

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 are arranged in a way that they appear to be fanning out from a central point at the bottom.

DISPENSATIONALLY
CONSIDERED

C. R. STAM

A C T S

**Dispensationally
Considered**

By
Cornelius R. Stam

VOLUME THREE
Acts 15:36 through 21:14

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Chapter XXVII - Acts 15:36-16:8

PAUL BEGINS HIS SECOND APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

STILL MORE TROUBLE

"And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

"And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

"But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

"And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus:

"And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

"And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches."
--Acts 15:36-41

THE FALLING OUT BETWEEN PAUL AND BARNABAS

Antioch had already seen enough contention because of the Judaizers, but before leaving the scene we are to witness still another sharp controversy, this time between Paul and Barnabas, those companions in labor who had together accomplished so much for the Lord.

The trouble began when Paul proposed that he and Barnabas visit their brethren "in every one of the cities"¹ where they had preached the Word, to see how they were getting on. Here we get a glimpse of the apostle's concern over his children in the faith, so often expressed in his epistles and especially in II Cor. 11:28, where he speaks of "*the care of all the churches.*"

¹ This is the thought in the original. They had already revisited some cities, but this time Paul proposed revisiting them *all*, without exception.

Barnabas evidently concurred with Paul in this, only he "was minded"² to take John Mark with them again, while Paul, on the other hand, felt it would be wrong to take with them, as a companion, the one who had "departed"³ from them so soon after they had embarked on their former journey. In the disagreement neither would yield to the other; Barnabas would not go *without* Mark and Paul would not go *with* him, until the matter developed into an angry dispute. Indeed, so sharp was the contention between these two old friends that they separated from each other, Barnabas taking Mark and sailing to Cyprus, and Paul choosing Silas and (after being commended to God by the Church) traveling through Syria and Cilicia.

WHO WAS WRONG?

It would be folly to water down such a passage as this in order to exempt either party from blame. No justification whatever is offered for this heated quarrel. Unquestionably it was improper and wrong, and by it Paul and Barnabas proved exactly what they had said to the Lystrians: "*We also are men of like passions with you*" (Acts 14:15). Characteristically, the Scriptures state the facts frankly for our learning and good. We emphasize this because, when we magnify Paul's *office*, as the Scriptures do (Rom. 11:13) there are always some who accuse us of exalting Paul personally.

Some have explained the contention by noting a possible spiritual decline in the change from the words: "*the Holy Spirit said,*" in 13:2, to the words: "*Paul said,*" in 15:36. It should be remembered, however, that in the former passage we have the Spirit's original instruction to *the Church at Antioch* to separate Paul and Barnabas for the work wherein they had now become engaged. Therefore we should not expect another such case, nor are we to suppose that the apostle is acting in the flesh every time we fail to find the words: "*The Holy Spirit said.*" Indeed, since the passing of the Pentecostal era believers should be very careful about saying: "*The Spirit said*" or, "*The Spirit told me*" or, "*The Lord said to me,*" unless they are referring to the written Word of God.

There were perfectly natural circumstances leading up to the quarrel between Paul and Barnabas. First, the failure of Mark, Barnabas' cousin,⁴ so early in their first journey had had its effects. Then too, Paul had probably begun losing confidence in Barnabas himself since he (Barnabas) had been "carried away" in the "dissimulation" at Antioch (Gal. 2:13).

On the other hand Barnabas may well have been irked at having been involved in Paul's rebuke of Peter. Indeed, Barnabas may have felt that Paul was personally indebted to him, because he had been the one to bring him to the apostles in Jerusalem and then to the work at Antioch. Also, Barnabas had once

² "*Determined*" is too strong for the Gr. *bouloumai*.

³ Gr. *aphistemi*, "fallen away."

⁴ The Gr. *anepsios* in Col. 4:10 is better rendered "cousin" than "sister's son."

ranked first among the prophets at Antioch (See [Acts 13:1](#), where Saul is mentioned *last*) and the two had frequently been spoken of as "Barnabas and Paul." This had been so even as recently as the council at Jerusalem ([Acts 15:12, 25](#)). Yet, little by little, Paul had been coming to the fore, leaving Barnabas in the background. This, of course, was God's will, but it may have been difficult for Barnabas to recognize it as such.

But while the Scriptures do not offer any vindication of their "sharp contention," it does not follow from this that the principles each contended for were necessarily wrong. Indeed, an examination of the facts indicates they were quite right, and as one places himself in the position of either party in the dispute he "can see his point," only each party failed to place himself sufficiently in the *other's* position or, as Paul himself later put it, to "*look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others*" (Phil. 2:4).

As to *what* the disputants were contending for, it should be observed on Barnabas' side that Mark's desertion must have disappointed him as deeply as it had Paul, and that Mark must have been the subject of his earnest prayers, their being related so closely. What dealings Barnabas had had with Mark by letter, or in Jerusalem, or whether Barnabas had again brought him to Antioch, we do not know. We know he was there, however, and it is evident that Barnabas felt there was sufficient ground for giving him another opportunity; that he had confidence that Mark had learned his lesson and could now be depended upon. It was perfectly natural and right that Barnabas should feel a strong responsibility to his young cousin in this matter. True, Mark had failed, but are faults never to be forgiven, and do not men often learn from their failures?

This is not the *whole* picture, however. Paul had not the same personal reasons nor, probably, the same grounds for renewed confidence in Mark that Barnabas had, and to him it probably seemed an unwarranted *risk* to proceed with *such* a companion on a journey which experience had shown would be fraught with peril. This can be well understood, for above all things "it is required in stewards *that a man be found faithful*" (1 Cor. 4:2) and "*confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint*" (Prov. 25:19). Doubtless too, Paul felt that Barnabas had been influenced by his attachment to a relative; that he was prejudiced in favor of his cousin to the extent that he did not sufficiently consider the arguments against his going.

TWO PARTIES INSTEAD OF ONE

As we proceed with our studies in Acts we shall see how more and more God *overrules providentially* rather than *intervening directly*, as He had at first.

What a change has taken place since the early chapters of Acts! There, for example, "*the multitude of them that believed [more than 5,000] were of one*

heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:32) and when two impostors sought to join themselves to the number, God intervened and struck them dead.

But now the believers were no longer all of one heart and of one soul--not even those at Jerusalem. Hence the "dissension and disputation" at Antioch, the "much disputing" at Jerusalem, Paul's rebuke of Peter at Antioch, and the "sharp contention" between Paul and Barnabas.

At Pentecost *"they were all filled with the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:4) simply because "the day of Pentecost was fully come" (Ver. 1) and the time had arrived for the pouring out of the Spirit in power. But now, with the raising up of Paul we are coming more and more into the dispensation where the *exhortation* is in order: *"Be filled with the Spirit"* (Eph. 5:18). At Pentecost the Spirit *took possession* of His own and *caused* them to do His will. *Now*, the Spirit's help is *provided by grace*, but we must *appropriate* it by *faith*. This, of course, presents a greater *challenge* and permits of greater *victories* and *rewards*, but it also makes defeat possible. Hence the record of so many failures among the believers after the raising up of Paul to usher in the new dispensation.⁵

But while direct divine interventions decrease in later Acts, it is evident that God does overrule providentially. We have seen this in the results of the Jerusalem council, so fraught with disaster. We have seen it too in the whole problem over the Judaizers. Had not the Judaizers come to Antioch, the council at Jerusalem with its important decisions might never have been held. Had not Peter "withdrawn" from the Gentiles at Antioch the argument of Gal. 2 would have lost much of its strength. This does not excuse Peter and the Judaizers, of course, but it does show us that while God no longer intervenes *directly* and *miraculously* in the affairs of men, He nevertheless *remains on the throne*, *"working all things after the counsel of His own will"* and *"for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose"* (Eph. 1:11; Rom. 8:28).

Thus, too, it was in the case of Paul and Barnabas. In the midst of failure we see God overruling, for now there are two parties instead of one going forth to proclaim the gospel, Barnabas taking Mark, and Paul, Silas.⁶

It has been noted that Paul and Silas were commended by the church to the grace of God (Ver. 40) as Paul and Barnabas had been at the first ([Acts 13:3; 14:26](#)) but that Barnabas and Mark received no such commendation at this time. This, however, may have been because Barnabas left suddenly or secretly, either from anger or disappointment, or generously, to leave the work there wholly to Paul.

⁵ For a fuller discussion of this subject see the author's booklet: *"The Believer's Walk In This Present Evil Age."*

⁶ One reason for this latter choice was doubtless that Paul needed with him one who could vouch for the decision of the Jerusalem council (See Acts 15:27).

Even at that, it does seem that the main body of the church there probably stood with Paul, though on the other hand again it must be said that the later record indicates that Barnabas' confidence in Mark was justified and that he did well in giving the young man another chance.

At any rate, Barnabas and Mark now sail for Cyprus, while Paul and Silas travel through Syria and Cilicia (we hope not bound for the same destination!). This is the first indication that *churches* had been established in Syria and Cilicia (apparently either after Paul's return to Tarsus or during his ministry in Antioch. See [Gal. 1:21](#) and cf. [Acts 9:30](#); [11:25,26](#); [15:23](#)).

It is heartening to consider that all four of the men we have been discussing really had the same great cause at heart, and that after a time their wounds healed again. In I Cor. 9:6 Paul speaks highly of Barnabas as a co-worker for Christ. As to Mark, in Col. 4:10 Paul instructs the Colossian believers to "*receive him,*" in Phile. 24 he calls him a "*fellow-laborer*" and in II Tim. 4:11 he makes the touching request: "*Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.*" Thus Mark came through with colors flying and Paul graciously received him back. Indeed it is touching to note that God used this servant (Acts 13:5) who had failed so dismally, to write the account of the *perfect* Servant, *The Gospel According to Mark*.

This is the last we hear of Barnabas and Mark in the Book of Acts. The dispensational reason for the disappearance of the twelve apostles, and even of Barnabas and Mark, from the record, is that the message and ministry entrusted to Paul might be duly emphasized. It does not indicate that Barnabas became a spiritual "castaway." Alexander Whyte's comments on Barnabas are pertinent here:

"Very soon now, it will be the greatest honor to any house on the face of the earth to entertain the Apostle Paul. But no proud householder of them all can ever steal this honor from Barnabas, that he was the first man of influence and responsibility who opened his heart and his house to Saul of Tarsus, when all Jerusalem was still casting stones at him" (*Bible Characters*, Vol. V, P. 230).

Paul would undoubtedly miss Barnabas now, not only because they had gone through so many experiences together in their service for Christ, but also because the churches he was now to revisit knew Barnabas and Barnabas' name was linked with his own in the letter from Jerusalem. How would the break now be explained, and might not Barnabas' absence arouse suspicion as to the genuineness of the letter? Surely Silas was *the* man to have with him in such a case, for as one of the "chief men" of the church at Jerusalem, specially sent to "tell [them] the same things by mouth," (Acts 15:27) he could now be of greater help than any.

TIMOTHY CHOSEN TO ACCOMPANY PAUL AND SILAS

"Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek:

"Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.

"Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek."

--Acts 16:1-3

A PROMISING YOUNG MAN

Those who would serve the Lord acceptably may well learn from Paul's perseverance and courage. The above passage records his *third* visit to Derbe and Lystra, where he had been stoned and left for dead.

It was in this vicinity that the apostle found a young man, remarkably provided by God as another helper and fellow-traveller, and destined to become one of Paul's most faithful and effective co-workers. That the provision was remarkable is indicated by the fact that the account of the incident opens with the exclamation "*Behold!*"

Timothy was the unfortunate offspring of an unwise and unscriptural marriage. His mother was a Jewess, named Eunice, and his father was a Greek. In Judaea such marriages seldom occurred, but here among the Jews of the dispersion they were naturally more prevalent. Perhaps the young Greek lover gave Eunice and her mother, Lois, to understand that when married he would become a true worshipper of the God of Israel, but it is evident that he had not done so, for Timothy had never even been circumcised and the passage we are considering indicates that he, the father, had remained "a Greek." Yet, these untoward circumstances were graciously overruled.

Whatever the temptations that had caused Eunice to accept this unequal yoke and whatever the reasons for which her mother, Lois, had consented to the marriage, it is evident that they both blamed themselves for what had taken place and earnestly sought to undo the wrong, for the apostle refers to their "unfeigned faith" (II Tim. 1:5) and to the fact that "from a child" Timothy had "known the holy Scriptures" (II Tim. 3:15).

With regard to this Dean Howson observes: "It is not a little remarkable that a character which is among the most faultless and charming in the Bible, should be

the character of that one person whose domestic relations and early training are thus described" (*Companions of St. Paul*, P. 269).

Yet, though mother and grandmother had both diligently taught Timothy the Scriptures, which were able to make him "wise unto salvation" (II Tim. 3:15) it was not directly through their instrumentality, but through Paul's, that he had been saved, for Paul calls him "*my own son in the faith*" (I Tim. 1:2, cf. 1:18 and II Tim. 1:2; 2:1). Apparently Timothy was saved at, or through, Paul's first visit to Lystra. We know, from II Tim. 3:10, 11, that he had an intimate knowledge of Paul's "manner of life" and of his persecutions at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra.

That visit to Lystra had taken place some six years previous and it was probably about twelve years after *this present* visit that Paul could still write to Timothy: "*Let no man despise thy youth*" (I Tim. 4:12) so Timothy must have been but a lad at the time of his conversion. But his thorough instruction in the Scriptures, the "unfeigned faith" of his mother and grandmother, the inspiration of Paul's preaching and his intimate knowledge of the apostle's manner of life and sufferings for Christ, must all have had a great effect upon him,⁷ for now "*Behold!*" here is this young man, already a consecrated and promising believer! Indeed, his Christian influence must already have extended beyond the limits of his native city, for we read that he was "well reported of" by the brethren of *two* churches: that at Lystra and that at Iconium (Ver. 2).

From the two epistles to Timothy it is evident that he was cultured and refined, a student from his youth, delicate in health and possessing, as was natural from his upbringing, an almost feminine tenderness, for Paul writes him with regard to his childhood, his mother, his grandmother and his tears, prescribes for his "often infirmities" and urges him not to be ashamed or afraid or weak, but to be strong, as "a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

Since Timothy was not a robust character, it appears that Paul sometimes feared that, if anything, he might withdraw from the fight. Timothy did not withdraw, however, but proved courageous and faithful to the end. He doubtless came to be Paul's most intimate associate for the greatest length of time.

Besides ministering to Paul and working with him much of the time, Timothy was left with, or sent to, many a church where his help was particularly needed (See Acts 17:14; 19:22; I Cor. 4:17; I Thes. 3:2; I Tim. 1:3) and Paul mentions him as a co-writer of six of his epistles (II Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; I Thes. 1:1; II Thes. 1:1; Phile. 1).

The apostle's esteem and affection for Timothy is readily seen in such passages as those in which he describes him as his "brother," a "minister of

⁷ His witness of Paul's cruel and unjust treatment at Lystra must have made a profound impression upon his young mind, laying the foundation for a warm and lasting friendship.

God," his "fellow-laborer in the gospel of Christ," his "beloved son, and faithful in the Lord," etc.

In one of his last letters, the apostle writes of him:

"But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you

"For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state.

"For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.

"But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel" (Phil. 2:19-22).

Even in his early ministry for Christ Timothy must have served with Paul in many more places than those of which it is recorded, for Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, explains that Timothy will remind them of his ways: "as I teach *everywhere* in every church" (I Cor. 4:17).

Another step in the transition from the old dispensation to the new is seen in the fact that hitherto all of Paul's fellow travellers on his apostolic journeys had been chosen from the Circumcision, while here, for the first time, was one who was only partly Jewish. For reasons which we will consider at length, the apostle, however, had him formally initiated into the Hebrew race by the rite of circumcision.

In addition, a public consecration service was evidently held for the young man, before he embarked on his journey with Paul and Silas. In this service men with the gift of prophecy declared that God had chosen Timothy for this ministry and a special "gift" for the work was imparted to him by the Spirit, as the elders of the Church, together with Paul, and probably Silas, identified themselves with him in the laying on of hands (I Tim. 1:18; 4:14; II Tim. 1:6). While the new dispensation was dawning brighter, the old, with its miraculous gifts, had not yet "vanished away."

Timothy, then, though very young, was by his upbringing, by his personal character, and now by supernatural endowment singularly qualified for the work he was to undertake in accompanying Paul on his journeys and assisting him in his work.

THE CIRCUMCISION OF TIMOTHY

Paul's circumcision of Timothy, so soon after the council at Jerusalem, has puzzled many sincere and diligent students of the Word.

If he had circumcised the young man because it was known that his *mother* was a *Jewess*, the problem might be more easily solved, but the passage under consideration clearly states that he did so because "they knew all that his *father* was a *Greek*" (Ver. 3). Yet, only a short time ago he had insisted, at the council at Jerusalem, that the *Gentiles* should *not* be brought under circumcision End the law. Indeed, he had taken Titus, a Greek, with him as a test case and was later able to say: "And Titus was not compelled to be circumcised either . . . we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour" (Gal. 2:3,5).

Why, then, did Paul now circumcise Timothy? Was this consistent? Did he temporize for expediency's sake?

It is often difficult, of course, to draw the line between right and wrong in cases where expediency is involved, yet it seems to us that both a general consideration and a particular examination of the incident will reveal that the apostle did not compromise or violate his principles on this occasion.

First, a compromise in these matters at such a time would have been too obviously inconsistent for, not only had Paul but recently fought for Gentile freedom from circumcision at Jerusalem, but we are distinctly told that both at Antioch and "as they went through the cities" on this very journey, they delivered to the churches the written decision of the council at Jerusalem⁸ (15:30; 16:4).

Second, it must be observed that the case of Timothy differed widely from that of Titus, not only because Timothy was partly Jewish, but because in his case no such principle was involved as there had been in the case of Titus. In the case which involved Titus, *believers* at Jerusalem had sought to establish it as a principle that the Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the law to be saved. In that case Paul "gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour" (Gal. 2:5). The Gentiles, to whom he had been sent with the good news of grace, were *not* to be placed under the law.

In the case of Timothy, however, no such principle was involved. No one here was seeking to impose circumcision upon Timothy. It was for the sake of the *unbelieving* Jews (Ver. 3) that Paul circumcised Timothy, and this was done voluntarily, so as to remove any possible hindrance to their ministry among the people of Israel.

Thirdly, the *time element* is an important factor in the interpretation of the Book of Acts. It must be remembered that Paul himself received the great truths of grace *gradually*, in a series of revelations, and that the circumcision of Timothy

⁸ From Acts 15:28-31; 21:25 and other related passages, it is a fair conclusion that the "decrees" (plural) of 16:4, refer to *copies* of the decree, rather than to a list of decrees. Their *decision* and *decree* was that the Gentiles were not to be placed under the law (21:25) but they hoped that the Gentile brethren would cooperate in refraining from such practices as might alienate them from the Jews at the start (15:21,29).

took place before he had even written his first epistle. A few years *later* he was to write to the Galatian believers, Jewish and Gentile alike:

"Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing.⁹ For I testify again to every man that is circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole law" (Gal. 5:2,3).

These Galatian believers had come to see the law as fulfilled in Christ and had *then*, through the influence of the Judaizers from Jerusalem, begun to place themselves under the law again.

Thus it would be wrong for *anyone today* to submit to circumcision in compliance with the law, and *even at that time* it would have been out of order for any *Gentile* to do so. But it must be remembered that the council at Jerusalem had not ruled against the circumcision of *Jewish* believers, that Paul's ministry was still "to the Jew first" and that he naturally began his testimony to them by proving that "Jesus is *the Christ*," the Messiah of Israel.

And now Timothy was to accompany him, a young man who had been brought up as a godly Jew and was even half Jewish physically, but had never been circumcised. Had he remained uncircumcised their ministry among the Jews would have been hindered from the very start, for "they knew all that his father was a Greek" and, suspecting that he was not circumcised, would have considered him an "alien from the commonwealth of Israel." Even social intercourse with the Jews would thus have been hindered, for they considered it an abomination to eat with the uncircumcised.

The statement, then, that Paul circumcised Timothy because "they knew all that his father was a Greek," should not lead us to conclude that Paul was making a concession to *Jewish believers* who felt that *Gentile* believers should be circumcised. It was clearly for the sake of the *unbelieving Jews* that Paul circumcised Timothy.

It is true enough that Timothy could have remained uncircumcised and that no one would have had a right to *impose* the rite upon him. Indeed, had *brethren* demanded Timothy's circumcision on the basis of Acts 15:1, Paul would have opposed their attempt to bring him into bondage, but since Timothy was half Jewish, physically, and mostly Jewish in his upbringing, and since circumcision was still the mark of God's covenant people, Paul circumcised him so that henceforth Timothy's ministry to the people of Israel might be as free and unhindered as his own.

In this act, performed at that stage in the transition from Judaism to grace, Paul was simply teaching the lesson that while we have no right to give up our liberty (Gal. 5:1) we do have liberty to give up our rights. This is what he

⁹ *Logically*, of course, *not actually*.

meant, when he exhorted even Gentile believers not to use their liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love to serve one another (Gal. 5:13). This is what he meant when he exhorted them in matters of "days" and "meats" to exercise their liberty in love, giving up personal advantage and privilege if necessary, for the spiritual benefit of others (Rom. 14:1--15:2; I Cor. 8:1--10:33). This is what he meant when he wrote:

"For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

"And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law" (I Cor. 9:19,20).

But here we must exercise caution. Some good Bible teachers, arguing that a two-fold program maintained during the latter part of Acts, have overlooked the significant recurrence of the word "as" in I Cor. 9:20-22, interpreting the passage to mean that Paul *placed himself under the law* when among the Jews, so as to win them, but lived free from the law while among the Gentiles.

But these brethren must then explain how the Jewish believers at Corinth, for example (to which church he here writes) could possibly have respected Paul if, after giving them to feel that he was a law-abiding Jew so as to win them to Christ, he then sought to win the Gentiles by showing *them* that he was *not* under the law!

It must be recognized that the two-fold program of the latter part of Acts was *not* to continue with *equal* force. One was to *displace* the other gradually (though many Judaizers sought to hinder the transition) and it is evident from the record that Paul began to teach the truths of grace to those very Jews he sought to win by sympathetically placing himself in their position. He *was not* guilty of double dealing when, among the Jews, he sought, as far as was consistent, to forbear practices and policies which might violate their standards, so that he could the better witness to them of Christ.

Should any be inclined to take Paul's circumcision of Timothy as justification for practicing water baptism today, we have but to remind them that the transition from the former dispensation to the present was completed with Paul's imprisonment in Rome, after which *both* physical circumcision and physical baptism were eliminated from God's program for the Church (See Col. 2:10-12).

FROM LYSTRA TO TROAS

"And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.

"And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

"Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia,

"After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not,

"And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas."

--Acts 16:4-8

We now find Paul, Silas and Timothy visiting the cities where Paul and Barnabas had previously ministered, and delivering to the believers, for their observance, the "decrees" (Gr. *dogmata*) that had been "decided upon" (Gr. *krino*, not "*ordained*") by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.

The use of the word *dogmata*,¹⁰ translated "decrees" in the *Authorized Version* does not imply that the Gentiles were, after all, partly subjected to the law. As we have pointed out in a footnote, the basic decision of the council at Jerusalem was that circumcision and the law were *not* to be imposed upon the Gentile believers, but the leaders there hoped that for the sake of the Jews in every city the Gentile brethren would co-operate in refraining from such practices as might nullify their ministry among them from the start (See [Acts 15:19-21](#), [24-29](#); [Acts 21:25](#)).

Had the intention of the council been to place or keep the Gentile believers *partly* under the law it would have been no great victory for Paul and his message. As it was, however, the communication from Jerusalem brought "joy" and "consolation" to the Gentile brethren (15:30,31) "confirming the churches" (15:41) and establishing them in the faith (16:5).

In a day when so much emphasis is laid upon "getting decisions for Christ" and so little upon doctrine and the study of the Word, it is important to note that the churches "*increased in number daily*" as *believers* were "*established in the faith*" (Ver. 5).

The selective principle in the divine inspiration of the Scriptures is clearly seen in Verses 5 and 7. Paul's whole ministry in Galatia is passed over with a few words, evidently because an account of it would not be in line with the special purpose of the Acts. In his letter to the Galatians we learn that "on account of [Gr. *dia*] infirmity of the flesh" he had preached the gospel to them at the first (Gal. 4:13). The exact nature of the illness that detained him among the Galatians is not stated,¹¹ though it seems to have been some severe eye trouble

¹⁰ From which, our word *dogma*.

¹¹ Nor whether this was the "thorn in the flesh" referred to in II Cor. 12:7-10.

(Gal. 4:15; 6:11 margin). However that may be, we know that even in his illness he plainly set forth Christ crucified among them (Gal. 3:1) and that his energy and faithfulness were richly rewarded by the esteem and affection lavished upon him by those whom he had won to Christ (Gal. 4:14,15).

"Asia," a province of Asia Minor, was the natural place for Paul and his companions to go next, but for some reason the Holy Spirit forbade them to preach the Word there at that time. Whether this was done by a vision, or through some who had the gift of prophecy, or by direct revelation, we are not told, but we do know that *later* Paul was permitted to do a great work in this region, "so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10; cf. 19:26; 20:4).

Next, arriving opposite Mysia, they "assayed," or *attempted* to go into Bithynia, but again "the Spirit¹² suffered them not," so they "passed by" Mysia, not geographically, but as far as laboring there was concerned, and "came down to Troas" (Ver. 8).

Nothing is said in this passage about Paul having revisited the believers at Pisidian Antioch, but this city was directly in the line of his journey and may be included in the "cities" referred to in Ver. 4. The apostle's original purpose to revisit the cities where churches had been established was, however, already being greatly extended.

¹² Some MSS read: "the Spirit of Jesus." It is still the same Spirit, sent by Jesus (John 16:7; Acts 2:33) who had already sent forth Paul and Barnabas (13:2,4) and had hindered Paul, Silas and Timotheus from preaching in Asia (16:6).

Chapter XXVIII - Acts 16:9-24

THE APOSTLE'S MINISTRY EXTENDED

THE CALL TO MACEDONIA

"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

"And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

"Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;

"And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days."

