Barnabas, as is evidenced by the fact that the church brought them on their way as they began their journey. It must have encouraged Paul and his party, too, to find that their news of the conversion of the Gentiles "caused great joy unto all the brethren" of Phenice and Samaria ([Acts 15:3](#)). Of course they might have sailed from Antioch to Joppa and avoided the regions of the Canaanites and the hated Samaritans, but the choice of this route may well have been an assertion of the principles for which they were standing.

## **PAUL AND HIS PARTY ARRIVE**

## AT JERUSALEM

"And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

"But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

--Acts 15:4,5.

## A WARM WELCOME

As Paul and his company had been "brought on their way by the church" at Antioch, so now they were "received [Lit. *welcomed*] by the church" at Jerusalem. Paul's two previous visits to Jerusalem had been brief and accompanied by considerable danger. At his first visit after his conversion the disciples had distrusted him and the Grecians had plotted his death, so that it had become necessary for him to leave the city (Acts 9:26-30). His second visit was made at the time when "Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church," killing James, the brother of John, and imprisoning Peter, with a view to delivering him to death after Passover (Acts 11:30; 12:2-4,25). At that time Paul evidently did not even see any of the twelve apostles.

But now things were different at Jerusalem. Messiah's followers in the city were multiplying again (many having also returned from the places where they had been scattered in the "great persecution" of 8:1) and seemed no longer to fear the *unbelieving* leaders, even planning to hold *their own council* right in the same city. Also, the *genuineness* of Paul's conversion to Christ was no longer questioned. Whatever objections some may have had to his ministry he was recognized and heartily welcomed by the church at large as a noted and successful servant of Christ.

It must have been a stirring experience to hear Paul and his friends, veteran soldiers of Christ, relate the "things that God had done with them."

## THE NUMBER OF SESSIONS HELD

It must not be supposed that the apostle and his party simply appeared on the scene, that the council was called and the question regarding the Gentiles discussed and settled. So important a matter could not be disposed of so simply. There were at least two, probably three and perhaps even four separate meetings.

In the Epistle to the Galatians Paul explains that a private preliminary conference was first held with "*them which were of reputation*" (2:2). It is *possible*

that Acts 15:4,5 does not refer to a *meeting* of the *church*, but the phraseology of the passage together with the fact that it would not have been much of a welcome by the church had it not been public, lead us to believe that it was a public meeting and that *after this* the Pharisees rose to object and "*the apostles and elders*" then met to consider the matter (Ver. 6). The meeting of the apostles and elders would then be the third meeting, followed by a fourth, attended by "*all the multitude . . . the apostles and elders with the whole church*" (Vers. 12,22).

## THE PRELIMINARY MEETING

The Apostle Paul, while deeply conscious of his divine call and commission, and determined to yield nothing that was essential, yet acted with that prudence and consideration which always characterized him. Thus we find him explaining in his letter to the Galatians that he had first met privately with those "of reputation"<sup>81</sup> to communicate to them personally that gospel which he preached among the Gentiles, lest his journey be in vain (Gal. 2:2).

Those who fail to see, or who deny, that a *further* revelation was given to Paul, should study the account in Galatians carefully, for it teaches emphatically that his message was something new and distinct from that which the twelve had been preaching.

First, the apostle distinctly states that "*in conference [they] added nothing to me*" while *he did* "communicate" new truths to them (Vers. 2,6). Second, these truths he calls: "*that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles,*" indicating that it was *not* the same message which *they* had preached among the Jews. Third, the fact that he communicated this gospel first to the leaders, lest he should, or had, run in vain, indicates clearly that he was endeavoring to make them see it.

How unscriptural, in the light of all this, to contend, as some do, that Paul was simply "checking up" with the leaders at Jerusalem, to make sure he was preaching the same message as they!

Apparently the results of this preliminary meeting were encouraging; for Acts 15:4 describes what was evidently a public welcome by the whole church, at which Paul and Barnabas related "all things that God had done with them." What a meeting it must have been! Who would not have been moved at hearing these valiant men of God tell of their experiences in getting the good news of God's grace out to the heathen! And that this was the theme of their account is evident from Ver. 5.

While the multitude was doubtless thrilled to hear what God had been doing among the Gentiles there were certain believing Pharisees present who were far from satisfied. They felt that the Gentiles must approach God through Israel to be saved; that they must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses or their faith

---

<sup>81</sup> Those of whom *men* made much. The reason for the apostle's use of this word here will be seen later.

was vain. Did not Isa. 56:6,7; 60:1-3; Zech. 8:13,23 and many other Old Testament passages teach this? How could these Gentiles now be saved apart from Israel, circumcision and the law? It was because some of the believing Pharisees now arose to voice these objections that a special meeting of the apostles and elders was necessitated.

### **THE MEETING OF THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS**

"And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

"And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

"And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us;

"And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

"Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

"But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they."

--Acts 15:6-11.

Verses 6 and 7 of this passage are often used by Protestants to prove that the government of "the early Church" did not rest in the autocracy of a single will, but in the deliberative decision of those appointed by the choice, or the approval, of the laity. Actually, however, this rather indicated a decline in the Pentecostal order in which Peter and the twelve had been given authority to represent Christ officially in His absence and all believers were filled with the Spirit ([Matt. 16:19](#); [18:18,19](#); [Acts 2:4](#)). The fact that they had to come together to "consider of this matter," exchanging views and feelings with "much disputing" and giving the result to the multitude, indicates that the Pentecostal era and its kingdom program were passing away. We shall see, however, how the Spirit overruled, establishing Paul's apostleship and message.