--Acts 16:9-12

THE MACEDONIAN VISION

It has been conjectured that since Luke evidently arrived on the scene here at Troas (Note the "we" and "us" in Ver. 10) it may have been he whom Paul saw in his vision. There seems to be no real support for this, however. In the vision Paul saw "*a man of Macedonia*," and it is doubtful whether Luke was a Macedonian. It is enough to know that Paul's course was again guided by a supernatural manifestation. The apostle was often led in this way during his early ministry, as were others of the Acts period, such as the circumcision apostles (5:19,20) Philip (8:26) Ananias (9:10,11) Cornelius (10:3) Peter (10:10,17,19; 12:7-9) etc.

This experience of Paul's has often been used as an example of what a missionary call should be. In view of the evident character of God's dealings with men in the present dispensation, the application is generally somewhat modified, but still there is the feeling that a "call" to missionary work involves some sort of "supernatural" manifestation: a dream, a feeling that "the Lord spoke to me," a sense of deep assurance or settled peace or urgent necessity or personal responsibility; a burden for the souls of a particular race or nation, the coming upon a particular Scripture passage from a "promise box" or in devotional reading, or the results of "laying out the fleece" or giving God the choice of two alternatives.

But none of these human emotions or experiences should be confused with the definite vision by which Paul was called to go into Macedonia, and those who today look for some supernatural manifestation in seeking God's guidance should

reflect that of the many such supernatural "calls" recorded in the Scriptures, this one of Paul at Troas is the last, for with the setting aside of Israel and her kingdom hopes such manifestations vanished away ([Acts 2:16-18](#), cf. [I Cor. 13:8](#)).

Today we are to walk entirely "*by faith, not by sight*" (II Cor. 5:7). With hearts burdened for the lost about us, we should ask God for wisdom and providential guidance as to how and where we may best fill the greatest need, and then prepare by His grace to discharge our responsibility to fill that need. It may be that, after earnest prayer and thoughtful consideration, one may conclude that he can best serve God in Africa and may prepare to go, only to be hindered and shown that God really wants him at home or in some other place. But this does not necessarily mean that he was wrong in preparing to go to Africa, as it would if he were called by some supernatural manifestation, or if personal experiences finally settled such things. On the contrary, the Lord may well use the most baffling circumstances for the good of His servant and for His own glory.

In the case before us Paul was called to Macedonia by a supernatural manifestation and, the call obeyed, there could be no question of his arriving there.

OFF TO MACEDONIA

"Immediately" after the vision we find Paul and his companions "endeavoring" to go into Macedonia, evidently enquiring at the harbor for passage on the first ship to sail there.

As we have seen, an addition had been made to the party at Troas in the person of Luke, the author of Acts. This is evident, not only from the grammatical change from "*they*" to "*we*" in Verse 10, but also from the fact that at this point Luke's simple *historical* style gives place to the *autoptical* style of writing, i.e., that of *personal observation*. The arrival of Luke at this time may well be traced to the apostle's illness while among the Galatians. Later Paul called him "*the beloved physician*" ([Col. 4:14](#)) referring not merely to the *act* that he was a physician, but to the affection with which he was regarded as a *physician*--probably most of all by Paul himself -- for benefits received. This is another indication of the dispensational change which has taken place since Pentecost (See [Acts 5:12-16](#) and cf. [Rom. 8:22,23](#)).

Here Luke accompanies Paul to Macedonia and Philippi, after which he appears to be absent again. But when Paul returns to Macedonia later we detect Luke's presence again by that same change of pronoun from "they" to "we." From here on he appears to have remained with Paul to the close of the Acts record.

Luke's presence was to prove a great help to the apostle in his journeys as the dispensation of miraculous demonstrations passed away. Almost the last word we hear from Paul, in prison at Rome, is "*Only Luke is with me*" (II Tim. 4:11).

Evidently the company was able to secure passage to Macedonia without delay, for the word "immediately" of Verse 10 is followed in Verse 11 by the words: "*Therefore loosing from Troas.*"

The wind, too, was favorable, for Luke says: "We came with a straight course to Samothracia [an island midway between] and the next day to Neapolis [the harbor of Philippi]" (Ver. 11). The thought here is that the wind was directly at their stern, speeding them to their destination so that it was not necessary to "tack," or travel in a zigzag pattern as would have been the case were the wind against them. The voyage must have been remarkably swift, for the whole was completed in two days, whereas it took five days to cover the same distance on a later voyage ([Acts 20:6](#)).

It must have proved encouraging to the apostle to have things go more smoothly for a time. In Galatia he had suffered illness, then twice the Spirit had hindered him from ministering in certain areas. The effect must have been depressing to one of Paul's nature. But upon arriving at Troas all was different. The beloved physician had now joined the party, a special vision had called him to new opportunities, a ship was ready to offer transportation and even the wind was favorable.

From the harbor at Neapolis Paul and his party made their way to Philippi, "the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony" (Ver. 12). There has been some criticism of Luke for an "inaccuracy" here. It is contended that Philippi was *not* the chief city of Macedonia. But there is no inaccuracy, except possibly in our translation. The word "chief," here, is at least once rendered "first" in the *Authorized Version* ([I Tim. 1:15](#)) and Philippi was the *first* city of Macedonia to which they came after leaving Neapolis harbor. The context, however, seems to agree better with the rendering "chief," only it should be noted that the definite article is not found in the original, and that even if it is correctly supplied, Philippi is still only said to be the chief city of *that part* of Macedonia."

It was, of course, an important city, named after the Emperor Philip, the father of Alexander the Great. As a Roman colony its citizens enjoyed many of the privileges bestowed upon the citizens of Rome itself. Free from the authority of the governor of the province, they conducted their own local government. They were not liable to examination by scourging and could appeal from Roman lower courts to the Emperor.

Now, after having been hindered from ministering in one place and in another, and having been called by a vision to Macedonia Paul, with his helpers, stood for

the first time on European soil, where he was to be used of God in greater measure than ever. We who come from European stock should humbly thank God for this manifestation of His sovereign grace.

The apostle's supernatural call to Europe was but a sequel to God's previous dealings with him. At Jerusalem, after his conversion, the Lord had appeared to him with the command: "*Depart; for I will send thee FAR hence unto the Gentiles*" (Acts 22:21). Later, while ministering at Antioch, the Spirit had said: "*Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them*" (Acts 13:2). With that Paul began his apostolic *journeys*. Now, lest he spend too much time in Asia Minor, he is called into Macedonia. Before it is over he will be taken as a prisoner "of the Lord" to Rome, to do the greatest work of all.

PAUL AT PHILIPPI

THE FIRST CONVERTS IN EUROPE

"And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

"And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

"And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us."

--Acts 16:13-15

The vision of the Macedonian calling for help evidently did not indicate an existing attitude toward the gospel, but a *need* and an *opportunity*. Rather than finding thousands eagerly awaiting the message of grace, the apostle and his company (Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke) spent several days at Philippi (Verse 12) and then had to make their own contacts by going to the riverside outside the city "where prayer was wont to be made"¹³ (Cf. [Acts 21:5](#)).

It would appear that there was no synagogue in Philippi, especially since we read of Thessalonica, the next city he went to, that there *was* a synagogue there (17:1) and that Paul went in "*as his manner was*" (17:2).

In any city like Philippi, where there were not enough Jews to maintain a synagogue, the few who did reside there would choose (or be granted) a place outside the city near a river or stream, to carry on their devotions; outside the city

¹³ R. V. renders this "where we supposed there was a place of prayer," but some scholars believe this change from the *Authorized* is based on a corruption of the early MSS.

for the sake of retirement, and by flowing water so that they could attend to the baptisms, or washings, which played so prominent a part in their worship.

Surely Israel was not being left without abundant testimony to the person and claims of Christ, for here, where there was not even a synagogue, the apostle and his helpers still made it a point to deal with "the Jew first," seeking out those who might resort to the riverside on the Sabbath day to pray. In this case the company was made up mostly, if not entirely, of women -- always apt to be more devoted and faithful than men. And among these women was one named Lydia, a merchant from Thyatira, who dealt in purple goods, the clothing of the rich and of the socially or politically prominent (See [Luke 16:19](#)).¹⁴ From her name it would appear that she was not a Jewess, but she had evidently come to fear the God of Israel and may have been a proselyte to Judaism.

At any rate we read that here was one "whose hear the Lord opened" to receive the truth (Ver. 14). There is an important doctrinal lesson for us here, for the assertion that *the Lord* opened Lydia's heart implies that it had been, and would by nature have remained closed. This is always man's condition apart from divine grace. The unaided efforts of even the godliest of men to enlighten the unregenerate heart must be vain and ineffectual. God alone can accomplish this ([II Cor. 4:6](#)) and having begun the good work, *He will complete it* ([Phil. 1:6](#)).

Yet it was not surprising that God, in His foreknowledge of all things, should choose to open this woman's heart for, though far from home and engaged in business, she was found here seeking the fellowship of those whose God had said: "*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,*" and was seeking that God in prayer. And now, through Paul's preaching, Lydia found God and true sabbath rest *in Christ* (See [Heb. 1:3; 4:9,10](#)).

THE BAPTISM OF LYDIA AND HER HOUSEHOLD

Much is often made of the fact that Lydia and her household were now baptized. Does not this prove, we are asked, that water baptism is in order under Paul's administration? No, it does not, for though Paul was already proclaiming "the gospel of the grace of God," Israel had not yet been finally set aside (See [John 1:31](#) and cf. [Acts 28:28](#)) hence much of the old program still prevailed. Paul had but recently circumcised Timothy; he had just been called to Macedonia by a vision; having arrived there he was careful to go to "the Jew first"; he was soon to cast a demon out of a damsel, and being imprisoned as a result, the prison doors were to be opened and his bands loosed *by a miracle*. This was the economy under which he had been saved and from which he gradually emerged, but there is no logic by which we can maintain that circumcision and miraculous signs have passed away and still hold on to the practice of water baptism.

¹⁴ Ancient writings have much to say about this industry in Thyatira and inscriptions have even been found among its ruins relating to the "Guild of Dyers" there.

But still less does this passage support the doctrine for which appeal is most often made to it: that of *household* baptism. One prominent writer argues that the passage says: 1.) *she believed*, but 2.) does not say *they* believed, 3.) implying that *they* were baptized because *she* believed. Says this writer: "No mention is made of *their* having believed, and the case is one that affords a strong presumptive proof that this was an instance of *household* or infant baptism."

But this is more than "reading between the lines," and such "proof" is too highly presumptive to stand the Berean test, when water baptism is consistently associated with repentance and faith in the Scriptures ([Matt. 3:5,6](#); [Mark 1:4; 16:16](#); [Acts 2:38](#), etc.). The Reformed theologian, Dr. Albertus Pieters made it clear that the doctrine of infant baptism rests on nothing more than *presumptive* "proof," when he wrote in *Why We Baptize Infants*: "If some intelligent being from Mars should come to visit our earth, and we should hand him a Bible He would not find infant baptism in the Bible, because it is not there, and cannot be gotten out of the Bible," and again: "The Bible is entirely silent about infant baptism, either pro or con. We admit it. We do not profess to get infant baptism from its pages. We *do* profess to *justify* infant baptism from its pages. That is a very different thing."

When an outstanding exponent of Reformed theology admits that infant baptism is not found in the Bible -- that it cannot be gotten out of the Bible, then we may be sure that it is our adversary who has caused this teaching to take its place among the cardinal doctrines of some of our greatest denominations. It is he who prompts men to "justify" religious practices not taught in the Scriptures; to "teach for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7).

The passage under consideration gives no indication that Lydia was even married, let alone that she had any children. The household referred to may well have been composed of servants or helpers, including perhaps Euodias, Syntyche and others of "those women" referred to in Phil. 4:2,3. Ver. 40 speaks of "the brethren," though this may refer to Timothy and Luke, both of whom evidently remained at Philippi when Paul and Silas went on to Thessalonica. Certainly Lydia's household, like Cornelius' household, was composed of individuals whose hearts could be purified "*by faith*" (Acts 15:9).

Those who hold to *immersion* as the Scriptural *mode* of baptism also find "presumptive proof" for their views here, in that Paul found Lydia by the riverside where, presumably, there would be enough water to immerse her. But there is no intimation that Lydia was baptized where Paul first met her. Indeed, the lack of any mention of her household at the riverside and the declaration that her household was baptized, would seem to indicate that some time had elapsed between the two. But even if they were all present at that first meeting and, for some reason were not mentioned at first, that would be no proof that they were baptized, much less *immersed*, in the river.

Let us reject all "presumptive proofs" and stand squarely on *the written Word*. There we shall find undeniable evidence that *water baptism signifies cleansing, not burial* ([Acts 22:16](#); [Heb. 9:10](#), etc.).

Having been baptized, Lydia invited Paul and his company to take up their abode in her home, which must have been of ample size to accommodate four additional people. The sincerity of her invitation was evident for, seeking to overcome their natural reluctance, she challenged them: "*If ye have judged me to be faithful [i.e., to have acted in good faith] to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And,*" says Luke, "*she constrained us*" (Ver. 15). No sooner was Lydia saved than she began *helping* the ministers of the gospel, furnishing them a home and headquarters for their work. And she was persistent and faithful in this help. (See Ver. 40).

How unostentatiously had the evangelization of Europe begun! There was no advance organization, no campaign to finance the movement, no advertisement of public meetings; there *was not even a public meeting*, where an impression might be made on the whole community. Paul and his companions simply spoke to a few women gathered together for prayer; the Lord opened the heart of one of them and a work was begun the magnitude of which can never be measured. We ourselves are some of the fruit of that humble meeting at a riverside nineteen hundred years ago.

SHAMEFUL TREATMENT AT PHILIPPI

"And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying:

"The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation,

"And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

"And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market-place unto the rulers,

"And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,

"And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

"And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.

"And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:

"Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks."

--Acts 16:16-24

THE PYTHONESS

Whether the apostle and his company continued to go to the place of prayer where they had begun their ministry at Philippi, or whether Luke now records an incident which had its beginning at that first meeting is, perhaps, difficult to determine. At any rate, it was as the brethren went "to prayer," or rather "to the prayer-place," that they were first met by a poor demon-possessed slave girl.

The phrase, "*a spirit of divination*" would have been more accurately rendered: "*a spirit of Python* [Gr. *Puthonos*]." Python was the name of the god Apollo in his oracular character, and his priestesses were called Pythonesses. His chief seat of worship was, as we know, at Delphi, the most famous oracle in the world and the last to be discredited. That more than mere superstition was involved here is evident from the fact that the Scripture clearly states that this damsel was possessed by a spirit of Python and that she brought her masters much gain by "soothsaying," or divining (Ver. 16) not by merely *pretending* to divine.

This particular Pythian priestess was under the control, not only of a demon, but also of a company of men who used her to great financial advantage because she was demon-possessed. Probably she was too valuable a slave for one owner to afford, since great numbers of the heathen would always flock to such, ready to pay a price for advice on politics, business, marriage, or whatever perplexed or troubled them.

This enslaved priestess of Apollo now began crying that Paul and his company were "*servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation*" (Ver. 17). "*And this she did many days*" (Ver. 18). What she said was, of course, true, but why she said it is another question. Perhaps it was to gain a reward from them for advertising them thus, or to gain more influence over their hearers by having discerned and declared the truth, or, perhaps the evil spirit prompted her to cry this lest *he* be expelled (Cf. Luke 4:33,34). There is still another possible explanation which may well be the correct one: that this was the sad cry of one who was spirit-possessed and knew it and recognized in the One whom Paul proclaimed her only hope of deliverance. Yet, in any case, this

knowledge came from an evil spirit and her continual crying impeded the work being done for Christ.

Finally the apostle, "being grieved," commanded the spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her. Doubtless there were several factors in the case which distressed the apostle. First, the implications of her declaration were bad. Was he in league with heathen gods? Surely a compliment from such a source was questionable to say the least. This whole system was Satanic and must be discredited. Then, the fact that people were placing their trust in this priestess of Apollo, the base motives of her masters and pity for the damsel herself -- all these doubtless combined to cause the apostle to rebuke the demon and command him to depart. Our Lord had similarly refused the testimony of the demon-possessed, for He would have no dealings with Satan (See [Mark 1:34](#)).

At this point it should be noted that while we read so much about demon and spirit possession and the casting out of demons in the Gospels and the Acts, we find no mention of these in the epistles of Paul; not even by implication in his later epistles. It would seem that demon possession, at least in the form in which we find it in the Gospels and the Acts, was characteristic of that day, when the kingdom of Satan was being challenged by the kingdom of Christ (See [Matt. 12:24-29](#)).

Those who seek to go "back to Pentecost" instead of "on to perfection" with Paul, sometimes make claims of demon expulsion, but true evidence of it is lacking as it is in their other claims of miraculous power.

One of the most popular Bible teachers of the past generation wrote on the very passage we are considering:

"Today we find the same characters. Even in our land, with all its enlightenment, there are literally thousands of people who scarcely make a move without consulting a clairvoyant or spirit-medium "

But when he speaks of present power to *cast out* demons he moves off into pagan lands:

"We have many instances in modern days of missionaries working in pagan lands where they have come in contact with people who seem to be just as truly possessed with demons as this young woman was, and on many occasions these servants of God have cast out those demons, using these same words." And then the writer proceeds to relate one such case of which he *heard*.¹⁵

But if *other* "servants of God" could do this in *pagan* lands, why could not *this* servant of God do it "*in our land*," where he says the same condition exists?

¹⁵ Dr. H. A. Ironside, in *Lectures on the Book of Acts*, Pp. 373-375.

Under the "great commission" to the eleven, power was given to "cast out devils," as well as to perform other miracles (Mark 16:17,18) but in harmony with the disappearance of other miraculous powers under Paul's ministry, the casting out of demons also vanished away. Nowhere is the believer today given such power.

Indeed, since the earthly establishment of Christ's kingdom has been deferred, Satan is not presently occupied with opposing it. Today he smarts from what took place at Calvary and occupies himself with perverting the truth as to Christ's accomplishments there.

In Heb. 2:14 we read that our Lord took part of flesh and blood: "*that through death He might destroy Him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*" In Col. 2:15 we read, concerning Christ and His death:

"And having spoiled principalities and powers, HE MADE A SHOW OF THEM OPENLY, TRIUMPHING OVER THEM IN IT."

Thus, in the epistles of Paul we learn that the cross spelled defeat for Satan, purchasing salvation and all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies for all who will believe. This is the blessed truth which Satan now perverts and opposes. He "*hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ [Lit., the good news of the glory of Christ] . . . should shine unto them*" (II Cor. 4:4). He "*now worketh in the children of disobedience*" (Eph. 2:2). But his opposition is subtle. He ostensibly honors Christ, encourages "spirituality" and a high code of morals. "*Transformed into an angel of light,*" his ministers also appear as "*the ministers of righteousness*" (II Cor. 11:14,15). Hence the believer today is instructed to put on the whole armor of God, that he may be enabled to "*stand against the wiles of the devil.*"

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world [age] against spiritual wickedness [wicked spirits] in high places [the heavenlies]" (Eph. 6:12).

But while Paul had come to Philippi with the message of grace, God had not yet brought the former program to an end, nor withdrawn his offer to establish the kingdom. Hence the particular manifestation of Satanic opposition and the response to it which we find here.

As we say, these manifestations have since passed away, but he who caused them has not. He it is who blinds the minds of the lost and who wrestles with the saved, to keep them from enjoying their rightful position in the heavenlies in Christ. Let us then not be "ignorant of his devices," failing to recognize his efforts to undo us, but let us be always ready, clad with "the whole armor of God" and strong "in the power of His might."

PAUL AND SILAS BEATEN AND IMPRISONED

The masters of the Pythoness were enraged because "the hope of their gains" had vanished with the demon.¹⁶ This has always been so. The Gadarenes asked our Lord to leave them because demons cast out by Him had destroyed their swine, which they should not have been raising anyway (Mark 5:16,17). Demetrius started a great uprising in Ephesus because the gains from his silver shrines were dwindling (Acts 19:24-41). And still today one of the chief causes of opposition to the truth is "filthy lucre." How many ministers of the gospel, even, would take their stands for the pure Pauline message of grace if it did not cost them financially! Paul had to warn Timothy against the desire to be rich (I Tim. 6:7-11). Peter, by the Spirit, predicts the coming of "false teachers" who "through covetousness" will "make merchandise" of men (II Pet. 2:3).

Had the gospel increased the income of this girl's owners they would doubtless have accepted it, but now, in the light of their loss, it was all wrong, even though their chattel, so basely used, had been restored to sanity and dignity by it. Thus they "*caught Paul and Silas*" (Timothy and Luke evidently escaping) and "*drew [Lit., dragged] them into the market-place unto the rulers*" (Ver. 19).

Appearing before the magistrates these men charged Paul and Silas with a very different crime than might be expected, saying: "*These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans*" (Vers. 20,21).

The observation that Paul and Silas were Jews was intended to prejudice the magistrates against them since the Jews, already hated, had been expelled from Rome by Claudius Caesar (18:2). But why this sudden concern about the sanctity of their religion? Had the plain truth been told it would have been to the credit of the apostles, so all of a sudden they affect a zeal for the public religion! How hypocritically conscientious men can become when their crimes are detected and exposed! Though the Romans opposed religious *innovations*, they were tolerant of existing religions and, indeed declared themselves the protectors of the gods of these nations which they had conquered.

But all this meant little now, for a popular tumult was already in the making. As "the multitude rose up together against them" the magistrates, who should have given them a hearing, tore off their clothes and commanded the lictors to "rod" them, i.e., to beat them with rods. After having beaten them with "many stripes" they "cast" them into prison, "charging the jailor to keep them safely," as though they were dangerous criminals. The jailor, "having received such a charge, *thrust* them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks" (Vers. 22-24).

¹⁶ The terms "came out" and "was gone" (Vers. 18,19) are the same in the original.

This bare account of the incident gives but a glimpse of the shameful treatment Paul and Silas were made to endure. The whole affair was highly improper to begin with. The plaintiffs had made a false charge and the magistrates had disgraced and punished them without a hearing or even an inquiry as to whether they were Roman citizens. Those who had professed such zeal for Roman law were flagrantly disregarding it now.

This was evidently one of the three times when Paul was "beaten with rods" (II Cor. 11:25). Flogging among the Jews was limited to 39 stripes (Deut. 25:3 cf. II Cor. 11:24) but the "many stripes" here inflicted on the naked apostles may well have exceeded that number, for in II Cor. 11:23 Paul refers to "stripes *above measure*."

Then, having been "cast" into prison, they were "thrust" into the inner prison. If secular history is correct these inner prisons were horrible dungeons below the ground, damp and reeking with filth. We know this one was below ground level, for we read later that the jailor "sprang in" (Ver. 29). And here they were subjected to still another form of torture -- the stocks,¹⁷ in which their feet were made fast. This made it difficult to sit up and practically forced them, backs all bruised and bleeding, to lie on the damp, vile, ground.

Later Paul recalled to the Thessalonians how he and Silas had been thus "shamefully entreated . . . at Philippi" (I Thes. 2: 2). Little wonder he could say: "*Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?*" (II Cor. 11:29).

But Paul and Silas were both Romans (Vers. 37,38). Why did they not let the magistrates know this at the very beginning? The only answer seems to be that by allowing the magistrates to put themselves in the wrong the apostles sought to secure for the Philippian disciples better treatment in the future. As it was, God had graciously overruled. Had the magistrates inquired into their citizenship and given them a formal trial, they might have been condemned to a long imprisonment, their work thus being hindered. *Now* the magistrates had put *themselves* on the defensive!

Doubtless the heroic comrades lay there sick and faint for a considerable period of time, perhaps sobbing in their pain and humiliation, but they who had subdued the spirit of Python were, though cruelly tortured, sustained by the Spirit of Christ and still gloriously triumphant!

¹⁷ It is interesting to note that the word for stocks (*timber*) is also used of the cross of Christ (See 5:30; 10:39; Gal. 3:13; I Pet. 2:24).

Chapter XXIX - Acts 16:25-40

THE PHILIPPIAN JAILOR CONVERTED

THE PRISON OPENED BY A MIRACLE

"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

"And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

"And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

"But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here,

"Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

"And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

"And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

"And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house,

"And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

"And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house."

--Acts 16:25-34.

What are these sounds at midnight? Praying! Singing!

Strange! Can it be coming from the dungeon where the two latest prisoners were cast? They cannot even kneel; their feet are fast in stocks. And *sing*? Why, only a few hours ago they were brutally beaten with rods and thrown into the dungeon, their backs pitifully bruised and bleeding from "many stripes."

Of course they cannot sleep -- yet how can they be praying and singing in their condition, and in such a place? Yet it must be they we hear, for they are the ones who have been going about telling people about salvation through Christ.

How strange and wonderful it sounds! Until now these walls have heard only groans, curses and vile outbursts: Now they are hearing prayers and songs!

What a testimony Paul and Silas bore for Christ that midnight! Though deeply wronged and in physical misery, faith and joy overflowed as they prayed and sang hymns (Gr. *humneo*) to God. They were far from bitter. In their suffering, and not knowing how long they would be confined to this horrible dungeon or what test they might have to face next, they poured out their hearts in prayer to God, calling upon Him for strength and help. And somehow He seemed closer to them now, rather than farther away, so that they burst out in one song of praise after another, coming from hearts overflowing with peace and joy. *"And the prisoners were listening."*¹⁸

Their consciences were clear and their hearts right with God -- and more, like the apostles in Jerusalem in *their* persecutions, they rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41). Indeed, in a truer sense than they, Paul was the apostle of the rejected Christ, filling up that which still remained of His afflictions for His Body's sake (Col. 1:24). Thus he later wrote to the saints in this very city:

"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake;

"Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me" (Phil. 1:29,30).

Yes, and the apostle went farther than that, expressing to them his longing to know Christ more intimately in "the *fellowship of His sufferings*" (Phil. 3:10).

This was the joy that filled and overflowed the hearts of Paul and Silas in that dark prison cell.

And suddenly, as they prayed and sang, there was an earthquake, so violent that it shook the foundations of the prison. *"And immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed"* (Ver. 26).

Surely this was a divine intervention. What if history does bear witness that earthquakes were frequent in that vicinity at that time, it would still be a miracle that one should take place just then and do just that -- including even the loosing

¹⁸ "The prisoners *heard* them" is not strong enough. They *listened*, deeply impressed by what they heard.

of every one's bands! This last unquestionably bears the stamp of the miraculous. Those who deny this have argued that an earthquake, besides loosening the doors, might well have broken loose the bolts that fastened the prisoners' chains to the walls. But what of the other ends? It says "every one's bands were loosed," not merely loosed from the walls. Moreover Paul and Silas had had their feet fast in stocks!

And now the jailor awakens to find all the doors of the prison open and naturally supposes that the prisoners have fled. We have already explained how these Roman keepers were made responsible with their lives for the prisoners entrusted to them (See [12:19](#)) hence it is not strange to find the Philippian jailor, in his distress, drawing his sword to take his life. Suicide, he thinks, is better than disgrace and a cruel execution.

But somehow Paul found out or sensed that the jailor was about to take his life and cried aloud from the darkness: "*Do thyself no harm: for we are all here*" (Ver. 28). To the jailor this must have seemed amazingly humane after the rough treatment he had given Paul and Silas, yet it was one of the natural fruits of the gospel they had been proclaiming.

But what power had kept *all* the prisoners in their cells? We are distinctly told that "*all the doors were opened*" and "*every one's bands were loosed*" (Ver. 26). Why did no one flee? We believe it was what they heard as Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns, for what must have been the reaction in the heathen heart and mind to such conduct! How could they help associating the earthquake with it?

By now the jailor, so narrowly saved from committing suicide, was completely overwhelmed. Calling for lights (plural, probably torches) he "*sprang in*" and "*came trembling*" and "*fell down*" before Paul and Silas. So great was his reverence for them now that he did not even speak until he had "brought them out" of the dungeon. Then he asked the great question which may already have been troubling him, and now had suddenly taken possession of his heart and mind. Addressing them as "Sirs" (Gr. *Kurioi*, Lords) he entreats: "*What must I do to be saved?*" (Ver. 30).

It has been argued by some that the jailor had physical deliverance rather than the salvation of his soul in mind when he asked this question, but the evidence unites to prove that this is not so.

1. Paul and Silas had been pointed out for "many days" in Philippi, as men who proclaimed "the way of salvation" (Vers. 17,18).

2. The earthquake was over. He could hardly be seeking "salvation" from that.

3. None of the prisoners had escaped, so his life need no longer be in danger from that source. Indeed, the jailor seems to have taken no immediate steps to re-secure the prisoners, either because his attendants (Ver. 29) saw to this, or because the salvation of his soul was now his supreme concern. God may also have used the circumstances to cause the prisoners to stay. At any rate, had he feared *Roman* judgment now, his first concern would have been to make certain no prisoner would escape.

4. The earthquake, the open prison doors, the neglect of the prisoners to do that which would have insured his ruin, Paul's solicitude for his life when he was about to commit suicide; all this would tend to make him seek more than physical deliverance.

5. Paul and Silas evidently took the jailor to mean that he sought salvation from sin. They would not have promised physical deliverance in return for faith in Christ.

6. The tender solicitude of the converted jailor toward the men he had so abused, and his joy when he, "with all his house," *did* believe, would seem to indicate that he had been under conviction of sin.

7. The references to the jailor's "house" in connection with both Paul's reply and the jailor's conversion (Vers. 31,32,33,34) harmonize with the cases of Cornelius (11:14) and Lydia (16:15).

How ready the apostles were with just the answer the jailor needed! "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*" (Ver. 31). This is the core of the message of grace.

When "the people" had asked John the Baptist: "*What shall we do then?*" he had insisted upon the fruits of repentance and of the kingdom ([Luke 3:9-11](#)). When a lawyer had asked our Lord: "*What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" the Lord had asked him: "*What is written in the law?*" and had instructed him: "*This do, and thou shalt live*" (Luke 10:25-28). When Peter's convicted hearers at Pentecost had asked: "*What shall we do?*" Peter had directed them to "*repent and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins*" (Acts 2:37, 38). But now, under Paul, the clear, pointed message is: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*" No matter what your sin, no matter what your ignorance, no matter what your fears about "holding on" -- "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*" Whether to the child, with a lifetime of opportunity before him, or to the dying man with only a few moments to live, the message is still: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*"

The added words: "*and thy house,*" have sometimes been taken as a promise that the faith of one member of a family secures the salvation of the whole family. If this were so all the world would of course be saved, for we are all related, but

the apostles did not mean this, nor is this teaching found anywhere in the Pauline epistles. The meaning is simply: "This goes for your household too. They, as well as you, may believe and be saved."

But while the apostles came right to the point in answer to the jailor's inquiry, they did not stop there, as some evangelists and soul-winners do today. Still sick and sore, they preached "the word of the Lord" to the jailor and to the members of his household, who had by now gathered around (Ver. 32).

Soon enough the jailor showed evidence that he *had* sincerely trusted in Christ as his Savior, for "the same hour of the night" he took them to still another place, where water was available, and there the once brutal jailor tenderly washed their stripes. We are not told what he said when he did this, but we suspect there were many words of regret and apology. And here too, the jailor "and all his" were washed with a baptism that signified cleansing from sin.

It should be observed again that Paul had not required this baptism for the remission of sins according to the "great commission" given to the eleven ([Mark 16:16](#); [Acts 2:38](#)). It was added *after*, as in the cases of Cornelius and Lydia, and only because Israel and the kingdom program had not yet been officially set aside. Nor does this mean that Paul *preached* or *taught* baptism. He rightly circumcised Timothy, yet he did not *preach* circumcision ([Gal. 5:11](#)). Similarly he says: "*Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel*" (I Cor. 1:17) and it would not be long now before the "one baptism" by the Spirit into Christ was all that would remain (Eph. 4:5).

So far from teaching household or infant baptism, the record states that the jailor "*rejoiced, believing [Lit., having believed] in God with all his house*" (Ver. 34). Yet able men of God, like Albert Barnes, will say: "The whole narrative would lead us to suppose that *as soon as the jailor believed* he and all his family were baptized *The Baptism appears to have been performed on account of the faith of the head of the family!*" (*Barnes on the New Testament*, at Acts 16:34. Italics ours). Such are the foundations upon which the doctrine of household baptism has been built.

But this passage gives no better support to the immersionists as far as the *mode* of baptism is concerned. There is no indication that there was enough water in the prison to *submerge* people in. Nor is it probable that there would be. Nor is there any indication whatever that they were immersed. They doubtless had water sprinkled or poured upon them in the same place where Paul and Silas had their stripes washed and certainly in "the same hour of the night" (Ver. 33). There had been an earthquake and much excitement and it is doubtful that they took part in a long ceremony. Indeed we read that they were baptized "straightway" (Ver. 33).

And now the jailor takes Paul and Silas into his own home and sets a table¹⁹ before them (Ver. 34). Doubtless they were hungry by now, for it was at the time of prayer, 9 A. M., (Ver. 16, cf. 3:1) that the trouble had begun, and it was now well past midnight. But a deeper hunger had been graciously satisfied for the apostles, for it must have been well worth all their suffering and humiliation to see the jailor "*rejoice, having believed in God with all his house.*"²⁰ Here was feasting and fellowship indeed! And the joy of the jailor and his household was typical of the joy that always follows true faith (See [2:46,47](#); [8:8](#); [Rom. 15:13](#); [1 Pet. 1:8](#)).

PAUL ASSERTS HIS ROMAN CITIZENSHIP

"And when it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants, saying, Let those men go.

"And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace.

"But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.

"And the sergeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.

"And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.

"And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed."
--Acts 16:35-40.

As morning light dawned the sergeants²¹ appeared, not with a summons to bring Paul and Silas in for examination, but with a message from the magistrates to "let those men go" (Ver. 35). This could scarcely have been because the magistrates felt that the sufferings endured by Paul and Silas were sufficient to pay for their "crime." The phrase "when it was day," rather indicates that for some reason they were in a hurry to release them.

Probably the magistrates realized, as they thought the matter over, that they had failed to carry out the boasted justice of the Roman Empire in having Paul

¹⁹ Not "meat" merely, but a *meal*. With but one other exception the word *trapeza* is consistently rendered "table."

²⁰ The Jailor's case was very different from that of *Cornelius*, and a greater demonstration of grace. Cornelius had feared God, prayed, given alms, etc. The Jailor, on the other hand, had only a few hours before showed how cruel the pagan heart can be. Yet now he was rejoicing in salvation with all his house.

²¹ Lit., *rod-bearers*. Probably the same men who had beaten them the night before.

and Silas beaten and imprisoned as criminals without inquiry or investigation. Perhaps they even suspected that one or both of them were Roman citizens, and the violent earthquake that followed their premature condemnation of the apostles may well have further troubled their consciences. Under such circumstances they would naturally seek to dispose of the case as quickly as possible.

The jailor, evidently pleased at this sudden turn of events, now bears the good news to Paul and Silas and bids them "go in peace," but what is his surprise when they *refuse* to go, Paul replying with a masterpiece of energetic brevity which, in modern English, would be translated about as follows:

"They have beaten us

"publicly,

"uncondemned,

"men that are Romans,

"and have thrown us into prison;

"and now do they throw us out secretly?

"No indeed;

"Let them come themselves and lead us out" (Ver. 37).

There was irony in the phrase "men that are Romans," for the magistrates had commanded to beat and imprison them on the charge that "*being Jews*" they had troubled Philippi exceedingly. Similarly the apostle points out that they had been "*thrown*" into prison "publicly," and now will the magistrates "*throw*" (Gr. *ballo* in both cases) them out "secretly," as if they had no rights? No, indeed! He will hold them to account for their illegal action. They must come themselves and escort the apostles out as publicly as they have cast them in. A secret pardon will not suffice; the apostle demands formal vindication.

Now the tables are turned. The accused become the accusers and the judges are in danger of being called to trial. The magistrates are now in danger both from Rome, for violating the vaunted sanctity of Roman citizenship, and also from Philippi itself, for its natives, themselves Roman citizens, upon learning that Paul and Silas are also Romans, may well resent the disregard of their rights. The magistrates, knowing this, "feared" (Ver. 38). There was nothing to do but to capitulate.

There are many lessons to be learned from Paul's action here. We may be certain that the apostle did not challenge these Roman rulers merely for the personal satisfaction he might get out of it. It was not from pride, but from a proper sense of the dignity of his office that he took this action. Also, he thought of the Philippian believers. He had always been the first to bear suffering patiently at the hands of his persecutors, but, as Barnes says at this point: "where submission without any effort to obtain justice might be followed by disgrace to the cause . . . a higher obligation may require one to seek a vindication of his character, and to claim the protection of the laws."

And this was not the only occasion when Paul asserted his rights as a Roman citizen. We find him doing so again in Acts 21:39, 22:25 and 25:10, 11. Yet we never find him demanding his rights as a *Hebrew* citizen. Thus God would emphasize the fact that Paul was pre-eminently the apostle of the Gentiles, as he says in his letter to the believers at Rome:

"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I AM THE APOSTLE OF THE GENTILES, I MAGNIFY MINE OFFICE" (Rom. 11:13).

Still we know that he *was* a Hebrew citizen as well; a *born* Hebrew (Phil. 3:5) and a born Roman (Acts 22:28) at the same time. In this he represents the Body of Christ, *a joint body of believing; Jews and Gentiles* (I Cor. 12:13). Indeed, this is further emphasized by the fact that Paul was a former enemy of God and His Christ, now gloriously *reconciled*, for we read, with regard to Jews and Gentiles, that Christ died:

". . . that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Eph. 2:16).

Thus, as the twelve were sent to Israel, so Paul was sent to the Gentiles, and as the twelve were the appointed representatives of the twelve tribes of redeemed Israel (Matt. 19:28) so Paul was the appointed representative of the "one body" (Col. 1:24,25).

Returning again to the local scene at Philippi, we find the magistrates apologizing to Paul and Silas, yet requesting them to leave the city, evidently fearing that their continued presence there might call attention to the magistrates' blunder and complicate matters further for them.

But the apostles, while graciously complying with the request, did not flee in haste from the city. With a dignity and self-possession which bespoke the justice of their cause, they went first to Lydia's home to comfort "the brethren." Surely "*the wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous are bold as a lion*" (Prov. 28:1).

We may be sure that under God Paul's courage, patience, presence of mind and clarity of judgment through this ordeal, and the faithfulness of Silas as his companion, placed the small church at Philippi in a much more advantageous position and doubtless helped greatly to establish it.

Nevertheless, these believers would not be free from persecution, for the gospel of God's grace having gotten a foothold in Europe, the devil would do all in his power to oppose it. Indeed, the sufferings they were to endure were to give them a deeper appreciation of the one who had himself suffered so much to bring Christ to them, so that again and again they were to seek Paul out in order to "communicate with his affliction" and supply his needs. How could such as Lydia and her household, and the delivered Pythoness, and the jailor and his household ever forget him?

For the present it seems that both Timothy and Luke remained with the infant church, for Luke says of Paul and Silas that "they . . . departed" (16:40). Indeed, it is possible that Luke remained at Philippi until Paul's next apostolic journey, for the narrative now proceeds in the third person, not returning to the second again until 20:6. Timothy, however, rejoined Paul soon after, being referred to in 17:14.

Thus "the gospel of the grace of God" was first planted in Europe, and still it continues to bring forth fruit, even though the glorious message, ever more fully revealed to the apostle of grace, and ever more fully proclaimed by him, has since been perverted and confused with "the gospel of the kingdom" by the very leaders of the Church.

Chapter XXX - Acts 17:1-15

CHURCHES ESTABLISHED AT THESSALONICA AND BEREIA

PAUL AT THESSALONICA

"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:

"And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures,

"Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

"And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

"But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

"And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;

"Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.

"And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.

"And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go."

--Acts 17:1-9

MANY GREEKS BELIEVE

Departing from Philippi, Paul and Silas made their way along the great Roman road to the west, arriving at Thessalonica, now known as Salonica, situated on the Aegean Sea about one hundred miles distant. They did not stop to evangelize Amphipolis and Apollonia, two cities along the way, doubtless concluding that the former could be reached through Philippi and the latter

through Thessalonica, a populous center from which the gospel might be widely proclaimed. Indeed, we are later informed that from Thessalonica "the word of the Lord" did in fact come to be "sounded out" throughout "Macedonia and Achaia" (I Thes. 1:8).

In addition there was a synagogue²² at Thessalonica and it was still Paul's custom to seek out such places first. This was doubtless partly because the Jews, believing in the true God, and having gathered about them proselytes and interested Gentiles, afforded him a good starting point from which to proclaim Christ. But in the program of God there was another important reason, Israel, as a nation, had rejected Christ and was already being set aside, the establishment of the Messianic kingdom being deferred until a later date. And now, as Paul was sent "far hence unto the Gentiles," he still went to "the Jew first," not with a view to the establishment of the kingdom after all, but that from Jerusalem to Rome the Jews might be left without excuse for their rejection of Christ and, as he explains: "*If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them*" (Rom. 11:14). The record of these facts is in harmony with the nature and purpose of the Book of Acts which, we must remember, is *not* to relate the story of "the birth and growth" of the Church of this dispensation, but rather to give an account of the fall of Israel and to explain why salvation was sent to the Gentiles apart from her instrumentality.

For three "sabbath days"²³ the apostle "reasoned out of the Scriptures" with the Jews at Thessalonica. That he was permitted to do this for so extended a time indicates what respect they must have had for his character, his ability and his earnest eloquence. Modern evangelists, who give their hearers a minimum of light from the Word and a maximum of entertainment, should take note of this, and should also take note of the amazing results of Paul's short ministry at Thessalonica.

What Paul preached at Thessalonica should also be considered here. Some have felt that Paul, since he reasoned out of the (Old Testament) Scriptures, must have proclaimed the same message as the twelve had been proclaiming: "the gospel of the kingdom" and "the gospel of the circumcision," and they have interpreted Paul's references to the return of Christ in his Thessalonian epistles to conform to this view.

But there is no evidence that Paul proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom, or of the circumcision, here or anywhere at any time. In Gal. 2:7 he states emphatically that "the gospel of the circumcision" had been committed to *Peter*, as "the gospel of the circumcision" had been committed to him. Nor is it said anywhere that "the gospel of the kingdom" had been committed to him or was preached by him.

²² Some texts read, "*the synagogue*," which might indicate that the Jews of this whole region were served by this one synagogue.

²³ Or, *weeks*.

In "opening" (explaining) and "alleging" (Lit., setting before, facing with, or maintaining a thing to be so) that Messiah, according to Scripture "must needs have suffered and risen again" and that the Jesus whom he preached was the Messiah, Paul was simply establishing the identity of Christ so that they might come to trust in Him. This was the natural point of contact, the logical place of beginning.

That Paul did *not* proclaim the same message as the twelve had been proclaiming is evident from the following facts:

1. He did not call upon them to repudiate the nation's part in the death of Christ; an integral part of the message of the twelve (See [Acts 2:23,36,38](#) and cf. [Zech. 12:10; 13:6](#)).

2. He did not, here nor anywhere, *offer* the return of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom, as the twelve had done ([Acts 3:19-21](#)).

3. God knew that the possibility of Israel's accepting Christ and His kingdom had already passed, hence the raising up of Paul to proclaim *another* message ([Acts 8:1; 22:18](#); etc.).

4. Paul's ministry, both in the Acts and in his early epistles is consistently *distinguished* from that of the twelve ([Acts 20:24; Gal. 1:11,12; 2:2, 6-9](#), etc.).

In this part of Acts, however, we have a *transition* from the old program to the new. The old *gradually* disappears as the new takes its place. It is perfectly natural, therefore, to find Paul, here and elsewhere in the Acts record, proving to the Jews by the Scriptures that "Jesus is the Christ," that some may be won to trust in Him and that those who join the nation in refusing to do so may be left wholly without excuse as God continues to set the nation aside. This is where he had to begin, for if the Jesus who had been crucified was *not* the Messiah, He was an impostor and surely could not be the Dispenser of grace to a lost world, nor the Head of the Body.

Paul's ministry at Thessalonica was brief, but as we add to the Acts record, additional information gained from his Thessalonian epistles, written soon after, we get a better idea of how much was accomplished and how so much *could be* accomplished in so short a time.

Luke, by the Spirit, informs us that "some" of the Jews "believed," or rather, were *persuaded*, and cast in their lot with Paul and Silas, along with "a great multitude" of "devout," or *worshipping* Greeks and "not a few" of the leading women of the city, who, evidently, belonged to that category. Again the Gentiles had put the Jews to shame, with "a great multitude" of them turning to the Lord as compared with "some" of the Jews. But, in harmony with the purpose of Acts,

Luke does not mention the even greater multitude of pagans won to the Lord during Paul's short stay there.²⁴ From Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians it is evident that the church there was from the beginning composed mainly of converts from *idolatry*, rather than from Judaism, for he writes to them as those who had "turned to God from idols" (I Thes. 1:9). Certainly the converted Jews in the assembly formed an insignificant proportion, for Paul writes to the Thessalonians almost as if there were no Jews among them (See I Thes. 2:14, etc.).

How was so much accomplished in so short a time? Was it because things just happened to go easily for him during this period? No, indeed; there was much opposition, but the apostle had come to them in the power of the Spirit, exhibiting rare courage and grace.

Writing by inspiration, the apostle recalls: "*Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance . . . But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi,*²⁵ *we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention*" (I Thes. 1:5; 2:2). And the Thessalonian believers, too, were introduced to suffering from the very beginning, for the apostle writes that they "*received the Word in much affliction*" and, as usual, "*with joy of the Holy Ghost*" (I Thes. 1:6, cf. 2:14).

But young and suffering believers could have had no greater human support than the Thessalonians received from Paul and Silas during their stay there. Again, by divine inspiration and not from spiritual pride, the apostle recalls: "*Ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake*" (I Thes. 1:5) reminding the Thessalonians how he and Silas had not dealt with them from motives of "deceit," nor "uncleanness," nor "guile," but as men entrusted with a sacred charge (2:3,4). Nor had they used "flattery" or some other "cloak for greed;" nor had they "sought glory of men," though "as the apostles of Christ" they "might have been burdensome" to the Thessalonians (2:5, 6). Rather, they had been "gentle" among these babes in Christ, "even as a nurse cherisheth her children." "Being affectionately desirous" of them, the apostles "were willing to have imparted unto [them] not the gospel of God only, but also [their] own souls" (2: 7,8).

One detail which perhaps surprises us most of all is that in the apostle's short stay here, with so great a work to do, he even took up daily employment, so that he might not need to look to them for support. "*For ye remember,*" he says, "*our*

²⁴ Unless Verse 4 should read "*devout persons and Greeks*" as a few MSS have it. These MSS, however, are probably the results of the difficulty encountered over Luke's failure to *mention* the converted pagans of which the church was mainly composed, for this rendering has little MSS support.

²⁵ Their backs undoubtedly still sore from the stripes received but a few days previous.

labor and travail [toil]; for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God" (2:9).

Finally, the apostle could call on them to bear witness: *"how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe" and "how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God" (2:10-12).*

How could *such* a ministry fail to produce results? And it *did* produce results. It produced results infinitely more extensive and lasting than all the shallow, frivolous "evangelism" of modern times.

Says the apostle: *"Yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain For... when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (I Thes. 2:1,13).* And the Thessalonian believers were, in turn, used to carry the message far and wide, for *"from you,"* says the apostle, *"sounded out the Word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad" (I Thes. 1:8).*

Little wonder the apostle gave *"thanks to God always for [them] all!"* (I Thes. 1:2). Little wonder he exclaimed: *"What thanks can we render to God ... for you!"* (3:9). Little wonder he called them his *"glory and joy!"* (2:20).

THE JEWS INCITE PERSECUTION

In addition to the opposition which they had encountered from the beginning, a persecution was now to be raised which was to force Paul and Silas to leave Thessalonica under cover of darkness.

The Jews, envious of Paul's success in winning so many to the Christ whom they rejected, resorted again to foul methods to thwart his ministry. Evidently fearing, among the Gentiles, to give to their hostility a purely Jewish appearance, they stirred up the pagans against the apostles as the Jews from Antioch and Iconium had done at Lystra ([Acts 14:19](#)). Here, however, they stooped to even lower levels than had the Jews at Lystra for, taking to themselves certain evil men from among the rabble,²⁶ they "gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar," assaulting the house of Jason,²⁷ where Paul and Silas had evidently been staying, and seeking to bring them out to the people²⁸ (17:5). Failing to find them, however, they dragged Jason and some of the other brethren to the rulers of the city, crying: *"These that have turned the world upside down are come*

²⁶ The word rendered "of the baser sort" is literally *market-loungers* and refers to such idlers as were always ready for mischief. A good rendering would be *rowdies*.

²⁷ If this Jason is the same as the one mentioned in Rom. 16:21, he was a relative of Paul's.

²⁸ Either to the mob or before the popular assembly.

hither also!" (Ver. 6). This was a real compliment. Would that it could be said of us, for the world is certainly wrong side up!

However, the charge as *they meant it* was not true, nor was it true that Paul and his associates had violated the decrees of Caesar or sought to incite sedition (Ver. 7). But the Jews had put into their mouths that charge which in widely spread Imperial Rome was always most apt to secure the attention of the magistrates--that of treason against the Emperor. This was the same false charge that had been brought against our Lord Himself when brought before Pilate (Luke 23:2).²⁹

To what extremes of intolerance and injustice religious bigotry can lead men! *The Jews* had raised the tumult, yet they accused the Christians of doing it. They themselves believed from their Scriptures that Messiah would overthrow the kingdoms of this world to reign over *them*, and they would have been the first to accept a king who would destroy Rome, if only he would leave them in their sins. Yet now they profess allegiance to Caesar! Their malice was much more bitter than that of Paul's pagan persecutors at Philippi. There the blunder was soon corrected, and that openly. But here the hate ran deeper. Indeed, before it was over the Jews from Thessalonica pursued Paul to Berea to persecute him further, just as the Jews from Antioch and Iconium had pursued him to Lystra.

Both the people of Thessalonica and their rulers naturally became troubled at hearing these things, just as "Herod . . . was troubled . . . and all Jerusalem with him," upon hearing of another "King of the Jews" (Matt. 2:2,3) for both people and rulers knew what conflict could result from any challenge to the authority of Rome. The rulers here, however, showed more restraint than the military magistrates at Philippi had done, for taking "security," or bail, from Jason and the others, they let them go.

Under the circumstances it seemed foolhardy for the apostles to remain at Thessalonica, since their very presence there would only tend to stir matters up more. Furthermore a sizeable assembly had already been established there. Therefore the brethren sent them away by night to Berea, a small town about thirty miles further west. But it was not easy for the apostle to leave so great a multitude of believers so recently, yet so thoroughly, converted to Christ. A short time later he wrote to them about "*being taken from [them] for a short time in presence, not in heart*" and about having "*endeavored the more abundantly to see [their] face with great desire*" (I Thes. 2:17). And with regard to the good news of their faith and love, brought to him by Timothy, the apostle wrote:

"Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:

"For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord" (I Thes 3:7,8).

²⁹ Though before the Jewish high priest He was charged with blasphemy (Matt. 26:60,61).

And they did!

PAUL'S MINISTRY AT BEREIA

"And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.

"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

"Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

"But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the Word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

"And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the were but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

"And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed."

--Acts 17:10-15

THE NOBLE BEREANS

Travelling by night in Paul's day was not as simple a matter as it is now, but the apostle and his companion were urged on, not merely by the necessity to put distance between themselves and their persecutors, but by their desire to go still farther into Gentile territory with the gospel of the grace of God.

Not deterred by their treatment at the hands of the Jews at Thessalonica, the two men, upon arriving at Berea went again into the Jewish synagogue. But here was an assembly of Jews different in character from any they had thus far found or, indeed, were to find. They are called "noble" or "well-born" (Cf. [1 Cor. 1:26](#)) but the word here indicates those *qualities of character* which might be expected of those of high birth: courtesy, generosity, freedom from bigotry, etc. Indeed this passage itself explains that they possessed those qualities of true spiritual greatness which entitled them to be classed among the spiritual aristocracy of their day.