### **THOSE PRESENT**

An examination of the list of those present at the special meeting of "the apostles and elders" will give us an inkling of the difficulties Paul faced as he defended his apostleship and message and the liberty of the Gentiles.

First there were probably all of the twelve apostles except James the brother of John, who had been killed by Herod. Then there was also James, the brother of Christ, who was an apostle in the secondary sense, but not one of the twelve. He was a strict legalist and a stickler for the letter of the law. It is doubtless for this reason that he came to be called "James the Just."

The ascendancy of this man among the twelve apostles is one of the signs of their decline and of the passing away of the Pentecostal program. He had not been named one of the twelve, much less the leader of the twelve. He was not even qualified to be one of them, for while they were following Christ, he was still an unbeliever (See [John 7:5](#) and cf. [Matt. 19:28](#); [Acts 1:21,22](#)).<sup>82</sup> Yet this man exerted a growing influence over the twelve and even over Peter, their Christ-appointed leader, probably by reason of the fact that he was our Lord's own brother in the flesh.

Paul testifies that as early as his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, when he abode with Peter for fifteen days, he saw none of the other apostles, but that "James, the Lord's brother," was with Peter. Later, upon his escape from prison, Peter asked some friends to report the matter, not to the other apostles, but to *James and the brethren* (Acts 12:17). Here in Acts 15 this James, rather than Peter, was evidently the moderator of the council (Acts 15:19,20). Indeed at Antioch, later, Peter even allowed himself to be intimidated by "certain from James," going back on the light God had given him as to his relationship to the Gentiles ([Gal. 2:11-14](#)). And at Paul's last visit to Jerusalem neither Peter nor any of the apostles are mentioned. We read simply that "Paul went in... unto *James*; and all the *elders* were present" (Acts 21:18). This James and his party, then, were a power to be reckoned with, and these circumstances explain Paul's characterization of these men as "*these who seemed to be somewhat*" and "*who seemed to be pillars*," and his declaration: "*Whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me*" (Gal. 2:6,9).

A comparison of Acts 15:7 and Gal. 2:4,5 reveals that among those present at this meeting there were also "false brethren, unawares brought in," working under cover to "spy out" the liberty which the Gentiles enjoyed in Christ and to bring them into bondage; men secretly brought in to infiltrate the audience and use political persuasion or pressure or other illegitimate means to sway the decision.

Then, of course, there were also the subordinate elders of the churches of Judaea (Ver. 6).

Representing the Gentile believers there were Paul, Barnabas, Titus and several others ([Acts 15:2](#); [Gal. 2:1](#)). The choice of Barnabas and Titus to accompany Paul on this occasion was, as we have said, particularly wise. Barnabas was a Jew, a Levite, who had formerly belonged to the church at

---

<sup>82</sup> He was saved, evidently, about the time of the crucifixion (Acts 1:14).

Jerusalem and had sold his property, laying the proceeds at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:36,37). He would well understand their viewpoint. Titus, on the other hand, was a Greek, brought along doubtless as an example of the reality of Gentile conversion and also as a test case in the event of a battle with the legalizers over circumcision, so that the Gentiles might have practical proof that circumcision and the law were not to be enforced upon them. What a valuable experience this must have proved to Titus when later he had to stand against the legalizers in the island of Crete! (Tit.1:10,11).

### PAUL'S BATTLE

In the earlier part of the meeting there was "much disputing" (Ver. 7). Those who sought to Judaize the Gentile believers and impose circumcision and the law upon them, together with those "unawares brought in" to help engineer the matter by undercover strategy, proved no match, however, for the Apostle Paul, who had the truth and even the consciences of most of his adversaries on his side.

How deeply grateful we should be to read his words:

"TO WHOM WE GAVE PLACE BY SUBJECTION, NO, NOT FOR AN HOUR; THAT THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL MIGHT CONTINUE WITH YOU" (Gal. 2:5).

As to Titus: *"He was not compelled to be circumcised either."*<sup>83</sup> The Judaizers did not win that battle.

### PETER'S PROTEST

We now come to the last mention of Peter in Acts. He appears as an "apostle of the circumcision," yet to endorse Paul's apostleship and to support his demand that the Jewish believers refrain from imposing the law upon the Gentiles.

On examining the account thus far one feels like asking: *"Where is Peter?"* Has not the Lord already made it unmistakably clear to him that the uncircumcised who believe are to be accepted as they are? Did he not relate to his brethren how, against his own inclination, he had been sent to Cornelius and his household and how they had been gloriously saved? Did not six brethren bear witness to the supernatural evidences of the conversion of these Gentiles? Did not his brethren hold their peace and glorify God when he had finished, acknowledging: *"Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life?"* (Acts 11:18). Why is he silent now? Is he not the one whom the Lord appointed as head of the twelve? Why does he not speak to put an end to all this disputing? Some argue against the papacy by pointing out that Peter neither presided, nor even proposed here, but he should have both presided and

---

<sup>83</sup> This is the sense of Gal 2:3.

proposed. Did our Lord's words mean nothing? He *had* presided and proposed in early Acts (1:15; 2:14). But his power and that of the other apostles was declining.

Peter had allowed himself to be pushed more and more out of his appointed place into the background, but in such a case as this he could not hold his peace forever. Finally, after there had been much disputing, he rose to protest against the movement to force circumcision and the law upon the Gentile believers.

First he relates the simple facts of God's working in the case of Cornelius and his household. It was now some time ago that God had chosen Peter from among the twelve that, as he says: "*the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe*" (Ver. 7).

Mark the words "*my mouth*," for they are most important in connection with this council. God had not commanded all of the twelve to begin going to the Gentiles now, for Israel had not yet received Christ and under the prophetic program salvation was to go to the Gentiles *through redeemed Israel*. Peter alone had been sent, and he to this one household only. He did not continue to minister to the Gentiles. Indeed, as a result of this council at Jerusalem he and the other apostles agreed to confine their ministry to Israel, recognizing *Paul* as God's apostle to the Gentiles ([Gal. 2:9](#)).

This all emphasizes the fact that God had a unique purpose in sending Peter to Cornelius and his household. It was not in fulfillment of the prophetic program or the "great commission" for *all* twelve were included in that program and commission. Thus if the time for that had been ripe they would all have gone to the Gentiles and they would have kept going. Nor was it that God was now to send the twelve to the Gentiles regardless of Israel's continued rebellion, for Paul, not the twelve, was to be entrusted with *this* task.

What, then, was God's special purpose in sending Peter *alone* (of the twelve apostles) to this *one* household of Gentiles? It was 1.) that Paul's subsequent ministry among the Gentiles might be given full recognition, 2.) that it might be recognized that the Gentiles were to be saved apart from circumcision and the law and, 3.) that the believers at Jerusalem might recognize these Gentile believers as their brethren in Christ.

True, Peter had not preached the mystery or the gospel of the grace of God to Cornelius and his household, but he had preached *Christ* and as he had proclaimed the necessity of *faith in Christ* for the remission of sins, his hearers had believed and were saved. At that moment the Spirit had interrupted Peter's address and had given these Gentiles that gift whereby Peter and his friends could know that their salvation was genuine.



The Jerusalem saints, then, could not deny that God was now working among the Gentiles, for their own leader had been sent to minister to them and must now bear witness that "*God, which knoweth the hearts [Gr. "the heart knower"] bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us*" (Ver. 8).

In this connection Peter observed (Ver. 9) that God had put "*no difference*" between Jew and Gentile, purifying the hearts of these Gentiles "*by faith.*"<sup>84</sup> This statement by Peter indicates a full acceptance of what Paul had argued for in the private conference with the leaders.

God had given Peter this experience with Cornelius and his household (significantly after the raising up of Paul) with this very council in view, that he might bear witness to the simple facts he had observed and so confirm Paul's ministry. And why should the Jewish believers complain? Was it not after all circumcision of *the heart* and its purification *by faith* that even Israel must experience before she can be saved? (See [Jer. 4:1,4](#); [9:26](#); cf. [Acts 7:51](#); [Rom. 2:25-29](#)).

How necessary was Peter's experience for just this occasion! Not that the circumcision apostles had any jurisdiction over Paul or the Gentiles, but that Paul's apostleship among the Gentiles and the liberty of Gentile believers in Christ might be *fully recognized*, lest Judaizers, boasting the "authority" of the leaders at Jerusalem, including even the Lord's brother in the flesh, continue to trouble the Gentile saints.

Having related the basic facts of his experience Peter now poses the question:

"Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Ver. 10).

The Pharisees and those who sided with them were attempting to impose upon the Gentiles a yoke which neither their fathers nor they had been able to bear. Indeed, the Pharisees, sitting in Moses' seat, had helped to make this yoke heavier ([Matt. 23:1-4](#)). To insist now that their wills prevail in this matter, rather than yielding to God's revealed will, would indeed be trying God and would but insure their own defeat and condemnation. In fact, it would now be *wrong* for Gentile believers to accept this yoke ([Gal. 5:1](#)).

Closing his remarks, Peter makes a most remarkable statement:

"But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they" (Ver. 11).

---

<sup>84</sup> In Acts 10:15 the cleansing of the Gentiles is shown to be *by grace* and here, *through faith*.

He does not say: "*they* shall be saved even as *we*" but "*we* shall be saved even as *they*." So far from the law being necessary to *their* salvation, he argues, it is not really that by which *we* are saved, and this will yet be demonstrated.

This is the last recorded statement in the account of Peter's ministry in Acts. It should be compared with the last words of his epistles. Explaining there that Paul has written some things "hard to be understood," he closes:

"BUT GROW IN GRACE, AND IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. TO HIM BE GLORY BOTH NOW AND FOR EVER, AMEN" (II Pet. 3:18).

This all shows how wrong it is to divorce Peter's experience at the house of Cornelius from the subsequent ministry of Paul, associating it only with the kingdom program. How *necessary* was this experience, and Peter's testimony regarding it, to a recognition of Paul's later ministry!

### **BARNABAS AND PAUL TESTIFY**

"Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles [Gr, "signs"] and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them."

--Acts 15:12.

It appears that at this point the whole church was again admitted and addressed by Barnabas and Paul,<sup>85</sup> who related what signs and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. This was to confirm to *these Jewish hearers* the fact that their ministry was indeed of God, for "*the Jews require a sign*" (I Cor. 1:22) and this was one of the reasons why Paul was at first given the power to work miracles.

In all this Paul had shown remarkable restraint, for he would doubtless rather have striven for the great doctrinal realities that had become so precious to him, but the great need now was that the believers of the circumcision recognize his God-given commission.