Many who have read this passage again and again still suppose that the Bereans were called "noble" merely because they "*searched the Scriptures daily*,

whether those things were so." This last is true, but it is not the *whole* truth. The Scriptures give us a *twofold* reason:

1. "They received the word [which Paul preached] with all readiness of mind."
2. They "searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so."

The Bereans were open-minded. This is the *first* lesson we must learn from them. To appreciate this quality in them we must remember that they were *Jews* who met in a *synagogue* each *Sabbath* day. Some of the things Paul preached to them must have seemed strange, if not almost unbelievable and impossible. Yet, if they listened with open mouths, they listened with open minds too. They did not shake their heads in refusal or deem Paul's message unworthy of investigation just because it was so different from that which they had heard all their lives. They were spiritually great enough to give him a sincere and interested hearing.

In this the Jews of Thessalonica compared unfavorably with them. "*These were more noble* than those in Thessalonica," where Paul had reasoned out of the Scriptures for three Sabbath days with men who were unwilling to listen, until they stirred up persecution against him and he was driven away.

How sorely this Berean lesson is needed in the professing Church today! So many among God's people, yes, and even among their leaders, lack this quality of true spiritual greatness. Their first thought is to conform to accepted beliefs rather than to conform to the written Word of God. Their desire to stand well with the popular leaders is greater than their desire *to know the truth and to make it known*. They would rather be *orthodox* than *Scriptural*.

We must not suppose that the Berean Jews were gullible, or mistake their broad-mindedness for credulity. If they were broad they were narrow too. They were not willing to accept what Paul said just because he said it. They would listen and consider, but would not concede, without real evidence from the Scriptures, that the *truth* had been preached. Paul's Word must be subjected to God's Word. This was another sign of their true spiritual greatness.

Picture the scene: A husband comes home saying he has heard strange things in the synagogue from the lips of a visiting rabbi. Reaching for the sacred scrolls, he begins an intensive search. The rest of the Sabbath day finds him buried in thought over the writings of the prophets. And not only that day, for he continues the search day after day. Rising early each morning and hurrying home from work each evening, he puts aside the less important things and searches untiringly until he is sure he has the Truth of God. And he is only one of many like him in that Berean synagogue.

How God must have rejoiced over this Bible-loving, Bible-honoring group! They, and not the popular leaders, were the truly great ones in Israel. Oh, for more such congregations today!

In this also the Thessalonian Jews showed up poorly by comparison. They never even got so far as to examine Paul's message in the light of the Scriptures, for they would not give him an interested hearing in the first place.

And here is another strange paradox. Those who reject light and refuse to even search the Scriptures to see whether these things are so, are yet so ready to accept without question what their "orthodox" leaders have taught them. They are so suspicious of other teachers, yet so credulous of their own.

What a rebuke to Rome this passage is with its encouragement to *individual, personal* Bible study! The Bereans were neither slaves to their own religious prejudices nor, on the other hand, would they accept the word of even the greatest man of God, without subjecting it to personal examination in the light of the Scriptures -- and *they were commended for it*.

If there is anything this passage teaches it is that every believer is responsible to examine even the best teaching in the light of the Scriptures, that every preacher should *expect* his teachings to be so examined and should *thank God* for those who do this. Indeed, it is a sign of a *lack* of spiritual greatness when men of God resent Scriptural examination of their teachings by their hearers.

The purity of the Church, doctrinally, depends not upon loyalty to the dogmas of the Church, but upon the maintenance of the Berean spirit among the people of God. The Bereans were not satisfied with a bit of devotional reading now and then. They *searched* the Scriptures *daily*, like the "blessed man" of Psalm 1:2. May we not fail to do so! May we not fail to train our children to do so, that we and they may justly deserve a place among the spiritual aristocracy of *our* day!

A word must here be added about the content of Paul's preaching at Berea. The fact that they "searched the Scriptures" for confirmation of it does not indicate, as some suppose, that he did not preach "the gospel of the grace of God" or proclaim Christ "according to the revelation of the mystery" as far as he knew it, for while the Old Testament Scriptures do not, indeed, *teach* these truths, they do *confirm* them. The "gap" in prophecy is surely a confirmation of the mystery revealed later. It proves that God had the "eternal purpose" in mind all the while. Similarly there is not one word in the Old Testament to the effect that the tabernacle and its furniture, the priesthood, the feasts of Jehovah, etc., are typical of Christ and the all-sufficiency of His finished work, but in the light of the revelation to Paul today they are shown to be such. Furthermore, Acts again consistently stresses the *Jewish* side of Paul's ministry at Berea. When the Acts record is compared with Paul's epistles we find that he *did* preach his special message consistently as it was ever more fully revealed to him (Cf. [Acts 15](#) with

Gal. 2; Acts 16:6 with the whole Galatian epistle; Acts 17:2,3 with I Thes. 1:5, etc.). He was called from the beginning to proclaim "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24) but this glorious message, while not *proclaimed* in the Old Testament Scriptures, is amply confirmed by them.

The result of the Scriptural, spiritual attitude of the Berean Jews toward Paul's teaching was that "therefore *many* of them believed," in addition to "not a few" Greek men and leading women. This in comparison with "some" (Gr. *certain, very few*) Jews at Thessalonica (Vers. 4,12). And we may be sure that these Berean believers were the stronger in faith because they had insisted upon an intelligent, Scriptural understanding of the subject. They now possessed not only the "full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22) but the "full assurance of understanding" as well (Col. 2:2). Unbelief, on the other hand, is based on ignorance often willful ignorance, of the Word. Thomas Paine's introduction to the *Age of Reason* contains the following words: "I had neither Bible nor Testament to refer to, though I was writing against both, nor could I procure any."

How long did Paul and Silas continue teaching at Berea? The fact that the Bereans *daily* subjected Paul's teachings to Scriptural examination would already seem to indicate that he must have remained more than a few days. From I Thes. 2:17,18 it would appear that he lingered in the vicinity of Thessalonica for some time, attempting "once and again," though unsuccessfully, to revisit them. The logical place for him to have remained at this time would doubtless be Berea.

"But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the Word of God was preached of Paul at Berea" his ministry there was cut short, for "they came thither also, and stirred up the people" (Ver. 13). How bitter was their hostility in pursuing him, and what malice they displayed as once again they stirred up others against Paul and his message rather than facing him themselves. Thessalonian bigotry had not only kept *them* in spiritual darkness; it had moved them to do all in their power to hinder *others* from receiving it. What a shame! Did they not have Bibles too?

Evidently the danger to Paul's life again became so great that it was necessary for the brethren to send him away immediately. He himself was generally reluctant to flee, even when in the gravest danger, but his safety was of paramount importance for the work's sake, hence from the beginning we find several occasions when "the brethren" sent him away (See Acts 9:25; 9:30; 17:10; 17:14).

The phrase "as it were to the sea" probably does not indicate any stratagem employed to elude the persecutors but rather the want of an immediate plan. The great necessity now was to get Paul away from Berea, further plans to be determined by providential circumstances.

At any rate Silas and Timotheus³⁰ were left at Berea to encourage and establish the believers there, while certain of the brethren accompanied Paul as far as Athens, a journey of nearly three hundred miles. Here for the first time the apostle seems to have been left completely alone. Hence his message to Silas and Timothy to come to him as speedily as possible.

It may be noted that we have no letter from Paul to the Bereans, nor any other mention of a church there. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the church there did not flourish. In the course of Paul's great apostolic journeys many churches must have been rounded of which we do not read a single word.

³⁰ Timothy had re-joined the company, perhaps at Thessalonica.

Chapter XXXI - Acts 17:16-34

PAUL AT ATHENS

A DIFFICULT ASSIGNMENT

"Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

"Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

"Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

"And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?

"For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

"(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing)."

--Acts 17:16-21

ATHENS IN PAUL'S DAY

The apostle was now alone in Athens, the most celebrated city of Greece (then called Achaia) and the cultural capital of the world.

Centuries before this Athens had won world renown for her cultivation of the liberal arts. The most celebrated poets and philosophers had either been born or had flourished there. The outstanding models of statuary and architecture were to be found there. And what was more, practically every religion was represented there.

Though the sun of Athens' glory had by now begun to set, she was still distinguished as the intellectual, artistic and religious center of the world.

There was the *Areopagus* (*Latin: Hill of Mars*) so named from the legendary trial of Mars there. Here judges, called *Areopagites*³¹ because they held session

³¹ One of these appears to have been saved during Paul's visit at Athens (Ver. 34).

there, actually *tried* doctrines and those who taught them! Above this rose the *Acropolis* with the *Parthenon* and its colossal statue of the goddess Athene.

While the city of Athens has continued to this day, her glory, like all earthly glory, has passed away. Only the ruins of her pride remain.

AN IDOL-RIDDEN CITY

While Paul waited for Silas and Timothy,³² *"his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry [Lit. crowded with idols]"* (Ver. 16).

The apostle was not filled with wonder at the beauty of Athens' art and architecture, at her subtle and refined philosophies, at her union of religions. He saw all this in the light of *truth* and *reality*. He was rather agitated and upset at the spectacle of men bowing down, not merely to that which their own hands had made, but to the spiritual forces of evil that induced them to "worship and serve the creature more than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25 cf. Dan. 10:21; Eph. 2:2; 6:12). And he was appalled at the sin that accompanied these heathen religions (Rom. 1:26-32).

With all their vaunted wisdom, the Athenians could not even settle on a god! One worshipped this "deity" and another that. Most worshipped different gods on different occasions. So great was the confusion that Pliny says that in Nero's time Athens contained over 3,000 public idols in addition to countless idols possessed by individuals. On every hand there were statues to gods and demigods. Practically every "deity" was represented including those "unknown." Petronius (Sat. XVII) says humorously that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens, and our Scripture states that the city was "crowded with idols."

Athenian philosophers had settled nothing. They had but demonstrated the hopeless bankruptcy of human wisdom and the utter depravity of human nature. Athens' myriad superstitions were but a proof that unbelief, though boasting superior intelligence, is always more credulous than faith. Her vile statues were but an evidence of the low moral level to which her religions had let her sink.³³

THE SYNAGOGUE AND THE MARKET

³² He remained alone at Athens for some time longer, for though he had sent word to Silas and Timothy to "come to him with all speed" (Ver. 15) when Timothy did come to Athens, bearing news of the sufferings of the Thessalonian believers, Paul could not bear to keep him but again "thought it good to be left at Athens alone" and sent him back to establish and encourage them in the faith (I Thes. 3:1-5). Considering the distance between the Macedonian churches and Athens, Paul must have spent a considerable period of time at Athens and mostly alone, except as converts were won. Thus did he sacrifice himself for the good of those he had been forced to leave. Finally Timothy, with Silas, rejoined Paul at Corinth (Acts 18:5) bearing good news from Macedonia (I Thes. 3:6,7).

³³ The exaltation of vice by Athens had had much to do with the fall of the Grecian Empire and was even now undermining the strength of Rome.

Though the city was "crowded with idols," there was still a synagogue there. God not quite crowded out! It was not, therefore, into any of the idol temples with which the apostle was surrounded, but into this synagogue that he first made his way. Those who met in this synagogue were primarily to blame for the conditions that existed at Athens, for everywhere the people of Israel had forgotten that, as the seed of Abraham, they were to be the instruments of God's blessing to the world ([Gen. 22:17,18](#)). They recognized the true God, but rather than bring God's Word to the nations they merely boasted in it--and that while failing to obey it. Thus, said the apostle, "*The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you*" (Rom. 2:24).

He saw the city crowded with idols- "*Therefore* disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews" (Ver. 17). The Jew still came first in his ministry. God had already begun to give Israel up and had begun to form the Body of Christ as a witness to the nations, but the sentence of doom was not to be pronounced upon the favored nation until the Jews from Jerusalem to Rome had had an opportunity to turn to Christ.

If we may go by Paul's procedure in other synagogues, he doubtless reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, proving that Jesus was the promised Christ and offering them salvation through His finished work -- something Peter had not done at Pentecost ([Acts 13:38,39](#) cf. [Acts 2:38](#)).

Next he reasoned also with the "devout" or reverent Gentiles, i.e., Gentiles who had come to revere the true God, though not having become Jewish proselytes. Third, he reasoned daily with such as he met at the market place, where the Athenians gathered every day, not only to buy and sell, but to argue their various philosophies. Here the apostle would meet many who were eager enough to discuss man's "chief end" and "highest good."

THE EPICUREANS AND THE STOICS

Among these were the Epicureans and the Stoics, who represented the two leading schools of Greek thought at that time. Secular history indicates that the Epicureans held forth in what was known as "*the Garden*," while the Stoics met in "*the Porch*," from whence their name was derived.

The Epicureans were the followers of Epicurus who had flourished at Athens more than three centuries before. They were virtually atheists, in that they taught that whatever god or gods there were, were too far removed from man to be concerned about his sins or sorrows. They believed in neither creation, nor the continued existence of the soul after death, nor resurrection nor judgment. There was nothing to disturb or alarm.

It follows naturally that the Epicureans held that *the enjoyment of pleasure* was man's "chief end" and "highest good" in life. Hence some--evidently most--gave themselves over to lives of gross sensuality and vice. Their philosophy gave them free license to do so. Others, like Epicurus himself, indulged in more refined pleasures, yet all gave themselves to self-gratification. If sensual excesses were to be avoided it was only because they did not ultimately lead to the greatest pleasure.

The Stoics were the disciples of Zeno, a contemporary of Epicurus, whose philosophy was, however, almost exactly the opposite. They were pantheists and fatalists, and taught that *virtue* was man's "chief end" and "highest good." They believed in the suppression of all natural feeling and strove to accept fate with calm composure, indifferent alike to pain and pleasure, that they might become the masters rather than the slaves of circumstances.

With respect to their morals it might appear on the surface that they approximated Christianity, but in fact they were as far from it as were the Epicureans. Their teachings did not rest upon revealed truth. They were but a natural reaction to the excesses of Epicureanism. We must remember that on every hand the most shameless sensuality was glorified in the public works of art. Indeed, the very religions represented at Athens were, for the most part, degraded and licentious. The excesses of immorality and vice which resulted, naturally had their evil consequences.

The philosophy of the Stoics, with its emphasis on self-repression, was a natural reaction to all this, but it did not stem from grace and faith. It was but man's attempt to make the most of himself. It produced a kind of phariseeism which looked down with scorn upon any who either wept or rejoiced. It knew nothing of the loving sympathy taught in the Scriptural exhortation: "*Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep*" (Rom. 12:15). What was more, its self-discipline was often affected rather than real and like the Pharisees they were hypocrites, simply unwilling to acknowledge their sin and their need of a Savior. Thus, as *pleasure* characterized the Epicureans, *pride* characterized the Stoics.

It was these representatives of "the Garden" and "the Porch" that "encountered" Paul with their doctrines of self-gratification and self-repression. Some, indeed, asked contemptuously: "*What will [Lit. would] this babbler say?*" i.e., "What does he mean to say?" The word translated "babblers" in A.V. is literally *seed-picker* and referred to those who, without thoroughly examining any subject would pick up scraps of information here and there as a bird picks up seeds. Others said "*He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods,*"³⁴ because

³⁴ Lit. *demons*. The word occurs 60 times in the New Testament and is always translated *devils* except here. It is significant in this connection that demons *were* behind their idol worship, and that angel spirits are called *gods* in Scripture because, like the rulers of this world, they are supposed to represent God (Psa. 82: 1,6; 86:8; 95:3; 96:4,5; 97:7,9, etc.).

he had been preaching Christ and the resurrection. Yet Paul's arguments must have been presented with great ability and spiritual power for, as Kitto says: "Even the Epicureans and the Stoics, loitering about in learned leisure, did not deem it beneath their dignity to contend with such a disputant" (*Daily Bible Illustrations*, Vol. 8, P. 366).

Such a stir did the apostle's teachings cause that "they took hold of him," as the original reads, and brought him to the Areopagus. Evidently he was not actually *tried* for his doctrines here, for we read nothing of an accusation or of witnesses or of a trial or sentence. They simply asked: "*May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean*" (Vers. 19,20). But it was probably meant to be a preliminary inquiry for what Paul had preached had been "strange" enough to require an explanation before the Areopagites.

"For all the Athenians [Lit., The Athenians, ALL of them] and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new [Lit., newer] thing" (Ver. 21).

They had called Paul a "seed-picker" but *they* were the "seed-pickers," always looking about for something newer, and thus betraying their dissatisfaction with what they had. True, they tried any doctrines that seemed to gain prominence, but did not try them by the infallible and changeless Word of God. They subjected them only to the bar of changing human opinion.

Now Paul must take this trait into account as he addresses them. He will give them something new: the one God they are as yet ignorant of, and His Son, Jesus Christ.

THESSALONICA, BEREIA AND ATHENS COMPARED

Before considering the apostle's sermon from Mars Hill, let us compare the record with respect to Thessalonica, Berea and Athens, the three latest cities to be visited by Paul. Leaving aside the question whether Jews or Gentiles are referred to, we find a particular characteristic emphasized in connection with those to whom the apostle ministered in each of these cities.

At the synagogue in Thessalonica Paul reasoned out of the Scriptures for three sabbaths (or weeks) with men who were unwilling to listen, with the result that only a few (Gr. "certain") of them believed, while "a great multitude" of the Gentiles believed. What Paul preached was new to them and they refused to consider it, letting the Gentiles put them, God's chosen people, to shame.

The bigotry of the Thessalonian Jews not only kept them in spiritual darkness but moved them to bitter opposition to the truth, so that they not only persecuted

Paul and Silas in their own city but followed them to Berea, stirring up the people there against them.

We need to heed this lesson today. Bigotry among God's people today will have the same effect as it had in Paul's day. Let us never close our minds so as to keep error out, for in doing so we will only shut new light out and close old errors in. Moreover, it is but a small step from shutting out new light from God's Word to engaging in bitter opposition to it.

The Athenians went to the other extreme. They lost interest in what was old and clamoured only to hear the new. Yet if what they heard did not appeal to them some "mocked" while others said, more politely: "We will hear thee again of this matter," with the result that there too the fruit was meagre.

This lesson is equally needed in our day, for all about us the Athenian spirit is rife. The masses are constantly giving up the old and looking for something new. So pronounced is this trend in our day that in nearly every large city "tomorrow's" news is sold on the news stands tonight, and supposing that the latest fashions and the latest advice must be best, men treat their minds like garbage cans, putting almost anything into them.

Significantly, the record of the Bereans comes between those of the Thessalonians and the Athenians. The Bereans possessed the true spiritual greatness to give man's word a respectful hearing, whether old or new, and then to subject it to an examination in the light of God's Word. The result was that "therefore *many* of them believed," in comparison with few of the Thessalonians and the Athenians. What is more, God recognizes them in the Scriptures as the spiritual nobility of their day because "*they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so*" (Ver. 11).

How this lesson is needed in the professing Church today among preachers as well as hearers! Modernists cast away precious treasures of the Bible, explaining that they are old and out of date, while Fundamentalists, clinging to old truth (and error) reject new light simply because it is new! Modernists vie with each other to keep up to date, intellectually, while Fundamentalists vie with each other to be orthodox, when both should make it their aim to be *Scriptural*, bowing in faith before the Word of God.

Men of God today do well to remember the words of our Lord after proclaiming the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. "*Therefore every scribe,*" said He, "*which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure THINGS NEW AND OLD*" (Matt. 13:52).

PAUL'S ADDRESS ON MARS HILL

"Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars Hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

"For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD, Whom therefore you ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.

"God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

"Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

"That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us

"For in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring.

"Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent;

"Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will Judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.

"And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

"So Paul departed from among them.

"Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them."

--Acts 17:22-34.

It is more than doubtful whether anything in the choicest oratory of the learned men of Greece could begin to match the dignity, majesty and grandeur of Paul's address before the Areopagites.

The apostle had met paganism; now he faced the philosophical arguments with which it was defended. From beginning to end he showed perfect self-control, while at the same time his discourse was the outpouring of that which had filled his heart, surrounded as he was by idolatry. His intense earnestness stands out in sharp contrast to the flippancy of the Athenians (Vers. 18,21,32) as he makes his reply from "the midst" of the Areopagus.

A TACTFUL OPENING

With utmost respect the apostle addresses his hearers as "*Ye men of Athens,*" acknowledging the fact that they are "*unusually religious*" (Ver. 22).

The *Authorized* "too superstitious" is a most unfortunate rendering. Paul was not so wanting in tact as to offend his hearers by his very opening remarks. The Athenians *were* superstitious but had he accused them of this at the outset he would have closed their minds to his whole discourse. Examine Paul's other speeches and it will be seen that he opens with such observations as will tend to win the interest and the sympathetic attention of his hearers.

The present case is no glaring exception to this rule of Paul's but rather a signal example of it. In a rare combination of compliment and caution the apostle acknowledges the zeal which the Athenians bestowed on their religion,³⁵ without expressing any opinion as to the religion itself.

Certainly Paul would not have called the Athenians *too* superstitious, when he was convinced that *any* superstition was wrong. Furthermore the same root is employed in Acts 25:19,³⁶ where very evidently it is used in the sense of *religion*, for surely Festus would not call Judaism *superstition* before Agrippa, who was himself a Jew.

But this opening statement of Paul's is the more remarkable because, while eminently tactful it was also the first blow in his argument against the philosophies of the Athenians.

The Epicureans were, as we have said, virtually atheists. No god or gods--if there were any --had anything to do with man. The Stoics, on the other hand, were pantheists. To them the universe was god. Both parties, had they been logical and consistent, would have scorned idolatry, though they could not have found the true God. Yet it was here that idolatry, in its multiplied forms, held almost undisputed sway. Betraying the weakness of their own positions the

³⁵ Lit., worship of demons or divinities.

³⁶ Where again it is mistranslated "superstition."

Epicureans had admitted gods into their system as phantoms of the popular imagination, while the Stoics had admitted them as minor developments of the great god, the universe. Both had followed the human bent toward some sort of worship and were, in practice, idolaters.

THE ALTAR TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

Actually, the original does not say that Paul had beheld, or observed, their *devotions*, but that he had observed the *objects of their devotion* and that among these he had found "an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD"³⁷ (Ver. 23). "This One, whom you worship as unknown,"³⁸ said the apostle, "I declare to you." There is an evident allusion here to their charge in Verse 18, for the word "declare" in Verse 23 is the same as "set forth" in Verse 18. They said: "*He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods [Lit. demons or divinities].*" He now replies: "*I set forth the true God [Gr. Theos, God] whom you worship as unknown.*" Thus he pleads "not guilty" to their charge of introducing "strange divinities."

With what delicacy, yet what boldness, the apostle refers to the idolatry with which he is surrounded, even using an inscription on *their* altar as his text!³⁹ This altar--and ancient writers say there were others like it--aptly expressed the sense of uncertainty which must necessarily trouble the minds of the heathen. Instinctively conscious of the limitations of their idol worship (See [Rom. 1:19-21](#)) and seeking to avoid the wrath of any god or gods still unknown and unacknowledged, they erected yet *this* altar, that no god might punish them for their neglect to worship him. Recognizing this, and taking advantage of the fact that they had inscribed *this* altar to the unknown *Theos*, Paul declared: "*Him* declare I unto you."⁴⁰

Continuing this emphasis the apostle proclaims to his hearers *the* God,⁴¹ the one that made the world [the ordered universe] and all things therein. Paul did not spend one moment proving to these philosophers that God exists or that He did create the universe or even that He is Lord of it. He *assumed* all this: "*The God, that made the universe seeing He is Lord of heaven and earth* "

He could well take this position. They had *acknowledged* that they did *not* know Him; Paul could say with authority that *he did*. Moreover the apostle well knew that their idolatry was an expression of their rejection of the light which God had given them. They, like the heathen elsewhere, were guilty of "holding," or *suppressing*, "the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18).

³⁷ There is no article in the original, but the Greek does not require one.

³⁸ "Ignorantly" is another unfortunate rendering.

³⁹ He could not have done so if it had not been that the word *Theos*, rather than *dairnonion* (demons) was used on this one altar.

⁴⁰ "*Him*" as distinguished from other gods; "*I*" as distinguished from their champions. Both words are emphatic in the Greek.

⁴¹ The original contains the definite article.

"Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them.

"for the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,⁴² even His eternal power and Godhead; SO THAT THEY ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE" (Rom. 1:19,20).

Thus in one short sentence the apostle dealt with the Stoics, who claimed that the universe *was* God, and with the Epicureans, who supposed that any gods who might exist were too far off to concern themselves with this planet. And, tactfully rebuking the idolatry which both inconsistently engaged in, he went on to point out that, seeing God had *made* the universe and was Lord of it, He "*dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped [served] with men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things*" (Vers. 24,25; cf. [Psa. 50:7-15](#)).

Paul here employs some arguments and some of the exact words which Stephen had used before the Sanhedrin in a defense which Paul himself, then Saul, had doubtless heard ([Acts 7:48-50](#)). It is remarkable that it had been necessary to tell the leaders of Israel the same things as these pagan philosophers. They had missed the lesson which David had learned ([Psa. 51:16,17](#)) looking upon the temple and altars and sacrifices themselves as sacred. Yet the very purpose of the Mosaic dispensation had been to show them that not only the moral law, but the ceremonial law was impotent to save the sinner ([Heb. 10:4](#)).

But if divinely-appointed sacrifices to God had no power in themselves to save, how much less those sacrifices which the heathen offered to gods of their own choosing!

Thus the apostle, with a God-given combination of tact and boldness exposed the folly and sin of their idolatry, and his arguments must have been the more impressive because of the location of the Areopagus, for as he spoke from the hill, with the open sky above them, the plain below and the sea in the distance, all must have spoken of the God whom he proclaimed as the Creator and Sustainer of all.

The word "blood," in Verse 26, should probably be omitted, as in the *Revised Version*, for it is not found in some of the best MSS. The meaning doubtless is that from one person God has made "all nations of men" to dwell on "all the face of the earth" and is a refutation of the Athenian notion that different nations were to be represented by different gods.

⁴² "Things that are made" is the Greek *poyeema*, from which our word *poem* is derived, and indicates the *harmony* of creation.