---

<sup>85</sup> It is significant that in Ver. 2, at Antioch, it is "Paul and Barnabas," while in Vers. 12,25, in Jerusalem, it is "Barnabas and Paul."

## **Chapter XXV - Acts 15:13-35**

### **GENTILE LIBERTY RECOGNIZED BY THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM**

#### **JAMES DECLARES THE DECISION**

"And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:

"Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name.

"And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

"After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:

"That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

"Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.

"Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

"But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

"For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day."

--Acts 15:13-21.

Finally the council was brought to a close as James rose to speak, evidently as the chairman of the convention.

Several important details in his address should be carefully noted.

First, in his "answer" James did not refer to what Paul and Barnabas had just said about *their* work among the Gentiles, but to what Peter had previously said, probably in another meeting, about *his* ministry to the Gentiles. Second, even in referring to Peter, James called him *Simeon*, using his earthly name rather than Peter, the name which our Lord had given him in connection with his superiority over the eleven ([Matt. 16:17-19](#)). Third, he handed down the final decision as *his own*. The words: "*my sentence is*" should read: "*I decide*," and the "*I*" is emphatic

in the original. So strong had James' position become among the believers of Judaea that none seemed to recall the fact that the Lord Himself had trained and commissioned *Peter* for the work and had appointed *him* their leader. But God was graciously overruling.

Referring back to Peter's account of his visit to Cornelius and his household, James points out that this was in harmony with (The Greek for "agree" is *sumphoneo*, from *with* and *sound*) prophecy. Quoting from Amos 9, he points out that "the tabernacle of David" was to be rebuilt "*that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord*" (Ver. 17).<sup>86</sup>

Whether James meant to contend that the salvation of the Gentiles under Paul was part of the kingdom program and that these Gentiles were to be subject to Israel would, perhaps, be hard to determine. To be sure this was *not* a further development of the kingdom program, for the seeking remnant and the called Gentiles of Amos 9 were spoken of in connection with the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David which was to take place "in that day," i.e., the day of the Lord. Certainly the tabernacle of David was not being rebuilt when James spoke; indeed the possibility of its being rebuilt in his day was becoming more and more remote.

Certainly the passage in Amos 9 is not being fulfilled in our day. Nor did James say it was being *fulfilled* then. Doubtless overruled by God, James simply said that the conversion of the Gentiles was *in harmony with* (Gr. *sumphoneo*) what the prophets had said. We can say as much about the conversion of Gentiles today, for while this is not a fulfillment of the prophetic program, the fact remains that God had promised to send salvation to the Gentiles and He *did* send it to them, in spite, of course, of Israel's refusal to become the channel of blessing, but He *did* send it. This explains such passages as [Acts 13:46,47](#) and [Rom. 15:8-16](#).

The fact pointed out by James that God "*first*" visited the Gentiles through Peter, implies a connection between Cornelius and his household and the Gentiles later saved under Paul. While it is true that in the case of Cornelius we have a foreshadowing of the conversion of the Gentiles through redeemed Israel, personified by Peter, yet the fact is that God sent Peter to Cornelius, not under the "great commission" but by a *special* commission, not because Israel had accepted Christ and the prophetic program could now go on, but because Israel had *rejected* Christ and a new program was being ushered in, and *Peter*, the leader of the twelve and of the Circumcision Church was the one chosen for this

---

<sup>86</sup> In A.V. Amos 9:11,12 reads "remnant of Edom," instead of "residue of men," and "possess," instead of "seek," but doubtless the latter in each case is correct, as quoted by James in Acts for while Edom is *adum* in the Hebrew, *man* is *adam* and while *possess* is *irsh*, *seek* is *drash*. The difference in each case is so slight that the words may very well have been miscopied. Also, James' quotation of the passage is more in line with the rest of prophecy than the text from which it was translated in the A.V.

task so that there might be no doubt as to it and that so the further development of this program under Paul (who had already been raised up when Peter visited Cornelius) might be fully attested.

James' testimony, under God, then, was *not* to show that the prophetic program was being fulfilled, for this was not yet the case, but that it was not contrary to God's purpose that Gentiles should be saved, but rather in harmony with it.

It is sad to see James usurping Peter's position, and even Paul's,<sup>87</sup> as he concludes: "*Wherefore I decide . . .*" (Verse 19). What he was about to propose was not *his* decision. As the records of Acts and Galatians bear witness, it was mainly the result of Paul's battle and Peter's protest. But in the providence of God, James' "decision" was still a remarkable one. It provided that the Jewish believers should *not* trouble the Gentiles about circumcision and the law, but proposed writing to them exhorting them to "abstain from polutions of idols, and from fornication,<sup>88</sup> and from things strangled, and from blood" (Ver. 20). On the basis of Acts 15:29; 21:25 and Gal. 2:5 we do not feel, as some do, that this still amounted to an imposition of the law, but that this course was suggested to smooth the way for better fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers and that the prejudices of the unbelieving Jews might not be shocked and *they* driven farther away from Christ. For, as James said:

"... Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day" (Ver. 21).

His phraseology indicates that should the condition pass, the exhortation would no longer be pertinent.

### OTHER AGREEMENTS

Let us now examine the remainder of the Galatians account and observe that other agreements were also reached, evidently in the meeting of the apostles and elders, which doubtless had an important bearing on James' "decision."

First, Paul points out in Gal. 2 a fact which he may well have sought to "get across" at the council too. The issue should not have been settled by James, who was not one of the twelve, nor even by John, but by *Peter*.

Comparing the circumcision ministry with his own, the apostle says:

"For he that wrought effectually in PETER to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles" (Gal. 2:8).

---

<sup>87</sup> For James had no authority over the Gentiles to whom Paul ministered.

<sup>88</sup> Probably not in its grossest forms but in such cases where they felt the Gentile believers might be more lax.

But with James holding sway Paul refers to the leaders four times as those who were "of reputation,"<sup>89</sup> saying once about those reputed to be somewhat: "*whatsoever they were [Lit. had been] it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person*" (Ver. 6).

Yet, as we say, God was overruling, for the apostle declares that "*they saw*" that "*the gospel of the uncircumcision*" had been committed to Paul, as "the gospel of the circumcision" had been to Peter (Ver. 7) and before it is over we find the circumcision leaders and Paul and Barnabas shaking hands in a solemn and important agreement:

"AND WHEN JAMES, CEPHAS, AND JOHN, WHO SEEMED TO BE PILLARS, PERCEIVED THE GRACE THAT WAS GIVEN UNTO ME, THEY GAVE TO ME AND BARNABAS THE RIGHT HANDS OF FELLOWSHIP; THAT WE SHOULD GO UNTO THE HEATHEN [GENTILES] AND THEY UNTO THE CIRCUMCISION" (Ver. 9).

The Judaizers had brought Paul's apostleship into question but now it was amply confirmed, for here we have James, the man-approved leader of the Hebrew Church and Peter, its Christ-appointed leader, together with John, *all* shaking hands with Paul and Barnabas in solemn and public recognition of the fact that God had called Paul and Barnabas to go to the Gentiles, and agreeing to confine their own ministry to the circumcision. How fully Paul had been vindicated!

This agreement is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that the twelve had at first been commissioned to go to all nations, beginning, of course, at Jerusalem ([Matt. 28:19](#); [Mark 16:15](#); [Luke 24:47](#); [Acts 1:8](#)). But as the apostles had *bound* things which had also been bound in heaven, so now they exercise their authority for the last time by *loosing* themselves from the commission to go to all the world, and what they did on earth was ratified in heaven (See [Matt. 18:18-20](#)).

As there was one exhortation appended to the decision as to the law in the Acts record, so we find one request appended to the agreement as to Paul's apostleship here in Gal. 2, for the apostle adds:

"Only they would that we should remember the poor;<sup>90</sup> the same which I also was forward to do", (Ver. 10).

Could there be any more eloquent testimony to the collapse of the kingdom program and the beginning of a new work among the Gentiles than that the leaders of the church at Jerusalem found it necessary to ask the Gentile

---

<sup>89</sup> In Vers. 6 and 9 the word "seemed" should be "reputed" as in Ver. 9 (Gr. *dokeo*).

<sup>90</sup> *Their* poor. There would be no point in asking help for the poor under Paul's ministry.

believers for financial aid? A great change had taken place since the time when they had all been "of one heart and of one soul" and none among them had lacked (Acts 4:32,34).

Paul understood the situation, perhaps better than they, and his sincerity in saying that he himself was "*forward*" to help them is evidenced by the fact that he had already brought them help from the church at Antioch (Acts 11:29,30) and that in his letters we find him raising funds from "*the churches of Galatia*" (I Cor. 16:1-3) "*the churches of Macedonia*" (II Cor. 8:1-4) and "*the churches of Achaia*" (II Cor. 9:2) to help "*the poor saints . . . at Jerusalem*" (Rom. 15:26).

### **THE LETTER TO THE GENTILES**

"Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

"And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:

"Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:

"It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

"Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

"We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.

"For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

"That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well."

-Acts 15:22-29.

### **A LESSON IN CHURCH POLITY**

This passage teaches another important lesson in church polity. It is true that Peter had been appointed leader of the apostles, and that he in particular and all of them together had been given great authority in the kingdom church. Yet it is

evident from the record that this authority was not intended to be exercised in a *dictatorial* and *arbitrary* manner, especially where matters vital to the whole assembly were concerned. This is clear from the records of the choice of Matthias (Acts 1:15-26) and the appointment of the seven deacons (Acts 6:2,3). And if this was so in the days when "*they were all filled with the Holy Spirit,*" it was the more so now that the Pentecostal program was beginning to pass away, for while the problem was mainly thrashed out in the conference of "the apostles and elders," the outcome still had to be submitted to the whole assembly for its approval. Let James call it "my decision," but even if it had been Peter's decision it would not, and *could* not, have stood until "the whole church" had approved it.

This is important in view of the fact that Rome, taking more than full advantage of the passages bearing on the authority given to Peter, has wholly excluded the laity from having any part in her decisions, whether important or insignificant. Indeed, even the clergy has no voice in its own government. Each one must learn to be *wholly subject to his superior*, so that *no Roman Catholic (except the Pope) is a member of the Roman Catholic Church in the true sense of the word*, not being given any voice in the church nor even any right to know what is done with the money he contributes.

In the government of some of our largest Protestant denominations we also observe the leaders clinging to as much political power as they dare, as they wholly exclude the laity from their Synods.