Here is another of those departures from the kingdom message and program, which we have found in Acts since the raising up of Paul. Our Lord, in His proclamation of the kingdom never went any farther back in human history than David and Abraham.⁴³ This was because the Gentiles had been cast away and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom was based on promises made to these two patriarchs. Hence the New Testament Scriptures open with the words: "*The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.*"

Paul, on the other hand, consistently goes back to *Adam*, "the first man" and points from him to *Christ*, "the second man," "the last Adam" (I Cor. 15:45-47). He shows how "*by one man sin entered into the world*" (Rom. 5:12). Even the children of Abraham must acknowledge that they are the children of Adam too, so that they might be saved through Christ, not as "the King of the Jews" but as the One who died for all.

"For as by ONE MAN'S DISOBEDIENCE many were made sinners, so by THE OBEDIENCE OF ONE shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19).

The fact that "all nations of men" come from one is not, however, intended to lend encouragement to the modern "one world" idea, for the apostle goes on to say that God determined, not only "the times before appointed," i.e., the seasons of their rule, but also "the bounds of their habitation" (Ver. 26 and cf. Deut. 32:8). What bloodshed and chaos has resulted from the failure of nations to recognize this fact!

But this, in turn, was in order that "they should seek the Lord." The nations have not been permitted to rule as long as they have wished, nor over as much territory as they have desired. *God* has determined beforehand the duration and the boundaries of their governments, that they might recognize their dependence upon *Him*, "seeking" after Him and "feeling" after Him with a view to "finding" Him. It is true, of course, that "*God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God,*" and that the verdict was: "*There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God*" (Psa. 53:2,3; Rom. 3:11) but this does not alter the fact that they *should* do so and are guilty for *not* having done so.

This, of course, was a refutation of the Stoic philosophy that the universe, including man, was God. But again the Epicureans come in for their share as the apostle hastens to add: "*though He be not far from every one of us, for in Him we live, and move, and have our being*" (Vers. 27,28). And to substantiate this fact to *them* he draws from the concessions of their own poets, one of which had said:

⁴³ Once He did *refer* to Adam and Eve without mentioning their names (Matt. 19:4) but this without any reference to the kingdom.

*"For we are also His offspring."*⁴⁴ Paul does not, of course, support the false doctrine of "the Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man" here, for he deals, not with regeneration but with creation ([Gen. 1:26,27](#); [Luke 3:38](#)) and goes on to conclude:

"Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device" (Ver. 29).

This was a rebuke to both the Stoics and the Epicureans. His argument was that if we, living, rational, moral beings are His offspring, we ought not to suppose that He Himself is like mere idols made by man from gold or silver or stone. All this must have been tremendously impressive, surrounded as they were by the false and fading glory of their idols and the greater glory of the creation above and about them.

What an evidence it was of the spiritual blindness of the Athenians, and what a rebuke to their vaunted wisdom, that Paul had to teach them the very ABC of theology: that there was one true God, that He was the Creator and Sustainer of all, etc. With all their illustrious philosophers and their renowned schools of learning they were still superstitious idolaters, so far from agreed as to which god to worship that their city was a veritable Babel of religious confusion. They had come no farther, spiritually, than the pagans at Lystra ([Acts 14:11-18](#)).

EMPHASIZING THEIR RESPONSIBILITY

But Paul's purpose was not merely to *convince* his hearers. He would *convict* them of their responsibility to the one true God, whom they had "worshipped" as but one among many, and then as "unknown." He would show them that they were to give an account to Him for their idolatry and sin, and would then preach Christ to them.

The statement that *"the times of this ignorance God winked at"* (Ver. 30) does not mean that until this time God had not held the heathen accountable. The apostle's own words in Rom. 1:18-32 make it all too plain that he *did* hold them accountable. The Old Testament Scriptures, too, bear abundant testimony that God never regarded idolatry as innocent, or its related sins as of no consequence. What Paul meant was simply that hitherto God had passed over the idolatry of the heathen world *without punishing it*, as though He did not see it.

But now, says the apostle, He *"commandeth all men everywhere to repent; because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead"* (Vers. 30,31).

⁴⁴ We still have practically the same words in the writings of Aratus of Cilicia (Paul's own province) and Cleauthus of Lystra, either of which Paul may have referred to.

Some have concluded from this passage that Paul, like Peter before Him, was sent primarily to proclaim repentance. This is a mistake.

The word *repent* (Gr. *metanoeo*) is found at least thirty-one times in the Gospels and early Acts. Moreover, we are distinctly told that repentance, in view of the nearness of the kingdom, was the *theme* of the message proclaimed by John the Baptist, Christ and the twelve ([Matt. 3:1,2; 4:17](#); [Mark 6:7,12](#); [Luke 24:47](#)). In comparison we find the word used only five times by Paul in Acts and in two of these cases he refers to what John the Baptist *had* preached to Israel ([Acts 13:24; 19:4](#)). Then in all of Paul's epistles we find the word used only seven times (including Hebrews, where it is used thrice) and again several of these cases have no connection with the message which Paul preached.

Since the word *metanoeo* means a thorough change of mind, it is evident that any unbeliever who becomes a believer repents in the process. Yet it is also evident from the above that the *emphasis* in the message of John the Baptist, Christ and the twelve, was on repentance, while this was not the case with Paul. An examination both of the latter part of Acts and of his epistles will reveal that the emphasis in his message was upon *grace*, to be appropriated by *faith*.

This is appropriate, for according to "the gospel of the kingdom" Israel was to repent of her backsliding and accept Christ as King and the Gentiles were to repent of their idolatry and accept Him as King. Under the dispensation which Paul ushered in, however, the Jew and the Gentile are both concluded under sin and Christ is offered as the One who died that they might be "justified freely by His grace." Hence the emphasis is upon grace, appropriated by faith.

We repeat, however, that it is a matter of *emphasis*, for any sinner, believing, repents, in the nature of the case and here, where Paul was encountered by the champions of idolatry and had proclaimed to them the one true God, it is surely not strange that he should call for a change of heart and mind. Nor does this at all indicate that he proclaimed the same message as had Peter and the twelve. Indeed, several distinctions should here be noted:

1. They had specifically been instructed to preach repentance to *the Jew first* ([Luke 24:47](#)) while Paul here shows its relation to "*all men everywhere*." 2. They had been sent to preach repentance *and baptism* for the remission of sins ([Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38](#)) while Paul does not mention water baptism here and, indeed, states in I Cor. 1:17 that he was *not* sent to baptize. 3. Paul clearly brought in repentance and judgment here as a background to the grace he would have proclaimed had he been allowed to proceed. This was another one of the interrupted discourses of the Book of Acts.

To hold, then, that repentance has no place in the Pauline message is to misunderstand the nature of repentance, but on the other hand, to *preach*

repentance, rather than grace, is to display ignorance of the message which the risen, ascended Lord committed to Paul and to us.

As we have said, Paul was answering the champions of idolatry. Quite naturally he would, in such a case, call upon them to repent and turn to the true God (Cf. [1 Thes. 1:9](#)). And quite naturally he would confirm what Peter had said with respect to our Lord's resurrection to "judge the world in righteousness."

But this was not all he had wished to say. *Now* he sought to search and awaken their consciences. "*God commandeth* all men everywhere to repent." It was not a matter of human opinion, as the Athenians were wont to suppose, but of *moral responsibility*. And it was in their interest to turn to God without delay because He had appointed a day in which the world would be judged in righteousness by Christ, whom He had raised from the dead as "assurance" of this fact.

PAUL'S DISCOURSE INTERRUPTED

At Paul's mention of the resurrection his address was interrupted. Some began to mock, while others, more politely, said: "We will hear thee again of this matter" (Ver. 32). This implies again that Paul was not defending himself in a formal trial and indicates further that his hearers evidently had concluded that there was not sufficient cause to hold such a trial. Satisfied with their own heathen beliefs they did not even care to hear him further.

"So Paul departed from among them." His efforts had not been wholly in vain, for there were "certain" who did believe; among them a woman (probably of some prominence) named Damaris, and one of the Areopagites themselves, named Dionysius. As a whole, however, the Athenians had proved that they were not the truly great of their day. They gloried, but in their shame. The humble Bereans had risen head and shoulders above them.

How long Paul stayed at Athens after this is not known, but it was probably after this that Timothy arrived with news from Thessalonica and was sent back again to encourage and establish them.

DID PAUL FAIL AT ATHENS?

Certain theologians have criticized Paul for failing to present the way of salvation in his speech at the Areopagus. It must be remembered, however, that he was brought to the Areopagus *because* he had been preaching "*Jesus, and the resurrection*"⁴⁵ (Ver. 18) and it is unthinkable that he would not have proclaimed salvation through Christ had he been permitted to finish his address.

⁴⁵ Paul's revelation as to both the death and resurrection of Christ went far beyond that which Peter had preached at Pentecost (See Rom. 4:25).

His discourse before the philosophers at Athens was in fact a masterpiece of God-given wisdom and spiritual power. The dignity and sincerity of his manner, his skillful use of local circumstances, his rare combination of prudence and boldness, the powerful way in which he met human philosophy with divine revelation, the tactful, yet telling manner in which he exposed his hearers as ignorant idolaters, searching their consciences, warning them of judgment and calling upon them to repent and turn to God; the superb manner in which he appealed to the testimony of creation⁴⁶ citing such of *their* poets as recognized any of the truths he proclaimed, and even using the inscription on *their* altar as his text, answering atheism, polytheism, pantheism, agnosticism, materialism and fatalism, all in the course of a few moments' time--all this marks his interrupted discourse on Mars Hill "a speech such as became such a place, such a speaker and such an audience."

⁴⁶ Rather than to that of the Old Testament, as he would among the Jews.

Chapter XXXII - Acts 18:1-22

PAUL'S MINISTRY AT CORINTH

GETTING SETTLED

"After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;

"And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.

"And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers."

-Acts 18:1-3

CORINTH IN PAUL'S DAY

At an isthmus only a few miles wide, where the waters of the Mediterranean Sea nearly cut Achaia (now **Greece**) in two, lay Corinth.

The ancient city had been burned by the Roman armies in 146 B.C., but a new and greater Corinth had risen and grown to be the commercial and political metropolis of Greece as well as one of the great sports centers of the world.

Corinth boasted extraordinary commercial advantages. It was a vital seaport with harbors on both sides of the isthmus, one on the Gulf of Corinth to the west, the other on the Gulf of Saron to the east, only a few miles away. Situated thus it inevitably became a center of commerce, for the sea trade between Asia Minor and Italy would naturally cross this narrow isthmus, and merchants and traders from all parts of Greece would come here to take advantage of its business opportunities.

It was doubtless also because of its advantageous location that Corinth became one of the world's leading centers of athletic entertainment. The world-renowned Isthmian games were similar to our Olympic games⁴⁷ and drew additional thousands of visitors to Corinth from many parts of the known world.

Though Corinth was quite different in character from Athens, it also boasted its subtle and accomplished reasoners, skilled in the art of sophistry and given to abstruse and metaphysical argument. There were "the disputers of this world," whose "wisdom," however, was "foolishness with God" (**I Cor. 1:20; 3:19**).

⁴⁷ The gymnasium, the stadium, the races, the boxing and wrestling matches are all alluded to in Paul's epistles.

From what we have thus far observed it will naturally be concluded that Corinth was a wicked city. A city with *two* ports and the amusement center of a heathen population could not be otherwise. Nor would its "higher learning" stem the tide of sin. But the most appalling aspect of Corinthian life was its *religion*.

In Corinth lasciviousness was not merely condoned but encouraged and actually "consecrated" as worship to Aphrodite,⁴⁸ the "goddess of love."

There stood her great temple along with smaller ones, where, history tells us, a thousand "sacred" harlots, enriched her coffers with offerings derived from licentious "visits" with men worshippers."

Little wonder Chrysostom called Corinth "the most licentious city of all that are or ever have been." There was no city on earth more profligate. The very name *Corinthian* in Paul's day was synonymous with immorality, so that one who "played the Corinthian" had fallen into immoral wickedness, and a "Corinthian banquet" was a drunken revel. Little wonder Paul had to remind the Corinthian church that "*neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind ... shall inherit the kingdom of God*" (I Cor. 6:9,10).

This was Corinth; celebrated for its wealth, luxury and dissipation: "the Paris of antiquity." In its crowded streets the apostle found himself surrounded by all sorts of people: Roman freedmen, slaves, businessmen on the look-out for gain, travellers out to see the world, sailors from two seas, sports enthusiasts, gamblers, pleasure seekers - and a large proportion of them away from home.

Those who wonder how Paul could call the failing Corinthian believers "saints" should bear in mind their background and surroundings. Actually the church at Corinth, with all its faults, was one of the wonders of church history and one of the triumphs of God's grace. Indeed, Paul, by the Spirit, calls them the "seal" of his apostleship (I Cor. 9:2).

But let us not get ahead of ourselves. Doubtless Paul made his way to Corinth, hoping to establish headquarters for the gospel in Achaia, as Thessalonica had been for Macedonia. Doubtless too, he trusted that from this center of travel the good news would spread the faster.

Today Corinth is easily reached from Athens by railway, but Paul had no such convenience at his disposal. Probably he went by ship across the Gulf of Saron rather than taking the tedious and roundabout land route. The trip by sea would take him no more than a day or two, while that by land would take five or six.

AQUILA AND PRISCILLA

⁴⁸ The counterpart of the Roman *Venus*.

Still alone upon his arrival at Corinth the apostle would need lodging and remunerative employment. He had no board or finance committee to which he might apply for funds. The church at Antioch had not underwritten his expenses. The believers left behind at Philippi had sent gifts "once and again" to relieve his "necessity," but as he kept travelling they "lacked opportunity," finding it more and more difficult to locate him ([Phil. 4:10,15,16](#)).

The Jews held that a parent who did not teach his son a craft taught him to be a thief, and evidence is plentiful that of all men Paul was most conscientious about financial matters. Thus we find him on several occasions working with his hands to supply his needs and sometimes even the needs of those who were with him ([Acts 18:3; 20:34; I Cor. 4:11,12; I Thes. 2:9; II Thes. 3:8](#)).

In the provision made for the apostle at this time we find a beautiful illustration of God's *providence* in using the seemingly natural order of events to fulfill His purposes. Even before Paul had "*departed from Athens*" to come to Corinth, "Claudius had commanded all Jews to *depart from Rome*," and so it was that Aquila and Priscilla, refugees from Italy, were already on the scene, waiting, as it were, for Paul to call on them, and were able to supply him with *both* lodging and employment.

Regarding Claudius' decree, the Roman historian Suetonius says that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because "they were constantly exciting tumults under their leader Chrestus." We know that *Christ* was now in heaven, so that this *Chrestus* may have been some other person, yet we know also that Christ *did* cause tumults wherever He was preached, so that either Claudius or Suetonius, later, may have mistaken such a tumult to have been aroused *under His leadership*.

Of course the record says merely that Aquila and Priscilla had "come from *Italy*" so that it might be gratuitous to conclude that they had necessarily lived in *Rome*. While Claudius' drastic decree extended only to Rome it doubtless affected Jews in all parts of Italy adversely.

Yet the latter part of Verse 2 of our passage seems to particularize upon the former, and we know that not long after this Aquila and Priscilla were found at Rome ([Rom. 16:3](#)) so it seems probable that this was their residence.

The question naturally arises in our minds whether Aquila and Priscilla were believers in Christ at the time Paul met them or whether they were won to Christ later through Paul. We cannot, probably, determine this with certainty, for while, on the one hand, the record states that Aquila was a *Jew* and that Paul joined the couple "*because he was of the same craft*," it must be observed on the other, that it is unlikely that Luke would have failed to mention their conversion if this had taken place under Paul's ministry. Furthermore Aquila had resided in Pontus and probably in Rome, and Christ had been preached in both places ([Acts 2:9 cf.](#)

1 Pet. 1:1; Rom. 1:8). Indeed, as we have pointed out, there is the distinct possibility that they were banished from Rome because of a tumult raised about Christ.

It is a singular fact that Aquila is never mentioned apart from his wife, and also that in three out of five times her name precedes his. Perhaps Priscilla was of higher birth or somewhat more capable or energetic than her husband, yet we never find her acting independently of him. Evidently both were mature in character to be able, for example, to later show such a popular and gifted preacher as Apollos "the way of God more perfectly" and to help Paul in his labors as they did, conducting church services in at least two of their homes (Rom. 16:3-5; I Cor. 16,19).

Ever since his arrival at Athens Paul's path had been a difficult one. Athens had been too frivolous to consider his message seriously and Corinth was profligate. Would he fare any better here? He had no human companion to help and sustain him (Acts 17:15; I Thes. 3:1). Loneliness and depression were telling on him.

What a comfort then, must the newfound friendship and work with Aquila and Priscilla have been! Mat earnest conversations they must have engaged in as Paul led them into precious truths which they had never known before! What a sacred spot their home must have become to him!

In Acts 19:21 we find Paul announcing his decision to visit Rome. Was this the result of his contact with Aquila and Priscilla and of their reports concerning the need and opportunities there?

One thing is certain: Aquila and Priscilla came to understand the glorious truths committed to Paul⁴⁹ and became faithful co-workers with him. Soon they were to accompany him to Ephesus (Acts 18:18,19) and later, at Rome, they were to receive his greetings as "*my helpers in Christ Jesus; who have for my life laid down their own necks*" (Rom. 16:3,4).

FROM JEW TO GENTILE AGAIN

"And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.

"And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.

"And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

⁴⁹ And so were used to show Apollos "the way of God more perfectly!" (Acts 18:26).

"And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.

"And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

"Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:

"For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.

"And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the Word of God among them."

-Acts 18:4-11

REASONING AT THE SYNAGOGUE

As Paul labored week days at the shop of Aquila and Priscilla he used the sabbath days to take advantage of the synagogue services, where he "reasoned... and persuaded the Jews and Greeks."

Perhaps it was during these early days at Corinth that, observing the character of the city, he "determined not to know anything among [them] save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). Not that this was not part of his special message, for, as we have seen, Paul's "*preaching of the cross*" was vastly different from that which Peter had preached at Pentecost when he accused his hearers of the crucifixion of Christ and called upon them to "*repent, and be baptized ... for the remission of sins*" (Acts 2:38). "The preaching of the cross" was the very heart of the great "mystery" revealed to Paul, only he could not, on account of their condition, explain the mystery to them or show them its transcendent glories (1 Cor. 2:1,6,7). Here he must preach only "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," as God's power to save and the appeal to holy living.

THE ARRIVAL OF SILAS AND TIMOTHY

As the apostle toiled to provide for his needs and ministered on sabbath days at the synagogue, there were anxious thoughts which troubled him day and night. What about the small band of believers at Thessalonica, where the persecution had been so bitter? What afflictions were they bearing now? Were they standing true? And what about the other groups he had left behind? (II Cor. 11:28).

At Athens Paul had been sought out by Timothy,⁵⁰ but the apostle, hearing of the plight of the Thessalonian believers, had sent him back to establish and

⁵⁰ Who with Silas had been left behind at Berea (Acts 17:14).

encourage them, even though it meant that he himself had to be "left at Athens alone" (I Thes. 3:1-3). Since then he had received no first hand news from them, though reports of their conversion had travelled far (I Thes. 1:8).

Picture the joyful scene, then, as the burdened apostle looked up one day, perhaps from his work in Aquila's shop, to see his beloved Silas and Timothy approaching! And see his face, radiant with both smiles and tears of joy, as his brethren bring him so much good news!

Timothy had come with most heartening reports from Thessalonica. They were standing firmly! True, some were confused about what Paul had said with regard to the rapture of believers to be with Christ, and were mourning for their deceased brethren, whom they feared would now be excluded from that glorious event, but their faith and love were strong and they remembered him affectionately, longing to see him again (I Thes. 3:6).

And he longed to see them too, to complete that which was lacking in their faith (I Thes. 3:10) but this glad news made his heart overflow with gratitude and joy (I Thes. 3:7-9) and he would write them without delay to establish them further especially with regard to the coming of the Lord to catch His own away (I Thes. 4:13-18).

But there was more to gladden the apostle's heart. Silas doubtless brought good news from Berea, where Paul had last left him (Acts 17:14) and there was also a special surprise: *a gift from his beloved Philippians!* (II Cor. 11:9). How it spoke to him of their steadfastness and their love for him! And how well he could use it now! Aquila and Priscilla had but "lately come from Italy" (Ver. 2) and it is doubtful that their business was prospering as yet and, as he later wrote the Corinthians, it was his "rule" to reach out with the gospel only as the needs were supplied, lest he "stretch" or reach, beyond that which God had provided (II Cor. 10:13-16).

Little wonder that with the coming of Silas and Timothy we find Paul preaching Christ with new fervor. Heavy burdens had been lifted from his heart. Financial needs had been supplied. Trusted co-workers would now be at his side.

Once more we find him wholly occupied with his message.⁵¹ He must get his kinsmen at the synagogue to see and confess that Jesus is the Christ.

It must not be supposed, from Verse 5, that the apostle had not already presented Christ to these Jews. Verse 4 tells us that "he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and *persuaded* the Jews and the Greeks." Certainly he would not trouble to *persuade* them with regard to minor matters. Yet Verse 5, in our version, seems to give the impression that he only began testifying that

⁵¹ Most texts read that he was "engrossed in" or "constrained by *the Word*."

Jesus was the Christ after the arrival of Silas and Timothy. The explanation is that the word rendered "testified" here is a strong word, even stronger than "persuade," in Verse 4, meaning "*to testify or protest solemnly.*" Thus Paul had been trying to persuade the Jews, sabbath after sabbath, evidently with little success, but now with the coming of Silas and Timothy he did this with greater zeal, solemnly protesting to them that Jesus was the Christ.

Lest any of our readers wonder how the preaching of Jesus as the Christ could harmonize with Paul's special message, we repeat that from both Acts and the early epistles it is abundantly evident that he preached much more than this wherever he went, but he had to begin here with these *Jews*, for if they, like their brethren in Judaea, denied that Jesus was the Messiah, how could they believe that He was the Lord of grace? Furthermore, it must be remembered that the Book of Acts is primarily the record of Israel's rejection of her *Messiah* and the explanation of her expulsion from divine favor. Hence Paul's special message of grace is given secondary notice here.

THE MESSAGE OPPOSED AND BLASPHEMED

Paul's testimony to the Jews at Corinth was not merely rejected; it was *opposed* and *blasphemed*, and that in a most definite and final manner. It is a military term Luke uses in Verse 6. The phrase "*they opposed themselves*" means that they set themselves in opposition as in battle array. And their blasphemy indicates that their rejection of Christ was as bitter as it was stubborn.

Once more the favored people were putting the Word of God from them⁵² and *judging themselves* unworthy of everlasting life (Cf. [Acts 13:46](#)). Thus it is that we read:

"AND WHEN THEY OPPOSED THEMSELVES AND BLASPHEMED, HE SHOOK HIS RAIMENT, AND SAID UNTO THEM, YOUR BLOOD BE UPON YOUR OWN HEADS; I AM CLEAN: FROM HENCEFORTH I WILL GO UNTO THE GENTILES" (Ver. 6).

Paul's act in shaking his raiment out against them had deep symbolic significance. It was the indignant protest of one who had found appeals to the Scriptures, to reason and to conscience fruitless. He would cease trying to persuade them.

Moreover, he again (as in 13:46) fixes the blame on them, as he exclaims: "*Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean.*" This is an evident allusion to [Ezek. 3:18,19](#). If they perished in their sin they could never complain that *he* had not warned them.

⁵² The recurrence of Jewish blasphemy here recalls our Lord's words in Matt. 12:31,32. That generation in Israel was committing the unpardonable sin.

It should be further observed that the apostle's statement about going to the Gentiles is considerably stronger than that recorded in Acts 13:46. There it was purely a local matter (though a symbolic one); here it is the announcement of a policy. There, with Gentiles clamouring to hear the Word of God and the Jews refusing to hear it, Paul had said: "seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, *lo, we turn to the Gentiles.*" Here he declares: "*From henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.*" From this point on he will be in a fuller sense "*the apostle of the Gentiles,*"

It is deeply significant that Paul's first recorded epistle, First Thessalonians, was evidently written in connection with the arrival of Silas and Timothy and the opposition of the Corinthian Jews (see [I Thes. 1:1](#); [2:14-16](#); [3:6,7](#), etc.) and that his epistles thus begin with his declaration: "*From henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.*"

THE CHURCH IN THE HOME

It is remarkable how often the work of God has been furthered by meetings held in *homes*. A nucleus of believers, perhaps, has become interested in the study of the Word, when some godly couple has come forward to offer the hospitality of their home for regular services. Many a great work has been done for God in this way, and many a church founded.

Here at Corinth, rejected in the synagogue, the apostle is invited by a man named Justus, to conduct his ministry in his home, and it was evidently while using this home as a base of operations that so great a work was done for God in Corinth.

Similarly Aquila and Priscilla,⁵³ later opened their homes for regular services both while residing at Ephesus and while residing at Rome, and in connection with each Paul speaks of them with particular affection. This is so also of Philemon, who entertained the church, or a church, at Colosse ([Phile. 1,2](#)). And Nymphas, of Laodicea, might never have been heard of, had he not been host to the church there ([Col. 4:15](#)).

THE CHURCH NEXT DOOR

The apostle was now taking a bold and aggressive step, moving into a home which the Jews would have shrunk from entering.⁵⁴ the house of a Gentile "worshipper" named *Justus* who, moreover, lived *right next door to the synagogue*.

⁵³ Who had already opened their home to Paul while at Corinth.

⁵⁴ Clearly, to *teach* there. He probably continued to live with Aquila and Priscilla, unless the coming of Silas and Timothy changed this.

Some have questioned his ethics in now conducting services in a home which "joined hard to the synagogue." Imagine the strained feelings as members of the two congregations met outside! Imagine how it must have infuriated the Jews at the synagogue to have Paul start meetings right next door!

To be sure it *is* a breach of ethics and worse, when the pastor or some member of a Bible-believing congregation allows personal considerations to induce him to foster or approve a division in the church in order to draw away some of its members and start a new assembly nearby. This is a negation of the Spirit's assertion that "there is one body," a disgrace before the world and an offense against God.