It is obviously true that the debate of an important question by a large audience, many of whom may be spiritually immature and few of whom, generally, have given the question mature consideration, may lead to wrong decisions and disaster. Men recognized for their spirituality and ability have been, or should have been, chosen for this very purpose, but the measure of their *true* authority is that of their *spirituality*. Hence, in matters affecting the whole church, the agreement reached privately should then be submitted to the laity for its acceptance or rejection.

We have observed this in the case of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles in Chapter 14, and here we see it again, even at the council in Jerusalem. The laity evidently did not have the right to *initiate* measures. This was left to men chosen or approved by them. But clearly they did have the power to vote on that which their leaders had agreed upon.

### **THE DECISION MADE FINAL**

After James had finished speaking the decision was made final as "the apostles and elders *with the whole church*" agreed to convey it to the Gentile believers. This now had to be done in a way that would leave no question as to its authenticity or finality. They would send a committee of men chosen from their



own company to Antioch *with* Paul and Barnabas, bearing a written notice<sup>91</sup> of the decision, which they together could vouch for by word of mouth. This committee was composed of Judas Barsabas, perhaps related to Joseph Barsabas (Acts 1:23) having the same surname, and Silas. Both were "chief men among the brethren" and their word would be respected.

The communication was addressed specifically to the Gentile brethren "in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia" (Ver. 23). This is doubtless because the question about circumcision and the law had spread to the regions bordering Antioch, where Paul had labored, probably before and possibly during<sup>92</sup> his year's stay at Antioch (Acts 11:25,26 cf. [Gal. 1:21,22](#)).

The written decision of the council was in itself a great victory both for the Gentile believers and for Paul. Opening with a hearty "greeting"<sup>93</sup> from "the apostles and elders and brethren" at Jerusalem, it explained that they had heard that certain of their own number had gone to Antioch, troubling the Gentile believers there and "subverting"<sup>94</sup> their souls, and assured them that these men had received no command from them to go. The word "such" has been incorrectly supplied in Ver. 24. The meaning is not that the church at Jerusalem had not commissioned them to say what they did, but that they had not commissioned them to go at all: "to whom we gave *no commandment*."

In comparison with these trouble-makers the letter went on to speak of "chosen men" sent with "*our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*" -- these "chosen men" sent to confirm their statements.

This gracious testimony to the character of Barnabas and Paul clearly implied that their words should be accepted and their authority respected by the Gentiles.

As to the actual decision of the council, reduced to writing in this letter, several important details should be noted.

1. The Church at Jerusalem did not impose the law upon the Gentile believers.

2. They could not have done so anyway, because they had no jurisdiction over them, but the point is that had the kingdom program gone on the Gentiles would have been subject to Israel. Now the Church at Jerusalem makes it clear that this is not the case.

---

<sup>91</sup> This notice is most interesting to examine. Its various parts seem to show the influence of several of the leaders who evidently helped compose it.

<sup>92</sup> Though we read in Acts 11:26 that "a whole year" he and Barnabas "assembled" with the believers at Antioch, which would seem to preclude much travel.

<sup>93</sup> The Gr. *katro* means literally, "*We wish you joy*."

<sup>94</sup> Gr. *anaskuazo*, used of an enemy dismantling and robbing. Cf. Col. 2:8.

3. The "necessary things" in which the Jerusalem Church did exhort them, were not *works of the law* which they sought to bind upon the Gentiles after all, but things which they felt the Gentile believers should "abstain" from so as not to shock the prejudices of the Jews with whom they came into contact (Ver. 29).

4. Even these details were not put in the form of *commands*. It was simply suggested that they would "do well" to abstain from these things for the time being (Ver. 29) even if this proved somewhat of a "burden." We do not believe, as some do, that Paul agreed to subject the Gentiles to certain legal requirements and then later repudiated the agreement (See [Gal. 2:5](#); [5:1,3,9](#)).

Because of the transition from the kingdom program to that of the present economy the council's written decision was necessary both to establish Gentile liberty and to confirm Paul's apostolic authority among the Gentiles. It did not, however, supersede Paul's own God-given authority and commission. He needed no Jerusalem council to endorse his apostleship. Thus while he accepted its decision as a satisfactory settlement of the matter in question, he never once refers to this letter in his epistles, not even when discussing the principal matter with which it dealt (Gal. 2). Anyway, Paul found higher reasons why the Gentiles - and even the Jews--should not be under the law ([Rom. 7:2](#); [Gal. 3:13](#); [Col. 2:14](#)) and higher motives for abstaining from anything that might in any way injure others, whether lost or saved ([Rom. 14:13-15](#); [I Cor. 8:1,4,7,9](#); [10:28-33](#); [Gal. 5:13](#)). Indeed, even where impurity and immorality were concerned he found greater motives for true sanctification in the truths that they were "bought with a price" and that their bodies were the members of Christ and the temples of the Holy Spirit ([I Cor. 6:15, 19, 20](#)).

Yet, how much had been accomplished on this journey to Jerusalem and what difficulties had been overcome! That convention bore eloquent witness to the fact that the Pentecostal era with complete control by the Holy Spirit was fast passing away for, like many a Christian convention today, it was fraught with possible disaster. Met in conference were some who evidently believed sincerely that the Gentiles should be circumcised and keep the law. Then there were the "false brethren" to deal with, as well as Peter's weakness and James' self-assertion. There had indeed been much to be apprehensive about, yet the Holy Spirit had graciously and powerfully *overruled*, until *both* James and Peter, with John, publicly and officially recognized Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles and the "whole church... assembled with one accord" wrote to the Gentiles as brethren in Christ, condemning the Judaizers, upholding Paul and declaring that *they* had agreed that the Gentiles were *not* to be under the law.

The church at Jerusalem must have been keenly conscious that the Holy Spirit had overruled, for in their letter we find the strong claim: "*It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...*" So definitely had the matter been settled that years later the leaders at Jerusalem said to Paul:

“Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law” (Acts 21:20).

But in sharp contrast:

“AS TOUCHING THE GENTILES WHICH BELIEVE, WE HAVE WRITTEN AND CONCLUDED THAT THEY OBSERVE NO SUCH THING” (Ver. 25).

The passage we have been considering contains the last mention of Peter – or of any of the twelve – in the record of the Acts. Having confirmed Paul’s ministry and apostleship he vanishes from the scene to be replaced entirely by Paul.

### **THE DECISION NOW REPUDIATED**

In spite of all the failures manifested at the Jerusalem Council, it must still be said that never since that time has so much authority been vested in an ecclesiastical gathering. There were the leaders of the twelve, whom our Lord Himself had chosen and commissioned as His representatives. There was Paul, called and commissioned by the *ascended* Lord, and Barnabas, who with Paul had been sent forth by the Holy Spirit to minister among the Gentiles. There were others also with greater or less degrees of authority as the representatives of Christ. Then too, the Scriptures declare emphatically that the decisions of the council were directed by the Holy Spirit.

Yet almost every Church council since has repudiated the decision of *this* council. Though *this* council so emphatically recognized the further revelation given to Paul for the Gentiles, with a message that *differed* from theirs (Acts 15:9-11; Gal 2:2, 7) and though they agreed fully and finally that the Gentiles were to remain under grace, yet almost without exception the Church has gone back from the Pauline commission to the so-called “great commission” given to the eleven, and council after council has had to deal with questions about the law, baptism, miracles and a hundred other details which never would have come up had the Church heeded the decisions of *this* council and listened to Paul. Even Fundamentalists have wavered between the Pauline commission and the “great commission” rather than standing squarely on Pauline ground. Here is the root cause of their present division and confusion.

### **THE LETTER DELIVERED**

“So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:

“Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

“And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

“And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

“Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

“Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the Word of the Lord, with many others also.”

Acts 15:30-35.

Suddenly, we find the apostles back at Antioch again! Doubtless they *did* make haste to convey the good news!

How wonderful it must have been to the Gentiles to hear that letter read! And then to hear the whole story, or a good deal of it, from the lips of Paul and Barnabas on the one hand and Judas and Silas on the other!

As for Judas and Silas, they stand in direct contrast to the Judaizers who had preceded them. The Judaizers had not been sent but had come casting doubts upon the reality of the Gentiles' conversion to “dismantle” and rob them. Judas and Silas, on the other hand, had been officially commissioned by the Church at Jerusalem and had come to encourage the Gentile believers and confirm them.

It should be noted here that “Judas and Silas” were “prophets also themselves” and *as such* confirmed the Gentile believers at Antioch. Thus while the necessary exchange of arguments to settle a case indicated that the Pentecostal control by the Spirit had given place to a new dispensation, this ministry of these prophets showed that the transition was not yet complete. The Gentile believers needed this prophetic confirmation because they were in the midst of the transition. This is what Mr. A. E. Bishop in his *Tongues, Signs and Visions* calls “an overlapping of the former and present dispensations, as some years elapsed before the dispensation of grace took its normal course.”

When their mission had been completed Judas returned to Jerusalem but Silas remained at Antioch. A great work was going on at Antioch. We get some idea of its magnitude when we read that Paul and Barnabas continued there teaching and preaching the Word of the Lord “*with many others also.*”

## Chapter XXVI

### MORE TROUBLE AT ANTIOCH

#### PETER'S DEFECTION

It must not be supposed, however, that the communication from the Church at Jerusalem, even though confirmed by accredited witnesses, had brought complete and lasting peace to Antioch from the trouble which the Judaizers had stirred up there. The influence of the Judaizers was to be felt for a long time to come. Indeed, we feel it still today.

It is undoubtedly at this point in the history of Acts that we must place Peter's visit to Antioch and his stern rebuke by Paul, for this took place *after* the council at Jerusalem, but *before* the separation between Paul and Barnabas. The record of this incident is given to us in Paul's letter to the Galatians:

"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

"For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

"And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

"But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all..." (Gal. 2:11-14).

This was the second time Peter got into trouble over the Gentile question and there is a significant connection between this incident at Antioch and the previous one at Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was the headquarters of the *Jewish* Church. Antioch was that (on earth) of the *Gentile* Church. When Peter returned to Jerusalem after ministering to Cornelius, "they that were of the circumcision contended with him" (Acts 11:2). When, later, he came to Antioch, Paul "withstood him to the face" (Gal. 2:11). At Jerusalem he was called to account for eating with the Gentiles (Acts 11:3). At Antioch he was rebuked because he had *stopped* eating with the Gentiles (Gal. 2:12). At Jerusalem *he rightly defended his action* (Acts 11:4). At Antioch *he had no defense to offer* (Gal. 2:11-18).

There was naturally a keen interest at Jerusalem in developments among the Gentiles. It was soon after the council at Jerusalem that Peter travelled to

Antioch to visit the church there himself. It must have seemed like a further fulfillment of the “sheet” vision to sit down and eat with these Gentiles and enjoy their fellowship to the full. But then something happened. It was reported that “certain from James” had arrived.