But this was far from the case at the Corinthian synagogue. Paul did not take this action out of spite or for personal reasons. These Jews were rejecting the Word of God and their own Messiah, and Paul, for the sake of any who might not be as adamant as the rest, began holding meetings next door as an open protest and a testimony against the unbelieving majority. He *wished* the members of the two congregations to meet, in order to keep the issue alive. It was entirely a doctrinal matter. His choice of the home of a Gentile⁵⁵ for a meeting place would moreover be apt to draw more Gentiles, and the new congregation would stand as a visible symbol of God's purpose to send salvation to the Gentiles despite, yea, *through*, Israel's unbelief. Thus it is written:

"... Through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy" (Rom. 11:11).

Surely Israel had no cause to complain. First, Messiah had come to His own, only to be rejected and crucified. But God had raised Him from the dead and, in infinite mercy, had offered "repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). Even as she stood stubbornly by her evil deed God still dealt with her, provoking her to jealousy by the believing remnant, the "little flock," the "foolish nation" (Luke 12:32; Rom. 10:19). And God did even more than this, for *now* He was provoking Israel to jealousy by the conversion of the Gentiles. Surely Isaiah's prophecy had been *more* than fulfilled.

"Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest to them that asked not after me:"⁵⁶

⁵⁵ In some MSS the name is Titus Justus; in others simply Justus; This has given rise to the question whether he was the Titus of Gal. 2:3 or whether he was surnamed Justus to distinguish him from that Titus. In either case he was doubtless an uncircumcised Gentile, for otherwise there would be no point in stating that he "worshipped God." This term, in the original, is used elsewhere of God-fearing Gentiles (Acts 13:50; 16:14; 17:4; etc.).

⁵⁶ This refers, not to the Gentiles, but to Israel, with whom God kept dealing though they wished He would leave them alone. Note: Isaiah is "bold", not kind, and the passage in Isa. 65:1 continues with the words: "I said, Behold Me, Behold Me, unto a nation that was not called by My name" that this can refer only to Israel is clear from the whole context, as well as from Paul's conclusion in the next verse.

"... ALL DAY LONG HAVE I STRETCHED FORTH MY HANDS UNTO A DISOBEDIENT AND GAINSAYING PEOPLE" (Rom. 10:20,21).

THE RULER OF THE SYNAGOGUE IS SAVED

The conversion of the "chief ruler" of the synagogue and his household must have made a profound impression upon the community and have given great impetus to the cause of Christ in Corinth. Indeed, it is in this connection that we read that "*many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized*" (Ver. 8). Thus God already placed His stamp of approval on the bold step Paul had taken.

It is important that we observe here that while *many* of the Corinthians were baptized, Paul baptized only a *few* of them. One of these was Crispus, doubtless baptized by Paul himself because he was so outstanding a convert. Another was Gaius, who later made his home a meeting place and was Paul's host on his second visit to Corinth (Rom. 16:23). Then he also baptized "*the household of Stephanas,*" perhaps because they were "the firstfruits of Achaia" (I Cor. 16:15).⁵⁷ Looking back, some years later, he could not recall having baptized any beside these.

This was not, as some have supposed, because Paul let others do the baptizing for him to save him time and energy. There was a deeper reason. Water baptism is clearly associated with the manifestation of Christ to Israel in John 1:31 and since He was still being made manifest to Israel water baptism was not out of order. Yet this rite had not been included in Paul's special commission; it could not be. He was not sent to baptize,⁵⁸ but to preach the gospel, and that simply, "*lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect, for,*" said he, "*the preaching of the cross*⁵⁹ . . . *is the power of God*" (I Cor. 1:17,18). Thus it was, too, that Paul never baptized anyone "*for the remission of sins,*" as John the Baptist and the twelve had done before him (Mark 1:4; Acts 2:38).

This explains the seeming lack of divine inspiration in the preceding passage (I Cor. 1:14-16). First the apostle states categorically that he thanks God that he baptized "*none*" of them, but Crispus and Gaius; *only* those two. *Then* he recalls that he also baptized the household of Stephanus. And then, becoming more cautious, he states that he does not *recall* having baptized any others!

This does not represent any failure in divine inspiration. Rather it is divine inspiration, demonstrating the fact that water baptism was becoming less and

⁵⁷ See Rom. 16:5. Either Epaenetus belonged to this household or he was another of the "firstfruits."

⁵⁸ As both John the Baptist and the twelve had been (John 1:33; Matt. 28:19).

⁵⁹ See the author's book: *The Preaching of The Cross*.

less important in the ministry of Paul and that it was not included in his special commission.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO A WEARY SOLDIER

But the strain of battle was telling on the apostle. He found himself haunted by fear and depression. Later he wrote of it:

"I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3).

It must not be supposed that fearlessness was characteristic of a nature so sensitive as Paul's. On the contrary, he was often afraid. His, by the grace of God, was rather the courage that went on braving dangers *in spite of his fears*.

The strain of meeting, week after week, right next door to the synagogue, with all the embarrassing situations inevitably involved, may well have caused some of his followers, and possibly himself, to question the wisdom or propriety of the step he had taken, adding to his mental depression. But the Lord was to endorse the act again in an unmistakable way.

It would appear from several passages in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians (especially 3:1, 2) that this letter was written while Paul was becoming apprehensive about the work at Corinth, and that it was after this that the Lord appeared to him in a vision⁶⁰ to encourage him.

Let the reader try to place himself in Paul's position while reading Verses 9 and 10 so as to appreciate its force more fully:

"Then spake the Lord to Paul ...:
"Be not afraid,
"but speak,
"and hold not thy peace:
"for I am with thee,
"and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee:
"for I have much people in this city."

How this gracious intervention must have encouraged the heart of the faithful warrior! How it must have stimulated his zeal for his beloved Lord, to hear His voice, encouraging him to speak out boldly and assuring him not only of the fellowship of His presence, but also of physical protection and - *many souls!* Tomorrow he could begin the work anew, assured in advance of the outcome.

Whether he "continued"⁶¹ in Corinth a year and six months longer or all

⁶⁰ *Horama*, an *objective* vision; not the same as Acts 2:17. This was one of the many occasions on which the Lord appeared to Paul.

⁶¹ Lit., "*sat*," as a teacher.

together, is perhaps impossible to ascertain, but we know that his ministry there was exceedingly fruitful. At Athens and Corinth respectively it had been demonstrated that *"the world by wisdom knew not God"* and that *"God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ... that no flesh should glory [boast] in His presence."*

PROFITABLE PERSECUTION

"And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat,

"Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.

"And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you:

"But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters.

"And he drave them from the judgment seat.

"Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things."

-Acts 18:12-17

THE APOSTLE BROUGHT BEFORE GALLIO

As God had used Paul to place the Philippian church in an advantageous position with the civil government, before his departure from Philippi, so He now used Gallio, a Roman proconsul, to do the same for the Corinthian church.

Though the Lord had appeared to Paul to encourage and reassure him as to his ministry at Corinth, this did not mean that he was to experience no further opposition. It did mean, however, that any such opposition would turn out to the advancement of the work there. A signal example of this is given to us in the account of Paul's appearance before Gallio.

When Gallio was made proconsul of Achaia,⁶² the Jews were quick to take advantage of the change in administration to stir up a tumult and bring Paul before the "judgment seat."

Gallio was the brother of Seneca, the famous statesman, philosopher and

⁶² Greece, in a general way, was sometimes called Macedonia and sometimes Achaia, but properly speaking, Macedonia was the northern province of Greece and Achaia the southern, each governed by a proconsul.

counselor of Nero during his early days. Seneca wrote of Gallio with great affection and described him as an amiable and gracious character, easy to get along with. Doubtless the Jews knew of his reputation and hoped he would accede to their demand that Paul be punished.

Their complaint was that Paul sought to persuade men to worship God "contrary to the law." They could, of course, have referred to their law (Cf. Ver. 15) for the Hebrew religion was then protected by the Roman government. It seems more probable, however, that they meant that Paul was setting up an unlicensed religion – one not included among those which were permitted under Roman law. When we consider the wicked and degrading religions which Roman law did permit, right here in Corinth, this charge against Paul was a shabby one indeed.

From what follows it appears that Gallio must have questioned the plaintiffs further about their charge, noting that it was wholly a dispute *between Jews*. Thus, when Paul was about to speak in his own defense Gallio interrupted to explain that the case was entirely out of his jurisdiction. Were it a matter of open wrong or "wicked villainy" (R.V.) he explained, he would have conducted a trial, but "if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters."

While the Roman government permitted and protected almost all religions, its magistrates were instructed to keep out of religious controversies if possible. In addition, the Jews had already stirred up much trouble and consequently had only lately been expelled from Rome. Gallio acted shrewdly, then, in not permitting Paul to speak and in declining to even hear the case. What did he know about their law or the words and names they were quibbling about.⁶³

Mark well, Gallio did *not* give Paul into their hands as Pilate had done with Christ ([Luke 23:23, 24](#)) for, unlike Pilate, he refused to even hear the case, much less to pass sentence. Nor did his "look ye to it" imply permission to them to try Paul civilly, or Paul would have appealed to Caesar as he did later, when Festus suggested a trial at Jerusalem (Acts 25:9-12,20,21).

Gallio *dismissed* the complaint - with emphasis, for he "*drove them from the judgment seat,*" doubtless ordering the lictors to clear the court.

To the Greeks standing by, who already hated the Jews, this was an opening to second the work of the lictors and give Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue⁶⁴ (and doubtless Paul's chief accuser) a sound beating.⁶⁵

⁶³ At least so it seemed to him, though the issue between Paul and these Jews was actually whether Jesus was the Christ.

⁶⁴ Evidently the successor to Crispus (Ver. 8). That Sosthenes also was eventually saved seems probable from the fact that Paul later mentions a Sosthenes as a co-worker with him in a letter to

"And Gallio cared for none of these things." His behavior harmonized with Seneca's description of his easy-going nature. He was careful not to hear Paul's case and failed to stop an outbreak of violence before the very judgment seat. Yet this may have been partly intentional. Some have supposed that a trial and verdict by Gallio in favor of Paul would have helped him more. Actually, however, Gallio's behavior must have proved a greater rebuff to Paul's accusers, and given him and the Corinthian church a better standing in the community than they otherwise would have had.

At Philippi Paul's sagacity had helped gain the young church there recognition by involving his opponents in blame and putting them on the defensive. Here Gallio's response to Paul's accusers had done the same. The Lord was fulfilling His promise to His faithful apostle. "And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while" - the full year and six months.

"Not many" prominent Corinthians were reached during Paul's stay at Corinth (I Cor. 1:26) but a large number of the common people did turn to Christ, and there were such outstanding conversions as those of Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and probably Sosthenes, his successor; also Gaius and the household of Stephanus. These more prominent ones were later to be joined by Erastus, the city treasurer (Rom. 16:23). Thus those higher up in the scale of life may thank God that I Cor. 1:26 reads "not *many*" rather than "not *any*."

It was some time before Paul's departure from Corinth that he wrote another epistle to the Thessalonians. Their problems regarding the Lord's return had not yet been solved. Some dishonest persons had taken advantage of Paul's absence, evidently forging a letter, or letters, in his name (II Thes. 2:2) further disturbing and confusing them, so that Paul had to impress upon them that it was his custom to sign his letters personally (II Thes. 3:17).

Some now seemed sure that the prophesied "*day of the Lord*,"⁶⁶ with its terrible judgments, was at hand. Indeed some, evidently confusing their persecutions with the coming "great tribulation," were giving up their daily employment and becoming "busybodies," thus dishonoring their Lord. "The prince of the powers of the air" was attacking again. Paul must write without delay to combat his influence and strengthen the little band of believers.

PAUL RETURNS TO JERUSALEM AGAIN

"And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila;

the Corinthian church (I Cor. 1:1). This would make two former persecutors now preaching Christ!

⁶⁵ In the continuous tense the word *tupto* means a *series* of blows.

⁶⁶ This is the correct rendering in 2:2.

having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

"And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.

"When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;

"But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem; but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.

"And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch."

Acts 18:18-22

PAUL'S VOW

After Paul had completed a full year and six months at Corinth he "*took his leave of the brethren,*" that is, he bade them farewell, and "sailed" (Lit., "*sailed away*") to Syria. With him on part of this journey were Priscilla and Aquila. Whatever their reasons for leaving Corinth and accompanying Paul as far as Ephesus, God was in it, for they were subsequently used to impart spiritual light to no less a man of God than the great Apollos (Ver. 26).

What Paul did at Cenchrea,⁶⁷ before leaving for Syria, presents a complex problem.

There were various vows which one might make to God under the Mosaic law (Deut. 23:21, 22) but the one which involved letting the hair grow during the term of the vow and shaving it off again at its expiration was the Nazarite vow, in which the subject consecrated himself to the Lord in a special way for a week, a month, a year or any designated period of time (Num. 6:1-21). This appears to be the vow which Paul had taken and which expired at Cenchrea.

This vow, however, was supposed to be consummated at "the door of the tabernacle" at Jerusalem, where blood sacrifices were to be offered and the hair, which had not been cut during the period of consecration, was to be shaven off and also offered in sacrifice.

In the Acts record we are told that Paul had "shorn his head in Cenchrea; for he had a vow," and also that he hastened to "keep this feast⁶⁸ that cometh in Jerusalem" (Vers. 18,21).

John Kitto is therefore probably correct in explaining that "as these [sacrifices]

⁶⁷ The eastern seaport of Corinth, where a church may well have been already established.

⁶⁸ It has been debated whether this was Passover or Pentecost.

could not be offered out of Jerusalem, those who took this vow in foreign parts, made their offerings at their next visit to the holy city" (*The Apostles and The Early Church*, P. 382).

The important question whether Paul was in the directive will of God in taking a vow involving blood sacrifices, or in observing a Jewish feast at Jerusalem, or indeed, in going to Jerusalem at all, will be discussed at length in a later chapter, but here we may say that while it is true, as some have pointed out, that the taking of a Nazarite vow was a wholly voluntary matter and not one commanded by law, the blood sacrifices involved in that vow *were* definitely and minutely controlled by the law (Num. 6:1-21).

Some have pointed out that the language, in the original, might be interpreted to mean that it was Aquila who took the vow⁶⁹ but this seems too evidently to be an attempt at escaping from a difficulty.

From Verse 19 it would seem that upon their arrival at Ephesus the company separated and Paul alone entered the synagogue. No reason is given for this, but it is possible that pressing business matters detained Aquila and Priscilla during these first days at Ephesus.

What is more singular is the fact that the apostle did not continue to minister to the Jews in this synagogue *even though they urged him to stay*, for it was seldom indeed that he found doors so wide open. But then, he was hurrying to get to Jerusalem, so declining their invitation he "bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem; but I will return again unto you, if God will" (Vers. 20,21).

Strangely, however, a veil is cast over his visit to Jerusalem and the inference is given that his stay there was extremely brief. The record merely states that "*when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up,*⁷⁰ *and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch*" (Ver. 22). We are not even told whether he reached Jerusalem in time for the feast; indeed, the language may well imply the contrary.

It is strange, too, that nothing is said about any welcome or rehearsal of his activities at Antioch, from whence, about three years previous, he had started out with Silas to "visit the brethren."

⁶⁹ The *Latin Vulgate* adopts this rendering but the Syriac and the great majority of texts and translations reject it.

⁷⁰ I.e., to Jerusalem.

Chapter XXXIII - Acts 18:23-28

PAUL BEGINS HIS THIRD APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

HIS THIRD DEPARTURE FROM ANTIOCH

"And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples."

-Acts 18:23

As we have observed, the kingdom Church of early Acts had its headquarters at Jerusalem, where Messiah was to reign ([Isa. 24:23](#)) with His twelve apostles ([Matt. 19:28](#)) and from whence the law was to go forth to His whole domain ([Isa. 2:2,3](#)).

The Church of Rome, however, teaching that the Church of today (she herself) is Messiah's kingdom, has arbitrarily changed its capital from Jerusalem to *Rome*, from whence her hierarchy dictates the policies and practices of her subjects all over the world. This, while scores of plain passages from the Word of God insist that the Church which is Christ's *kingdom*, was - and is - to have its headquarters at *Jerusalem*,⁷¹ while "the Church which is His *Body*" has *no headquarters on earth*. Its headquarters are in heaven where its Head is ([Eph. 1:22,23](#); [Phil. 3:20](#), R. V.).

Sad to say, much of Protestantism still follows Rome in teaching that the Church of this dispensation is Christ's *kingdom*; that it began at Pentecost or before, when the kingdom message was proclaimed by the twelve apostles. Little wonder the various denominations have set up their own hierarchies to "govern" the affairs of their members near and far. Little wonder that the free recovery of truth has been hindered by Protestant political machinery almost as much as by Roman religious dictatorship.

We stress this here because some have called Syrian Antioch the *headquarters* of the early Gentile Church. This is a mistake, for there is no indication that any Christian hierarchy ruled from Antioch. Indeed Paul's most prominent associates (except Barnabas) are found almost everywhere *but* in Antioch.

Yet, as if to emphasize the fact that Paul was *not* associated with the twelve

⁷¹ While Rome is not once mentioned in this connection.



PAUL'S
THIRD
APOSTOLIC
JOURNEY

in their kingdom ministry, the Spirit has indicated that all three of Paul's apostolic journeys began from *Antioch*, the city to which Barnabas had first brought him to minister among the Gentiles.

Thus it was that, after spending "some time" at Antioch, the apostle "departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order,⁷² strengthening all the disciples" (Ver. 23).

Dean Howson feels certain that on a journey from Syrian Antioch to Ephesus Paul would have revisited most, if not all of the churches he had founded and ministered to, and not only those in Galatia and Phrygia. It may be, however, that the churches in these two regions needed special attention and that he was eager to return to Ephesus in fulfillment of his promise. Also, the churches of Syria, Cilicia, Lycaonia, Pamphylia and Pisidia had already been visited twice. In any case there must have been many a touching scene as the apostle reappeared among friends he had won to Christ and now established them in the faith.

APOLLOS AT EPHESUS AND CORINTH

"And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.

"This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

"And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

"And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace:

"For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ."

-Acts 18:24-28

During Paul's absence from Ephesus there appeared on the scene a man with outstanding qualities of spiritual leadership, and one who was to play an important part in the life and ministry of the apostle.

The Scriptures tell us first that he was a Jew from Alexandria. This background already gave him a spiritual advantage over others. The Jews at

⁷² These words imply the carrying out of a systematic plan.

Alexandria placed more emphasis on the Scriptures than on "the traditions of the fathers," as witnessed by their world-famed library and school of Biblical interpretation, and especially by the fact that the first Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures, the *Septuagint*, was produced there.

We read, moreover, that Apollos was "*an eloquent*⁷³ man," and "*mighty in the Scriptures*" (Ver. 24). In addition to this he was thoroughly "*instructed [Lit., catechized] in the way of the Lord*" (Ver. 25).

"*The way of the Lord*," we take it, refers to the way He taught His disciples to live in view of the establishment of His kingdom, and the way they did live after the coming of the Holy Spirit ([Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37](#)). Paul himself had once gone to the high priest for letters of authority to the Damascene synagogues that if he found any of "*this way*" he might bring them bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2) and later he testified that he had persecuted *this way* unto the death" (Acts 22:4).

Apollos' eloquence, then, came from a background of profound knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures and a thorough understanding of "the way of the Lord." Perhaps the greatest testimony to the fact that he was painstakingly *thorough* in his studies is the statement in Verse 25, that "being fervent in the spirit, he spoke and taught *diligently* [Lit., *accurately*] the things of the Lord."

What a combination! "Fervent in the spirit" and "eloquent" - and with so much to back it up: a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures and of "the way of the Lord" and the gift for painstaking *exactness* both in study and in teaching. Doubtless Apollos was one of the most powerful and popular preachers of the day; one who could command large audiences almost anywhere.

Yet we are informed that he knew "*only the baptism of John*" (Ver. 25) i.e., he did not know that the Spirit had come (See [Acts 1:5](#)) and of course did not know the greater truths revealed through Paul. He was like Luther and Calvin, mighty in the truth, *as far as he knew it*.

Here is an important lesson for every man of God to learn. In the writer's library are the works of men like Luther, Calvin, Ellicott, Moule, Howson and Kitto; men who did not understand the great truth of the mystery, yet were thorough in their study of the Scriptures and signally used of God. What was the secret of their power? It was their passion to know the truth and to make it known. These men, from Luther on, were emerging from the dark ages - as we still are today - and could not see many of the great truths which have since become so plain and precious to many of us. But with an earnest passion for the *truth* they studied the Word of God and imparted to others the light they received, often at great cost.

⁷³ The word *logios* may also mean *learned*, but the context and Paul's letters to the Corinthians seem to favor *eloquent*.

Any man of God who follows their example today will also be mightily used despite his limitations. It is when unbelief enters and light is refused or when, for fear or favor, men do not stand true to the light they have received, that spiritual power is lost. This is why in these days when the great truth of "the mystery" is being recovered, so many who reject it are losing the power that once attended their ministry for Christ. May God help them to pay the price to find it again!

How Apollos had come to know "the baptism of John" and "the way of the Lord," we do not know. Probably either he had visited Palestine some time previous, or disciples from Palestine had reached him in Egypt. At any rate he was so filled with what he had learned that he freely "spake and taught" about it and now "began to speak boldly in the synagogue" (Vers. 25,26). Thus the place which Paul had declined to fill was now occupied by one who knew only "the baptism of John."

But the greatest qualities of this great man, and also of Aquila and Priscilla, are yet to appear.

As the couple first heard Apollos preach they, of course, recognized him as a truly great teacher of the Word, but as he continued teaching they noticed that he got no further than the baptism of John and the teachings of Christ on earth.

In this matter, which must have proved a disappointment to them, they showed their fine Christian character. They did not take him to task for his limitations or criticize him to others. Instead "*they took him unto them,*" perhaps inviting him to dine or visit with them, and then they "expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (Ver. 26).

The Greek word here rendered "*more perfectly*" is the comparative of that rendered "*diligently*" above. Here Apollos had found a couple who could lead him further into the truth with the same painstaking exactness which he had himself exhibited, and therefore could appreciate.

It should be noted that whereas he had been instructed in "*the way of the Lord,*" Aquila and Priscilla now led him further into "the way of God [Gr. *Theos*]" (Ver. 26). They could now tell Apollos the great basic truths of the mystery as they had learned them from Paul in his "gospel of the grace of God." They could show him the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension (of which he may have heard) *in the light of that grace* - all of it harmonizing perfectly with the Old Testament Scriptures, though not taught there.

It is noteworthy that Apollos received his advanced theological training, not at a seminary or from any of the great leaders of the day, but from two humble tentmakers and one of them a woman. Nor is this the last we hear of the service of this godly couple for Christ, for later Paul writes of them as having opened their home to regular church services here in Ephesus ([I Cor. 16:8,19](#)) and still

later he writes of them as *"my helpers in Christ Jesus, who for my life have laid down their own necks,"* and indicates that again in Rome the church services were held in their home (Rom. 16: 3-5). For their heroism and faithfulness, says the apostle, *"not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles"* (Ver. 4). Perhaps few of us have thought of the debt of gratitude we owe to such as Aquila and Priscilla.

But Apollos also showed his greatest qualities at this time. It is inspiring to think of the powerful and popular preacher so sincerely willing to be taught that he sits with unaffected humility at the feet of two members of his audience - a tentmaker and his wife. And this is not all.

Apollos could now, of course, have returned to the synagogue, explaining that he had preached to them without full knowledge of the truth, and claiming that he now knew the way of the Lord more perfectly, but this would doubtless have served only to arouse the suspicion of his hearers, destroying his usefulness among them. Evidently feeling, therefore, that Aquila and Priscilla could better carry on the testimony at Ephesus and wishing to minister where Paul had already established the truths he had so recently learned, Apollos thought to go to Achaia, whereupon "the brethren" wrote the "letters of commendation," evidently referred to in II Cor. 3:1. The result was that upon his arrival at Corinth he *"helped them much which had believed through grace"* (Ver. 27). Not that he immediately led them further into the truths of grace, for he himself had but recently begun to see them, but he encouraged the believers as *"he mightily convinced the Jews,"*⁷⁴ and that publicly, *showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ"* (Ver. 28).

And thus the chain of circumstances ran: Paul had helped Aquila and Priscilla at Corinth, *they* help Apollos at Ephesus and *he*, in turn, helps the brethren at Corinth, watering what Paul had planted (I Cor. 3:6).

As might have been expected, however, some at Corinth began to prefer Apollos to Paul. Unlike Paul, they contended, Apollos had come with "letters of commendation" (II Cor. 3:1).⁷⁵ Furthermore, Apollos was an orator while Paul was not, for *"his letters,"* said they, *"are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account"* (II Cor. 10:10, R.V.). Thus Apollos unintentionally became involved in division and rivalry in the church at Corinth. One party boasted of him and another of Paul. There were others, but Apollos was chiefly involved, for after mentioning four such divisions (I Cor. 1:12) Paul deals mainly with his own and Apollos' connection with the case (I Cor. 1:13; 3:4-6).

But neither Paul nor Apollos condoned, much less fostered this party spirit among the Corinthians. Indeed, it is touching to witness the humility of these two

⁷⁴ Lit., *overwhelmed with argument.*

⁷⁵ Quite forgetting that *they themselves* were Paul's "letter of commendation" (Vers. 2,3).

great men and their mutual consideration for one another.

In writing to the Corinthians about it later Paul does not ask: "Was *Apollos* crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of *Apollos*?" He rather makes little of himself, and asks: "Was *Paul* crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of *Paul*?" (I Cor. 1:13). Indeed, such confidence did Paul have in Apollos that he strongly urged him to return to Corinth just when the party rivalry was so great, and such consideration did Apollos have for Paul that in spite of Paul's urging he would not go. In Paul's words: "*As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you . . . but his will was not at all to come at this time. . .*" (I Cor. 16:12).

Evidently the experience brought these two great men of God closer together, for in Titus 3:13 the apostle writes most solicitously of Apollos with regard to a forthcoming journey, to make certain that he will be well cared for and will want nothing.