No more was this announcement made than a separation began among those who had been thus enjoying each other’s fellowship. First Peter “*withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision*” (Gal. 2:12).<sup>95</sup> This, of course, was not only cowardice, but hypocrisy, for if Peter’s fellowship with the Gentiles had been right before, why was it wrong now? As a result of Peter’s action “*the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation*” (Gal. 2:13).

It must have been heartbreaking to Paul to see even Barnabas desert him. It was Barnabas who had first brought him to the apostles when they were afraid of him (Acts 9:26, 27). It was he and Barnabas together who had, under God, accomplished so much among the Gentiles (Acts 14:27; 15:3). And how Barnabas had stood with him against the intrusions of the Judaizers! In Acts 15:2 we read that *Paul and Barnabas* had “*no small dissension and disputation with them,*” and that as a result the church at Antioch had determined that *Paul and Barnabas*, and certain others, should go up to Jerusalem about the matter. At the council at Jerusalem Barnabas had evidently stood with Paul without wavering, for Paul’s “*we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour*” follows the statement: “*I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas*” (Gal. 2:1,5). And as to the results of the council, the apostle says: “*They gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen*” (Gal. 2:9).

But now even Barnabas had followed Peter in his cowardly and hypocritical separation from the Gentiles, and as a result Paul “*withstood*” Peter “*to the face*” and rebuked him “*before them all*” (Gal. 2:11, 14).

### WHO WAS THE TROUBLEMAKER?

The question may well be asked here: Was not Paul making more trouble in the assembly than Peter and the others would have made by withdrawing? Surely feelings must have run high and relations must have been strained as Paul openly and publicly rebuked the great apostle from Jerusalem. Was Paul forgetting the dignity of Peter’s position; that Peter had been appointed the chief of the twelve apostles by the Lord Himself; that he had been used to lead thousands to Christ before he was even saved? Was he *practicing* what he *preached* and later wrote, that believers should walk

“With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

---

<sup>95</sup> What an influence James and his party must have exerted to be able to intimidate even the chief of the apostles in this way!

“Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2,3).

Was *he* the trouble maker of Antioch?

No, for the trouble was more subtle than appeared on the surface.

God had been breaking down “the middle wall of partition” between the Jew and the Gentile, and of the apostles at Jerusalem no one knew this better than Peter. He had been shown by a vision from God that he could and *should* eat with them, and had helped Paul’s cause in the dispute at the Jerusalem council by reminding the Judaizers of this and declaring:

“And God, which knoweth the hearts, bear them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us;

“AND PUT NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN US AND THEM, PURIFYING THEIR HEARTS BY FAITH” (Acts 15:8,9).

Peter, then, had known and testified to the oneness of Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ, but now he was withdrawing himself from the Gentiles – and doing it hypocritically for fear of James’ party. He may have done so in the most kindly attitude, with many apologies and explanations to the Gentiles, but the fact remained that *he* was causing a division among believers. Nor was this merely a local matter. It was a repudiation of the decision of the council and of God’s revealed will. What if Paul had not spoken up. See what had happened already! Had not Paul spoken out boldly, a division might have started there which would have opened an irreparable breach between Jewish and Gentile believers and negated entirely the truth of the “one body.”<sup>96</sup>

Silence in such a case would not have helped to keep the unity of the Spirit, but to *break* it. Though Peter may have excused himself most apologetically and though Paul’s open rebuke may have appeared unkind, it was Peter who was causing the division and Paul who was endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit.

There is a lesson here for us today. The professing Church, while large in numbers, is disintegrating before our eyes. While God says “*there is one body,*” there are *hundreds of denominations* in the United States alone. In one case after another believers have “withdrawn and separated themselves” from other believers. In one case after another great, spiritual men like Peter have started it

---

<sup>96</sup> While the analogy of the “body” may not yet have been used by Paul and, significantly, is not used in the Acts, Jewish and Gentile believers were in fact one body in Christ. In Acts the stress is laid on the setting aside of Israel and the breaking down of the middle wall of partition.

and great, spiritual men like Barnabas have been carried away with it. Nevertheless it has been *wrong*.

What, then shall our attitude be? If we speak out some will remind us that we should endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit, but let us fix it well in our minds that silence in the face of the present divisions would be as wrong as the divisions themselves if we truly believe that we should be one and especially if we know the remedy for the division, the sevenfold basis for our oneness in Christ ([Eph. 4:4-6](#)).

In the incident at Antioch Peter, not Paul, “was to be blamed” (Gal. 2:11). He had been guilty of “dissimulation” and had “not walked uprightly” (Vers. 13, 14). He had “made himself a transgressor” in his attempt to build again the barrier which he himself had helped to break down (Ver. 18).

No one knew all this better than Peter himself and, while Paul’s rebuke may have rankled in his bosom for some time to come, he realized all the while that had not Paul leaped to support him as he stumbled he might have dragged many down with him in his fall. Thus, not only did Peter recover from the rebuke, but the last person he mentions in his writings, excepting the Lord Jesus Christ, is “*our beloved brother Paul*” (II Pet. 3:15).

That the dispensation of grace was dawning brighter is shown by Paul’s ascendancy over Peter in their three recorded meetings thus far. At the first Paul acquainted Peter with his call and commission (Gal. 1:18). At the second he received his public recognition (Gal. 2:19). At the third he rebuked him as his superior (Gal. 2:14).