Chapter XXXIV - Acts 19:1-22

THE THREE YEARS AT EPHESUS

THE DISCIPLES OF JOHN

"And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,

"He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

"And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.

"Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

"When they heard this, they were baptized In the name of the Lord Jesus.

"And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied.

"And all the men were about twelve."

-Acts 19:1-7

Fulfilling his promise, Paul returned to Ephesus and doubtless had a happy reunion with his beloved Aquila and Priscilla and the other "brethren" referred to in 18:27.

Before entering the synagogue he found "certain disciples" who were no farther advanced dispensationally, than Apollos had been before his contact with Aquila and Priscilla. They, like Apollos, knew only "the baptism of John."

It is doubtful that they became disciples of John through Apollos' ministry at Ephesus for Aquila and Priscilla dealt with Apollos as he "began" to minister in the synagogue (18:26) and there is no indication whatever that Apollos baptized any of his hearers with John's baptism.

However, the fact that Paul "found" these disciples before entering the synagogue, and his direct question about the Holy Spirit may well indicate the possibility, if not the probability, that they were *associates* of Apollos, whom he (and perhaps Aquila and Priscilla) had been unable to lead into further truth, so

that Aquila and Priscilla now mentioned their case to Paul, hoping that he might succeed in doing so before commencing his ministry in the synagogue.

The *Authorized* renderings of both Paul's question and their answer are misleading. The word "*since*" in the question is as incorrect as the "after" in Eph. 1:13, for Paul's question was whether they had received the Holy Spirit "*upon believing*." Nor did their answer indicate that they questioned the *existence* of the Holy Spirit. They could not have questioned this, for the Old Testament Scriptures contain many references to the Holy Spirit, and John's baptism itself was a preparation for the baptism with the Spirit ([Matt. 3:11](#)).

Furthermore Paul's question must be understood in the light of its background. It concerned their receiving the "pouring out" of the Holy Spirit in *miraculous power* (Acts 2:17,18). Our Lord had distinctly stated, with regard to the promise of the Spirit:

"And, behold, I send THE PROMISE OF MY FATHER UPON YOU: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with POWER FROM ON HIGH" (Luke 24-49).

"But YE SHALL RECEIVE POWER, AFTER THAT THE HOLY GHOST IS COME UPON YOU" (Acts 1:8).

This too was the promise of Old Testament prophecy, so that these disciples actually replied: "We have not even heard whether the Holy Ghost has *come*" (Ver. 2). This word "*come*" should have been supplied by the translators as they supplied the word "given" in John 7:39.

This must not be confused with the Spirit's operation in *regeneration*, much less with His present work in *sealing* believers (Eph. 1:13) *baptizing* them into Christ and His Body (Rom. 6:3; I Cor. 12:13) and *indwelling* them as His temple (Eph. 2:22).⁷⁶ Indeed, at Pentecost it was Christ who baptized men in the Spirit while today it is the Spirit who baptizes men into Christ (Matt. 3:11 cf. [Rom. 6:3](#); [I Cor. 12:13](#)).

Finding that these disciples had not received the Spirit (in miraculous power) the apostle asked:

"*Unto what then were ye baptized?*" to which they replied: "*Unto John's baptism*" (Ver. 3).

This, of course, explained why they had not received the Spirit, for had they been baptized with Peter's baptism at Pentecost they would have received "the

⁷⁶ While all this had in fact taken place in these believers, nothing is said of it here since the theme of Acts is the fall of Israel, not the formation of the Body. This is an instance of the selective principle in divine inspiration.

gift of the Holy Ghost" ([Acts 2:38](#)).

WERE THESE DISCIPLES REBAPTIZED?

Now Verses 4 and 5 have been used by those who speak of "Christian baptism" - especially our Baptist friends - to show the great importance of water baptism and of being baptized *in the right way*.

This, they argue, is the last mention of water baptism in the Acts and in it these disciples actually had to be baptized over again because they had not been baptized with "Christian baptism" - the baptism of the "great commission" and/or Pentecost.

No argument for "Christian baptism" could be weaker, and we here propose to prove that these disciples were not rebaptized at all.

It is regrettable that Verses 4 and 5 have for so long been read through Baptist spectacles that it is almost impossible for some to read them correctly.⁷⁷ Even the general run of commentaries have been affected by the continuous repetition of the Baptist view of this passage even though it presents insurmountable difficulties.

The misinterpretation of this passage springs from the mistaken notion that Verse 5 records the *rebaptism* of these disciples, while in reality it is the continuation of Paul's explanation in Verse 4. In Verse 5 Paul recalls the *response* of John's hearers to his message.

Among the many arguments which support this view are the following:

1. There was no basic difference between John's baptism and that of Peter at Pentecost. Both were baptisms of "*repentance*" and both were "*for the remission of sins*" (Mark 1:4; Acts 2:38). There was a difference in the result, however, for at Pentecost those baptized received "*the gift of the Holy Ghost*" in addition to the remission of sins. This explained why these disciples had not received the gift, and why, with the laying on of Paul's hands, they now "spoke with tongues and prophesied."

2. Paul's main question did not concern water baptism but the gift of the Holy Spirit. These disciples had not received this gift because they had been baptized *before the coming of the Spirit*. Therefore Paul laid his hands on them, imparting the Spirit to them.

3. Why should these few disciples alone be rebaptized? Why not the twelve apostles, Apollos and *all* who had been baptized before Pentecost?

⁷⁷ Though some translations render Verse 5 so that it cannot be misunderstood, notably the Dutch, which reads: "*Those who heard him . . .*"

4. How could the rebaptism of only these few prove the importance of "Christian baptism" over John's baptism? Would not the lack of evidence that all the others were rebaptized rather prove the opposite?

5. Why should Luke's record be interrupted to record the rebaptism of these twelve men without explaining why *only these* had to be rebaptized?

6. The record does not say that these men were baptized *again*.

7. If the popular interpretation of Verse 5 were correct it would more probably read: "When they heard this, Paul baptized them . . ." or "they were baptized *again* . . ." As it is, Verse 5 records the response of John's hearers to his message (Ver. 4) and then Paul enters in Verse 6 ("And when Paul . . ." etc.) laying his hands upon them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

8. In Acts 8:12-17 there were believers who *had* been baptized with so-called "Christian baptism" yet, for another reason, had not received the gift of the Holy Spirit. These, like the disciples here under discussion, received the Spirit by *the laying on of hands*.

9. If this "last record" of water baptism in Acts proves the importance of "Christian baptism," does it not also prove that tongues and prophecy go with Christian baptism? When these disciples were "rebaptized," the Holy Spirit came upon them and *"they spake with tongues and prophesied"* (Ver. 6).

It is passing strange that so few of those who use this passage to prove the importance of Christian baptism, seem to notice these obvious objections to their view. We know of only one who holds the rebaptism theory who freely admits the near impossibility of holding this view. He is Dr. W. M. Ramsay of Aberdeen, Scotland. In his book, *"St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen,"* he says: "This episode I must confess not to understand.... If there were any authority in MSS or ancient Versions to omit the episode, one would be inclined to take that course" (P. 270).

Some stress has been laid on the so-called "formula" in Verse 5 as proof that this could not refer to John's baptism.

As we have written again and again there is no Scriptural warrant whatever for the notion that the phrases, "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19) and "the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5) were *formulae* to be used at baptism. This unfounded notion caused the late Dr. Haldeman to refuse church membership to one who had been baptized by Dr. Pettingill, because he had not been baptized in the name of the Trinity (according to [Matt. 28:19](#)) but in the name of the Lord Jesus (according to [Acts 2:38](#) and [8:16](#)). This same unscriptural notion has led some to the conclusion that the

twelve apostles did not work under the commission recorded in Matt. 28.

When our ambassadors to other lands represent us at diplomatic conferences they speak, to be sure, *in the name of the United States of America*, but they do not keep repeating these words as a formula. And who can deny that John, the forerunner of Christ, went forth and baptized in His name and by His authority, as well as did the apostles?

The record closes by pointing out that the disciples at Ephesus numbered "about twelve." If any significance may be attached to this it would appear to link their experience with *Israel* and the divine *government*, and this would be consistent with the purpose of Acts.

FROM THE SYNAGOGUE TO THE SCHOOL OF TYRANNUS

"And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

"But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

"And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks."

-Acts 19:8-10

Paul's previous visit to Ephesus, along with the testimonies of Apollos and, doubtless, Aquila and Priscilla, had evidently served, at the very least, to stir up keen interest at the Ephesian synagogue, so that upon his return Paul was permitted to minister there for three months. Nor, should we conclude that he managed to retain his position among them for this length of time by maintaining a "discreet silence" on the most vital subjects of all, as some "diplomatic" preachers do today, for we are distinctly told that he "*spake boldly*," without reserve, all this time.

More than this; all this time he "*disputed*," or *debated* with these Jews and sought to "persuade" them of the truths concerning "the kingdom of God"⁷⁸ (Ver. 8).

It is a sad commentary on the state of the Church today that *controversy* over the Word of God is frowned upon. Christian leaders often consider it a personal affront when their teachings are questioned. Debates about great Bible doctrines are considered "unspiritual" and why, they ask, should we try to *persuade* others

⁷⁸ This term must not be confused with the "kingdom of heaven." It will be discussed at length when we reach Acts 28:31.

"to believe as we do"? Why not just leave it to the Holy Spirit to show them? So little does *the Word of God* mean to them; so utterly has the spirit of the noble Bereans died in their hearts.

Let all such take careful note of the conduct of the Apostle Paul in this matter, for he is constantly found the center of contention and controversy.⁷⁹ No one could ever say that *he* did not care what men believed. And let them hear the words of one who wrote at a time when great numbers of our choicest Bible commentaries and works of theology were written.⁸⁰

"We live in a time of much religious debate and debate has a tendency to bring out truth more clearly into view" (*Companions of St. Paul*, P. 14). "I say it is a happy circumstance that these subjects are eagerly debated. For debate leads to improvement, and diversity of opinion is far better than indifference" (*Ibid*, P. 51).

But once again "divers were *hardened*"⁸¹ and "*believed not*," lit., "*were unbelieving*," i.e., they *would not* believe, and their stubborn unbelief caused them to oppose Paul publicly by "speaking evil" of his teachings, as the Jews had done at Paphos, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, Berea and Corinth.

Convinced that his ministry in these surroundings had now been brought to an end, and desiring to transfer those who had believed to a more edifying environment, the apostle "departed" from the synagogue and "separated the disciples" from the unbelieving Jews, taking up a daily ministry in "*the school of one Tyrannus*" (Ver. 9). The school of Tyrannus became to the Ephesian synagogue what the house of Justus had been to the Corinthian synagogue: a public condemnation of Israel's rejection of Christ.

Whether this new place of ministry was one of the divinity schools so often connected with synagogues, or a secular institution of learning; whether Tyrannus offered free use of the school because he had been converted to Christ or had become interested, or whether Paul and his associates rented it from him; indeed, whether Tyrannus was then the lecturer at this school or whether it was merely named after a Tyrannus, we do not know. We do not even know the hours at which Paul held forth there. We only know that we find him, earnest and zealous as ever,

"disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

"And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in

⁷⁹ Though by no means *contentious* by nature.

⁸⁰ Great Britain's Dean John S. Howson.

⁸¹ "Stiffnecked," in Acts 7:51 is derived from this word.

Asia⁸² heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Vers. 9,10).

Thus the church at Ephesus became a distinct body and Ephesus became the center of Paul's apostolic labors and the chief seat of Christianity in the province of Asia.

A few years previous he had been "forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia" (Acts 16:6) but now he was used of God to evangelize the whole province thoroughly. It is possible that the province was evangelized spontaneously as the gospel of the grace of God was carried from one to another, for even in our shallow day the continued presence of a prominent evangelist often has an effect on a large area surrounding the city in which he ministers. More probably, however, the province was evangelized by an organized campaign, as the apostle sent his helpers forth with the message. It is doubtful that Paul himself left Ephesus to take part in this, however, for not only is there no record of it, but our text states quite specifically that "this" daily ministry in the school of Tyrannus "continued by the space of two years" and that *as a result* "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus." Furthermore Paul, in an epistle written later, distinctly states that the believers in Colosse and Laodicea, two of Asia's principal cities, had *not* seen his face ([Col. 2:1](#)).

From the record it appears probable that the work outgrew the school of Tyrannus and that in addition to the three months in the synagogue and the two years at the school of Tyrannus he spent approximately nine more months at Ephesus (See [Acts 20:31](#)). It may be that the rest of Chapter 19 records events that transpired during this time. Certainly there is the "season" of Verse 22.

PAUL'S UNCEASING TOIL

Before considering the two examples of the power of Paul's ministry given to us in Chapter 19, we should take note of some of the additional information about his stay at Ephesus which is given to us outside that chapter.

First it should be noted that during most of his stay at Ephesus he worked with his hands probably again with Aquila and Priscilla - to support not only himself but also his associates in the work. In Acts 20:34 he reminds the Ephesian elders: "*Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities and to them that were with me.*" And writing to the Corinthians toward the close of his stay at Ephesus (as we shall later see) he says: "*Even unto this present hour we ... labor, working with our own hands*" (I Cor. 4:11,12).

And besides this he debated daily in the school of Tyrannus for two of these years and *also* made time for much personal visitation, teaching "*publicly, and*

⁸² The *province* of Asia, in Asia Minor.

from house to house" (Acts 20:20). Pastors who put a minimum of energy into their ministry for the Lord and then wonder why it does not prosper would do well to consider these facts prayerfully and act accordingly.

HIS PERSECUTIONS AND SUFFERINGS

The apostle bore many heavy burdens while at Ephesus.

Writing to the Corinthians about the matter, he says there were "many adversaries" (I Cor. 16:9). It is doubtful that the "beasts" with which he "fought. . . at Ephesus" (I Cor. 15:32) were actual wild beasts, but his phraseology in this passage gives us some idea of the ferocity of the opposition he encountered.

At Ephesus there was a great arena or amphitheatre where foot races and boxing and wrestling matches were staged. At the close of such entertainments they often sent men into the arena to fight with wild beasts. These were called "last victims." Sometimes they were trained, armed men, but more often condemned criminals, completely unarmed. These closing "shows" were considered the climax of the day's entertainment for the blood-thirsty throngs that had gathered.

Almost certainly alluding to this, the apostle wrote to the Corinthians:

"For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, [both] to angels and to men" (I Cor. 4:9).

One aspect of his sufferings not mentioned in Acts 19, yet one which we might have suspected, is also referred to in his farewell to the Ephesian elders: the vicious and relentless opposition of the unbelieving Jews. As he bids his friends good-bye, he recalls the *many tears and trials* "which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews" (Acts 20:19). Those from whom he had been forced to separate himself at the synagogue, and perhaps others from other cities where he had ministered, would not leave him alone but, again and again, sought opportunity to slay him. Constantly his life was in jeopardy. As he went to call on interested hearers he was always conscious that danger and death might lurk nearby. It was dangerous to ever be alone. This constant pressure told on him and often caused him to burst forth in tears.

Then, too, there was "the care of all the churches" (II Cor. 11:28). Beside the new assemblies in Asia (I Cor. 16:19) which required more and more attention, there were the other churches, farther off, which he had founded, and from which he received news.

It appears that it was before or during his stay at Ephesus that he heard such disturbing news about the Galatian churches that he wrote them immediately with

his own hand, warning them of the dangers of the course they were taking. There was news from other churches, too, that caused concern, and there can be no doubt that as he labored at his tent-making these companies of believers were continually on his mind.

Since Corinth was situated just across the Aegean Sea from Ephesus and there was constant intercourse between the two cities, Paul doubtless kept better informed about the Corinthian church than about any other outside Asia. Indeed so disturbing were the reports from Corinth that the apostle was constrained to pay them a short visit during this time. How soon reports about their party divisions, legal battles, disorderly gatherings, etc., began to arrive we do not know, but it is evident that already he began to learn about the gross immorality practiced among them - immorality which would have been considered a disgrace even among the heathen.⁸³

This second visit to Corinth is not actually recorded but there is clear internal evidence that it took place. For one thing, the second *recorded* visit to Corinth ([Acts 20:1-3](#)) is twice called his "*third*" visit ([II Cor. 12:14; 13:1](#)) so that there must have been a visit between the two which are recorded. The apostle describes this visit as one in which he had come to them "*in heaviness*" ([II Cor. 2:1](#)) and one which had caused him great personal humiliation ([II Cor. 12:21](#)). Hence he writes in [II Cor. 13:2](#) "*If I come again I will not spare.*"

Besides Paul's unrecorded visit to Corinth there is also another letter which though not included in Sacred Scripture, he evidently wrote to them at about this time. This is "the⁸⁴ epistle" alluded to in [I Cor. 5:9](#). Evidently after his brief visit to them he had received further disturbing reports about their moral conduct so that it had become necessary to send them an epistle in which, by apostolic authority, he forbade them to keep any company with fornicators. Evidently this injunction was misunderstood (perhaps even purposely by some) so that they then wrote him an epistle to which First Corinthians (actually his *second* letter to them) was in part the reply (See [I Cor. 7:1](#)). In this letter he further explains that his previous letter had referred to keeping company with *professing believers* who practiced fornication ([I Cor. 5:9-11](#)).

All this anxiety and sorrow of heart did the apostle have to bear while toiling physically to support himself and his co-workers, and carrying on an extensive public and private ministry at the same time. Yes, this and more, for while still at Ephesus he wrote to these carnal believers:

"We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we are despised."⁸⁵

⁸³ The number involved must have been large and a considerable number of them must have *persisted* in their sin, for in [II Cor. 12:21](#) the *unrepentant* ones are still called "many."

⁸⁴ The original contains the definite article.

⁸⁵ This is a sample of the biting sarcasm so typical of this epistle.

"Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked,⁸⁶ and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place;

"And labor, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it;

"Being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day" (1 Cor. 4.10-13).

GOD'S BLESSING ON HIS MINISTRY

It must not be supposed from all this that Paul was crushed in spirit and continued his strenuous ministry only out of a sense of stern duty. Far from it! In reliance upon God and doubtless with the inspiration and encouragement of faithful helpers in the work,⁸⁷ he maintained a remarkable spiritual balance. As he wrote to the Corinthians not long after:

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed [crushed]; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

"Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (II Cor. 4-8,9).

Thus his ministry at Ephesus was blessed beyond measure. In Verse 10 of Acts 19 we learn that through his ministry there all in Asia heard "the word of the Lord Jesus"; in the remainder of the chapter, which we have yet to consider, we find a large portion of the Ephesian populace voluntarily burning their heathen books at a public bonfire; *"so mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed"* (Ver. 20). And these spiritual victories are attested to by Demetrius the silversmith, who complained that *"not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuades and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands"* (Ver. 26). Little wonder that Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *"For a great door and effectual is opened unto me"* (I Cor. 16:9). In all his persecutions and sufferings God was working.

Before we close this examination of Paul's ministry at Ephesus we have yet to consider two specific cases of God's blessing upon it: one relating to Israel and the other to the Gentiles.

JUDGMENT UPON ISRAEL BLESSING TO THE GENTILES

"And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul:

⁸⁶ This does not mean to be *without* clothing, but without sufficient clothing.

⁸⁷ Including Onesiphorus, who helped him in many ways (II Tim. 1:16-18).

"So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

"Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.

"And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.

"And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?

"And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

"And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

"And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds.

"Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver."

-Acts 19:11-20

In the passage before us we have another of those significant narratives of Acts which set forth, symbolically, the blessing of the Gentiles through Israel's fall.

It begins with the "special" miracles which God wrought through Paul. Actually the word "special" should have been rendered in the negative as it is in the Greek: *"not common"* or *"not ordinary."* The idea is that though Ephesus, being more oriental in character than Athens or Corinth, had many magicians and wonder-workers about her streets, God used Paul to work miracles which they could not duplicate, just as Moses and Aaron, more than fifteen centuries earlier, had wrought miracles which Pharaoh's magicians found it impossible to imitate.

Among these were the curing of diseases and casting out of demons by handkerchiefs and aprons which had touched Paul's person. The era of demonstrative miracles had not yet passed.

But among those who witnessed these miracles there was a company of Jews who were a symbol of what their nation was fast becoming and has since

become.

They were "*vagabond Jews*," wanderers, far from their land, certainly not typical of redeemed Israel of the future who "shall dwell in their own land" ([Jer. 23:8](#)) but rather of the present apostate Israel, wandering homeless in other lands.

Moreover these Jews were "exorcists," men who expelled, or presumed to expel, evil spirits, not, of course, by the power of God, but by magical rites, incantations and other means, the implication being that they went from place to place offering to cast out demons for a price.

Now some of these, observing the power that Paul exercised in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, presumed to use Christ's name in their sorceries, saying: "*We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.*"

How low these vagabond Jews had fallen, spiritually, is evidenced by the fact that, for personal gain, they would use the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, their Messiah, whom they rejected, in a traffic with evil spirits which was strictly forbidden by Scripture and punishable with death (See [Ex. 22:18](#); [Lev. 20:27](#); [Deut. 18:10,11](#); [I Sam. 28:3,9](#)).

In this too they were symbolic of their nation, for rather than representing *God* before the nations now, Israel has become a *false prophet* by rejecting Messiah. Yet, while rejecting Christ as an imposter, no one has been more ready to make financial gain of Him than the Jew, on "Good Friday" at Easter time, Christmas time and all through the year.

Among these wandering exorcists were seven sons of a leading priest, named Seeva who used the name of Christ on one occasion with disastrous consequences, for the evil spirit replied contemptuously: "*Jesus I recognize and Paul I know,⁸⁸ but who are ye?*" whereupon the demon-possessed man, with the strength of the Maniac of Gadara, leaped upon them, overcoming all seven of them "so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded" (Ver. 16). Such was the consequence of the unauthorized use of that holy name.

In this these seven vagabond Jews were again symbolic of the nation as a whole, for in their ill use of Christ, Satan has prevailed against them and left them, spiritually, naked and wounded.

But there is even more in this narrative that is symbolic, for as a result of this incident "the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified" and there were "many," evidently including some Jews, who now "believed . . . confessed, and showed their deeds" (Vers. 17,18).

⁸⁸ Lit., "*recognize*," as an authority; "*know*," have familiar knowledge of.

Once more, then, we have salvation going to the Gentiles *through Israel's fall* (See [Rom. 11:11-15](#)) and more: through their fall there is grace to all, both individual Jews and individual Gentiles, as it is written:

"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that upon Him.

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:12,13).

"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).

As a result of the judgment upon these exorcists the believers who had used "curious"⁸⁹ arts brought their books of instructions, secret formulae, incantations, etc., and staged a large public bonfire, burning books totaling about fifty thousand pieces of silver, or nearly ten thousand dollars in cost. "*So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed*" (Ver. 20).

Thus the "special" miracles which God wrought through Paul were by no means an encouragement to idolatrous practices or superstitions, but were rather a supernatural testimony, especially to Israel,⁹⁰ that Paul's ministry was the work of God.

PLANS TO VISIT JERUSALEM AND ROME

"After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.

"So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a season."

-Acts 19:21,22.

We are not to presume that Paul had received any revelation instructing him to go to Jerusalem and Rome, for it is distinctly stated that he "*purposed*" this "in the spirit" i.e., his spirit. The *Companion Bible* explains: "The meaning is that he was firmly resolved."

⁸⁹ Lit., going beyond that which is legitimate.

⁹⁰ See I Cor. 1:22.

The apostle's heart constantly yearned for Jerusalem and his kinsmen ([Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1](#)) and he had long had a desire to go to Rome ([Rom. 1:13; 15:23](#)) but little did he imagine that soon he would be taken from the one to the other as "the prisoner of Jesus Christ for [the] Gentiles" (Eph. 3:1).

Planning to pass through Macedonia and Achaia before travelling to Jerusalem, he sent Timothy and Erastus, ahead, evidently especially to prepare the Corinthians for his coming, so that he might not again embarrass both them and himself by his coming ([I Cor. 4:17](#)).

It was doubtless at this time that *First Corinthians* (actually his *second* letter to them) was written.

We know that this letter was written while he was at Ephesus ([I Cor. 16:8](#)). We know also that it was written while his ministry there was prospering ([I Cor. 16:9](#)) which would probably place it at or after Acts 19:20. We are informed, furthermore, that it was written when he planned to visit them after remaining briefly at Ephesus ([I Cor. 16:8](#)). This again would set the date at Acts 19:22b. Finally, it was certainly written before the great tumult over the goddess Diana ([Acts 19:23-41](#)) for immediately after this he departed for Macedonia and Greece ([Acts 20:1,2](#)).

The epistle which we know as *First Corinthians*, then, was almost certainly written between the public bonfire of Acts 19:19 and the uproar over Diana, or during the "season" referred to in Ver. 22. Evidently the church at Ephesus, or a segment of it, met in the home of Aquila and Priscilla at this time ([I Cor. 16:19](#)).

The plan to visit Macedonia and Achaia again was doubtless largely due to continued disturbing reports from the church at Corinth. Members of "the house of Chloe" had reported that a factious spirit prevailed among the believers there. The constant intercourse between Ephesus and Corinth must have brought many believers from one city to the other, for the apostle had also learned of their going to court one against another, their disorderly conduct at their services and many other serious failings. Indeed, the most serious defection of all was "*commonly reported*": immorality so wanton that even the heathen considered it too disgraceful to speak of ([I Cor. 5:1](#)).

Then too there was the letter which he had received from *them* regarding marriage. This too must be dealt with. Thus it is that we have "First Corinthians" in our possession today.

In this great epistle we learn that the apostle had preached much which the book of Acts, because of its nature and purpose, does not mention. There he shows that "the preaching of the cross" had been his theme ([I Cor. 1:17-25](#)). There he also rebukes the Corinthians because, due to their carnality, he could not explain to them the "deep things of God" and the great truths of "the mys-

tery," which he *had* taught to more mature believers (I Cor. 2:1,2,6,7; 3:1-4). To those who boasted of their party connections or went to law against each other, he declared that "by one Spirit" they had all been "baptized into one body," that with all their failings they were "the Body of *Christ*"; members of Him and therefore of each other (I Cor. 12:13,14,27). To those who boasted of their miraculous powers, especially speaking in tongues, he showed the transcendent glory of love (I Cor. 13:8-13). To those who lived as though they were responsible to no one, he declared that Christ was indeed alive and revealed the additional "secret" that at any "moment" He might come to call them to Himself (I Cor. 15:12,20,51-53).

THE MIRACLES AT CORINTH

Those who suppose that the miraculous powers of the apostolic era were a sign of spirituality, and who contend that if we were but more spiritual we too would possess these powers, should stop and consider the case of the Corinthian believers.

From Paul's letters to the Corinthians it is evident that they were of all the churches the most unspiritual, yet he acknowledges: ". . . *ye come behind in no gift*" (I Cor. 1:7). That "gifts of healing... working of miracles ... prophecy ... divers kinds of tongues," etc., were included with these "gifts" is evident from I Cor. 12:9,10.

From the fact that the *Corinthian* church stood ahead of others in the possession of miraculous gifts, then, we must conclude that the possession of such gifts was not an indication of spirituality.

What, then, *did* they indicate? Simply that *God* was working. They were *signs* to the unbelieving, and especially to the unbelieving *Jews* (I Cor. 1:22).

Thus it becomes particularly significant that it was just this *unspiritual* church that possessed most of the sign gifts. Whether or not the believers at Corinth still met in the home that "joined hard unto the synagogue" at this time, they were certainly under constant observation by the Jews of the synagogue there. These Jews would certainly not be impressed by the lives these carnal believers led, but, looking at the signs, would have to acknowledge the new movement to be *the work of God* (See [John 3:2](#)).

Chapter XXXV - Acts 19:23-41

THE UPROAR AT EPHESUS

SATAN ENRAGED

"And the same time there arose no small stir about that way.

"For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen;

"Whom be called together, with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.

"Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands:

"So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

"And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

"And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.

"And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.

"And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.

"Some therefore cried one thing, and some another, for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.

"And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people.

"But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

"And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?"

"Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.

"For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.

"Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies; let them implead one another.

"But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, It shall be determined in a lawful assembly.

"For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.

"And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly."

-Acts 19:23-41

The nineteenth chapter of the Acts is a record of tremendous victories for Christ. It tells of the *extraordinary* miracles wrought through Paul and of the discomfiture of deceivers who sought to use the name of Christ to their own advantage. It tells also of the deep inroads being made into the heart of heathenism as large numbers of those who had practiced the black arts came and burned their books, valued at fifty thousand pieces of silver, in a public bonfire. Thrice in the chapter the mighty effects of Paul's ministry are particularly noted (Vers. 10,20,26).

It is not strange, then, to read of a great popular uprising against Paul and his teachings, incited, not first of all by men, but by the "wicked spirits in the heavens" against whom believers, especially *faithful* believers, still "wrestle" today (See [Eph. 6:12](#)).

DIANA

It was actually Diana who incited "no small stir" about the "way" which Paul proclaimed, for the real "Diana," back of that carved statue, was a fallen angel or group of fallen angels. It is they, the demons, who were behind all idolatry. The philosophers at Athens were evidently aware of this, for when Paul appeared among their idols to preach Christ, they said: "He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange *demons* [Gr., *daimonion*]" (Acts 17:18).

Whether the advocates of the unspeakable lewdness practiced in the "groves" and temples of Ashtoreth and Venus, or the protectors of young men and maidens and the champions of chastity, like the earlier Artemis, all idols represented attempts by Satan to pervert truth and divert worship away from God.

Thus it is that God commanded the children of Israel:

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me ... for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God ..." (Ex. 20:3,5).

And thus it is that Psalm 82 presents God "judging among the gods," and saying:

"I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.

"But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes" (Vers. 6,7).

Idolatry, on the human side was, of course, not based upon truth, but upon the changing superstitions of unregenerate men. Hence the Diana of Ephesus (the later Artemis) was, unlike her various predecessors, the many-breasted personification of fruitfulness and bounty in nature, and as a woman, she called forth a fanatical loyalty from her devotees.⁹¹

The image of Diana was supposed to have fallen from heaven, sent down to earth by Jupiter, but it is easily possible, especially considering its unshapely form, that it was nothing more than a meteor made into a crude statue.

But if the *image* of Diana was crude, her *temple* was world-renowned for its beauty. Situated at some distance from the city, it was magnificent to behold, with its one hundred twenty massive marble pillars,⁹² each the gift of a prince, and was considered one of the seven wonders of the world. So great was the national pride in this sanctuary that it is said that when Alexander the Great offered the spoils of his eastern campaign on condition that he be permitted to inscribe his name on the building, the honor was declined.

Ironically, however, Diana, whom "all Asia and the world" was once said to have worshipped, is not worshipped by a single man today, and her magnificent temple lay buried in the dust for centuries until fragments of it were uncovered by Mr. J. T. Wood for the British Museum in the late eighteen hundreds.

⁹¹ A similar devotion is rendered to Mary in Roman Catholicism, so that those who readily take the name of Christ in vain and so carelessly exclaim "My God!" are offended if Mary's name is as lightly used. Take the name of God in vain, but not that of Mary!

⁹² Each pillar is said to have been sixty feet high, weighing one hundred fifty tons. Pliny says that the temple took two hundred twenty years to complete (Lib. 36, C. 14).

DEMETRIUS

Demetrius, the silversmith, was, of course, the human instrument whom Satan used to touch off the uprising at Ephesus. He appears to have been at the head of a guild of silversmiths and others of "like occupation" and had been instrumental in bringing them "no small gain" through the sale of silver shrines "for"⁹³ Diana. The devotees of Diana would buy these miniature shrines to carry on their persons, display in their homes or leave at the temple itself as an act of worship, much as Romanists today present their rosaries and images at Lourdes and Ste. Anne de Beaupre. Moreover, Ephesus, being one of the largest seaports on the Aegean Sea, travellers from far and near would also purchase these silver shrines to take home as mementos of the world-renowned Diana and her temple.

Concerned because of the sharp decline in business since Paul's appearance at Ephesus, Demetrius called the guild members together to discuss the situation. With almost naive simplicity he stated the purpose of the gathering and the real reason for his concern over Diana and her temple: "*By this craft we have our wealth*" (Ver. 25). Paul, by contending that "*they be no gods, which are made with hands,*" was *hurting business*. This was the human cause behind the uproar. Little matter whether Paul was right or wrong in his contention; he was causing them personal loss.

This passage teaches further that those who stood to gain by idolatry, actually wanted the gullible masses to attach supernatural significance to this merchandise "made with hands," otherwise why object to Paul's contention that these objects were *not* gods?

As we have pointed out, Satan, "the god of this age" (II Cor. 4:4) was the moving power behind all this, diverting men's worship away from God, and his efforts in this direction have continued to this day.

Even the Church of Rome, while contending about representation and symbolism before Protestants, actually leads her devotees to attach supernatural significance to things "made with hands."

The writer has before him a letter received from the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement, at Graymoor, New York. It contains, as an "Easter gift," a medal⁹⁴ of St. Pius X, supposed to have touched his body and to have been blessed by Pope Pius XII. The Graymoor Friars send the medal, of course, to promote devotion to St. Pius X, but also - of course - with the prayer and the *suggestion* that St. Pius X will inspire the recipient to make some sacrifice to help educate young men for the priesthood!

⁹³ Evidently the facade of the temple, with the figure of Diana in the center.

⁹⁴ Worth almost nothing in actual value.

"*Let St. Joseph Solve Your Problem,*" says a paid newspaper ad and, incidentally, a chaplet of St. Joseph will be mailed to anyone sending a contribution of one dollar or more to the Catholic institution placing the ad. In another periodical small advertisements keep appearing urging its readers to "Burn a Votive Light" in honor of "*Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal,*" or "*St. Christopher,*" for a "safe journey," or "*St. Anthony,* finder of lost things," or "*The Infant of Prague*" for "finances," or "*St. Anne,*" for a "happy marriage," or "*St. Joseph,*" for "employment and good death." How to get these "votive lights"? That is explained on page 32, where the prices are given.

These are only a few of the evidences seen on every hand that *Rome promotes superstition and idolatry for financial gain.* Well do we remember our amazement at the almost unbelievable prices charged for the cheapest religious trinkets at Ste. Anne de Beaupre in Quebec.

Thus the spirit that prompted Demetrius to call a meeting of his guild still prevails today. Even among Protestants, yes, and Fundamentalists, *vested interests* play a prominent role in the stubborn resistance to spiritual advances and reforms.

How transparent is Demetrius' complete argument! "Paul's teaching is endangering our business - and, of course, the glory of our goddess, Diana"! Why did he have to cover his greed with a cloak of religion? It was the danger to their "gain," their "wealth," their "craft" that had roused Demetrius and his fellow guild members, otherwise they would have cared little about the glory of Diana and whether or not the masses of common folk worshipped her. At any rate "our wealth" came first with the leaders; then the glory of Diana, but the glory of Diana would come first with the masses, and would be used to restore the wealth of the leaders.

THE UPROAR

Money and religion! Where could two more inflammatory elements be found with which to start a mad uprising!

As the guildsmen, "full of wrath," went about crying aloud to Diana, "the whole city was filled with confusion" (Vers. 28,29).

It would appear that at this point the guildsmen sought to capture Paul, whom Demetrius had mentioned by name, but, failing to find him had caught Gaius and Aristarchus (two of Paul's travelling companions) and were now taking them to the theatre to subject them to their own form of "justice." If the home of Aquila and Priscilla was Paul's lodging place at Ephesus, this may well have been the occasion on which they "laid down their own necks," for him ([Rom. 16:4](#)); at least we know of no other specific occasion to which this tribute by Paul could more

appropriately refer.

Seeing Gaius and Aristarchus taken by force, and concluding that in the theatre, if anywhere, they might learn what the commotion was all about, the populace "rushed with one accord into the theatre" (Ver. 29).⁹⁵

Where the apostle had been in the meantime, we do not know, but learning of the tumult, he now would have entered in among the people, had not the disciples prevented him from doing so. It is a testimony to the character of Paul that at this point "certain of the chief of Asia [Lit., *Asiarchs*⁹⁶] *which were his friends*" sent a message to him, entreating him not to venture into the theatre (Ver. 31). Evidently Paul had gained the respect and admiration, and even the affection, of these prominent men, so that now, though not themselves believers, they proved to be his true friends.

Meantime bedlam reigned at the theatre. "*Some cried one thing, and some another; for the assembly*⁹⁷ *was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together*" (Ver. 32).

In the excitement, a man named Alexander was being singled out from the multitude, "the Jews putting him forward" (Ver. 33). Some have supposed that this was the Christian Alexander of I Tim. 1:20, before his defection, and that the Jews put him forward to deliver him to the vengeance of the mob. But there are insurmountable objections to this view, especially since the Jews themselves were opposed to the worship of Diana and would hardly place themselves in so compromising a position.

It is far more likely that this Alexander is the "coppersmith" referred to in II Tim. 4:14, who did Paul "much evil," probably at this very time. It is evident that this man, put forward by the Jews, was about to make "a defence" (not "*his* defence") to the people. Probably the Jews, themselves opposed to idol worship, feared that *they* might suffer the wrath of the silversmiths and thus chose from among themselves a man of "like occupation," a coppersmith, to explain that *they* had not caused the defection from Diana - this, when they, as worshippers of the one true God, should have supported Paul in this conflict.

⁹⁵ The ruins of this ancient amphitheatre still stand. It probably seated upwards of twenty-five thousand persons.

⁹⁶ The *Asiarchs* were men of wealth and position chosen to preside over public festivals and games.

⁹⁷ Gr., *ekklesia*, rendered *church* well over a hundred times in A. V., but *assembly* here and in Vers. 39,41. The occurrence of this word here is further confirmation of the fact that its use in Acts 2 is no proof that the Body of Christ began at Pentecost. God has had His *ekklesia* all down through the ages. See Acts 7:38 and LXX (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) where he word occurs more than sixty times. The *ekklesia* of 19:32 was not, of course, the church of Christ at all, though what is said about it may well describe the confusion prevailing in the professing Church.

Alexander was not even given a hearing, however. The multitude well knew that the Jew was the hereditary foe of idolatry and when they saw that Alexander was one of that race, their confusion was immediately dispelled and as one man they cried out "*Great Diana*⁹⁸ of the Ephesians" (Ver. 34) continuing this for two hours.

We have here an example of how wrong the majority can be, and how little sight and feelings are to be trusted. Here was a mass demonstration of deep emotional feeling but it was wholly unsound, and its effect utterly unpredictable. Such a demonstration was fraught with great peril, for a fanatical mob like this, with emotions aroused to so high a pitch, might do almost anything.

After two hours, however, the "townclerk" (the chief officer of the city) succeeded in appeasing the people. Showing himself to be both tactful and persuasive, as a man of the world, he first soothed the feelings of the multitude with regard to Diana.

"What man is there," he asked, "that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper [temple-sweeper⁹⁹] of the great goddess Diana and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly" (Vers. 35,36).

This, we say, was well calculated to calm the storm of emotions, but the townclerk's conclusion was as weak as his premise. "*What man knoweth not?*" "*Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against!*" The masses, of course, readily accept as truth that which they are told "everybody knows." Indeed, there is perhaps nothing that holds even the great majority of believers back spiritually like the thought that they must not repudiate that which is commonly believed, nor accept that which is not commonly accepted, and thus they actually set human opinion above divine revelation. Let us thank God that truth rests upon a firmer foundation than the confused and changing opinions of fallen men! The townclerk spoke so confidently of Diana and her glory, but already Diana and her temple are memories of the past, and their glory withered and gone.

Next the townclerk had a word to say in defense of Paul and his associates. They had not been "robbers of temples"¹⁰⁰ nor "blasphemers" of Diana (Ver. 37). Their care not to deride this heathen goddess shows what restraint Paul's fellow-

⁹⁸ The insertion of the word "is" in A.V. and R.V. is probably incorrect. "*Great Diana*" was a common formula of *devotion* and *prayer*, as attested by several ancient inscriptions. "*Great is Diana*" could be a calm expression of recognition of her greatness. "*Great Diana*" gives a more natural and far more effective tone to the scene. Four times in this chapter Diana is called "great" by the devotees.

⁹⁹ This is the literal meaning of the word here rendered "*worshipper*." Thus is Ephesus personified as Diana's devotee.

¹⁰⁰ Since many of Diana's worshippers brought their gifts to her at the temple, robberies there were quite common.

workers had practiced under his leadership and by his example. In the record of his ministry among both Jews and Gentiles, we find him often *reasoning*, *debating* and *persuading*, but never *insulting* or *ridiculing*. Now this was all to his advantage.

In the light of all this, argued the townclerk, Demetrius and the craftsmen should present any complaint against Paul and his associates in the manner prescribed by law. And this he capped with a serious reminder that the Roman government looked with stern displeasure upon any outbreak of lawlessness.

Having thus calmed the passions of the multitude and restored order, the townclerk declared the assembly dismissed.

THE POSITION OF THE BELIEVERS AGAIN ENHANCED

Once more God had overruled the opposition of Satan to enhance the position of a young and struggling church. At Philippi He had used Paul's Roman citizenship, at Corinth the sagacity of a heathen judge, and here the appeal of the townclerk. The church at Ephesus would now be in a much more favorable position in this period when her growth and establishment were so important. Thus does our God take the wise in their own craftiness and cause even the wrath of man - yea, and of the devil - to praise Him.

Finally, it should be noted that Israel falls more and more in the background in this episode, as both the persecution and protection involved originate with the Gentiles.

Chapter XXXVI - ACTS 20:1-5

THE RETURN TO MACEDONIA AND GREECE

PAUL'S ACTIVITIES THERE

"And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia.

"And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece,

"And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia.

"And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus.

"These going before tarried for us at Troas."

-Acts 20:1-5

Very little is told us here of a ministry which must have consumed many months. Paul departed for Macedonia, went over those parts, exhorting the believers "much" and then arrived at Greece, where he stayed three months; that is all the information we have from Luke's record.

As we meditate upon what *is* told us, however, and examine Paul's early epistles as to his activities at this time, a much more complete picture unfolds.

Whether the uproar at Ephesus cut short the apostle's stay there, we are not clearly told. In any case, though, it would be wiser for him to leave now. A tremendous work had been done there, and since he, personally, had become the chief target of the enemy's fury, it would be better for the work to entrust it now to the care of those with whom he had labored for three years.

Thus, taking affectionate leave of the disciples, he left for Macedonia, doubtless revisiting the believers at Thessalonica, Berea and, of course, Philippi. What happy reunions, after at least six years' absence, there must have been with old friends and co-workers such as Lydia and her household, the Philippian jailor and his, Jason, and scores of others! The apostle must have experienced much joy, some apprehension and also some sorrow at their reports of spiritual victories and defeats, and he gave them "much exhortation" (Ver. 2).

On the way to Macedonia he would doubtless stop (perhaps to change ship) at Troas, and it is probably regarding this occasion, that he wrote to the Corinthians some time later:

"Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord,¹⁰¹

"I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia" (II Cor. 2:12,13).

The apostle had, as we shall see, sent Titus to Corinth to deal with some of their problems and to learn, and report to him, the effects of his recent letters to them. Evidently he had hoped to meet Titus at Troas, but had been disappointed, with the result that he became so anxious that he failed to enter the open door of opportunity set before him, proceeding to Macedonia instead.

And this state of spiritual depression continued even after he had reached Macedonia. We have already mentioned the happy reunions that must have taken place, especially at Philippi, yet even here he could not shake off the apprehensions he felt with regard to the Corinthian church.

It was here in Macedonia, however, that Titus finally reached the apostle with news that was generally good. Thus he wrote:

"For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.

"Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus" (II Cor. 7:5,6).

TITUS

It is remarkable that Titus, who occupied so large a place in Paul's ministry, is not even mentioned in the Book of Acts. Conversely, the notice he is given in just one of Paul's epistles (II Corinthians) is altogether unique in Paul's writings. In that epistle alone he is mentioned nine times, and always with affection and esteem.

Ramsay believes that had he not been a Gentile he would have been recognized sooner, and reads in II Corinthians a possible wish on Paul's part to compensate for the neglect that had for many years sacrificed him to the thankless policy of conciliating the Jews (See *St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen*, Pp. 285,286).

Titus had probably been converted to Christ through Paul's ministry while at

¹⁰¹ Perhaps through his evangelization of Asia (See Acts 19:10).

Syrian Antioch. From there Paul and Barnabas had taken him up to Jerusalem as a test case in the controversy over Gentile freedom from the law of Moses ([Acts 15:2](#); [Gal. 2:3](#)). As we have already pointed out, he *may* have been the Titus Justus of Acts 18:7 (See R. V.) whose house adjoined the Corinthian synagogue. If so, his inviting the believers to meet in his home would correspond well with his nature as it is described for us in the Scriptures. After performing many difficult and valuable services for Paul, Titus was left in charge of the churches on the island of Crete ([Tit. 1:5](#)) a difficult assignment indeed (See Tit. 1:12,13) and finally we find him at Dalmatia ([II Tim. 4:10](#)) again among a rough class of people.

Titus and Timothy were probably closer to Paul than any of his co-workers, and in this fact we learn how wonderfully God provided the moral and spiritual support the apostle so often needed in his strenuous ministry, for these two young pastors differed greatly in nature and character, yet both were so valuable to Paul.

As we have already pointed out, it is evident from Paul's letters to Timothy that he was cultured and refined, a student from his youth, delicate in health and possessing, as was natural from his upbringing, an almost feminine tenderness. The apostle writes to him about his childhood, his mother, his grandmother and his tears; prescribes for his "often infirmities" and begs him not to be ashamed or afraid or weak, but to be strong, as "*a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*" This sincere and refined young man, a teacher by nature, proved a great help to Paul and served with him as "*a son with the father*" (Phil. 2:19,22).

Titus was a very different character. This is quite evident from Paul's letter to him, in which he addresses him as an army general might address his lieutenant; directing him to *set in order the things that are wanting*, to exhort and convince the gainsayers, to *stop the mouths of unruly and vain talkers*, to *rebuke sharply those who lived careless lives*, to *show himself a pattern of good works* and to *reject wilful heretics*.

An interesting comparison between Timothy and Titus is to be found in what Paul has to say with respect to visits they made to Corinth.

Timothy was head and shoulders above the Corinthian believers, both morally and spiritually, yet when Paul sent him there, he had to write a letter ahead, exhorting them: "Now if Timotheus come, see *that he may be with you without fear*; for he worketh the work of the Lord, as also I do. *Let no man therefore despise him . . .*" (I Cor. 16:10, 11). But later, when Titus had been to Corinth and had returned, Paul wrote them: "And his inward affection is more abundant toward you, whilst he remembereth the *obedience* of you all, how with fear and trembling ye *received him*!" (II Cor. 7:15).

Titus, then, was the more robust character of the two, yet far from *coarse* or

crude. Indeed, he was by nature a remarkable combination of enthusiasm and discretion and, certainly, integrity (See [II Cor. 12:18](#)).

REPORT FROM CORINTH

Paul needed a friend like Titus. We have discussed the apostle's anxiety and mental depression both at Troas and in Macedonia, and while this state of mind was partly due to his apprehensions regarding the church at Corinth, it was also partly due to his disappointment at failing to find Titus, whose buoyant faith had so often encouraged and refreshed him.

He left Troas, he says, *not* first of all, because he had failed to hear from Corinth, but "*because I found not Titus, my brother*" (II Cor. 2:13) and regarding his "troubled" condition in Macedonia, he says that "God, that comforteth those that are cast down," comforted him, first of all, "*by the coming of Titus,*" and *then* by the news he brought from Corinth (See [II Cor. 7:5-7](#)).

It was a relief to Paul to learn from his friend that conditions at the Corinthian church had improved measurably; that the majority had sincerely mourned over their conduct, had shown an earnest desire to live pleasing to God and were still devoted to him ([II Cor. 7:7](#)); also that they were still glad to do their part with regard to the offering being gathered for the poor saints in Judaea ([II Cor. 9:1,2](#)).

There was, however, an obstinate minority whom Paul's letters, and perhaps the visits of his associates, had only embittered. From Paul's replies to them we gather that they attributed his interest in the collection for the Judaeian saints to personal monetary motives ([II Cor. 12:17,18](#)) yet asserted that he could be no true apostle, since he accepted no financial support! (II Cor. 11:7); that they compared, to his disparagement, the credentials Apollos had presented ([Acts 18:27](#)) with Paul's lack of them ([II Cor. 3:1,2](#)); that they sneered at his bodily infirmities ([II Cor. 10:10](#)) and charged that his declared intentions to come and visit them were all a bluff; that he was actually afraid to appear among them ([II Cor. 1:15-18; 13:1-3](#)).

Thus it was that Paul sent Titus¹⁰² back to Corinth¹⁰³ with another letter, that which we know as the *second* epistle to the Corinthians. This letter had a two-fold character containing expressions of love and joy to the obedient, and of rebuke and warning to the disobedient. Paul sent this letter to prepare the way for his third visit to them, to defend himself against the charges of his enemies and to warn them that their enmity would not deter him from exerting his

¹⁰² Along with two other trusted brethren (II Cor. 8:18,22).

¹⁰³ That II Corinthians was written from Macedonia (possibly Philippi) at this time, and sent by the hand of Titus, is concluded from the following facts: Paul had come from Asia, via Troas to Macedonia (II Cor. 1:8; 2:12,13) was now in Macedonia (II Cor. 9:2,4), had met Titus there and had received the news from Corinth (II Cor. 7:5,6), had sent Titus back with this letter (II Cor. 8:6, 16-18) and was soon himself to follow (II Cor. 9:4; 13:1).

apostolic authority and power if they persisted in their rebellion (See [II Cor. 10:2-6](#); [13:1-3](#)). And there was still another reason:

THE COLLECTION FOR THE JUDAEAN SAINTS

As we have already intimated, the apostle had for some time been gathering an offering for the poor saints in Judaea. He had several reasons for engaging in this project. First, he felt it was the duty of the Gentiles, who were now being made partakers of Israel's spiritual things, to minister to them in material things ([Rom. 15:25-27](#)). Second, he had *promised* to remember Israel's poor ([Gal. 2:10](#)). Third, he hoped that a generous gift from the Gentile believers would serve to *improve relations* between the church at Jerusalem and the Gentile churches ([Rom. 15:31](#); [II Cor. 9:12,13](#)).

Evidently the churches of at least four provinces had joined in this undertaking. In the Corinthian letters three of these provinces are mentioned in this connection: *Galatia* ([I Cor. 16:1](#)) *Macedonia* ([II Cor. 8:1-4](#)) and *Achaia* ([II Cor. 9:2](#)). Then, if Acts 20:4 is a list of the delegates thus far entrusted with the delivery of the gift (as it appears to be) Asia must also be included.

This was not the first time, of course, that the Gentile churches had helped the Judaeen churches financially. Regarding the request of the leaders at Jerusalem that the Gentile churches remember their poor, Paul had commented to the Galatians: "*Which very thing I was also zealous to do*" ([Gal. 2:10](#), R.V.).

And indeed the apostle had been used to deliver Gentile bounty to Jerusalem years before this, when the believers at Syrian Antioch had "sent relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea" ([Acts 11:29,30](#)).

This alone is evidence enough that the Pentecostal program, with its "all things common," had broken down. *Then* the Church at Jerusalem had enjoyed great prosperity, "*neither was there any among them that lacked*" ([Acts 4:32-35](#)); but since then the Gentile church at Antioch, and now those in the provinces of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia and Achaia, had all had to come to the support of "*the poor saints ... at Jerusalem.*" Thus the picture, unlike that presented in prophecy, is one of needy Jews receiving "alms" from the Gentiles ([Acts 24:17](#)).

PAUL THE PROMOTER

Probably the great majority of believers have looked upon Paul as one who devoted himself almost entirely to prayer, Bible study and preaching, and had as little as possible to do with organization and finances.

How wrong they are! It is doubtful, in fact, whether there ever was a greater *promoter* than Paul. Wherever he went he *organized* churches and great

evangelistic endeavors, and during the period of Acts which we are now considering he was actively engaged in an organized campaign to raise funds - large funds - for the needy saints in Judaea.

HIS INTEGRITY

One reason why he could do this so well was because, unlike some modern money raisers in the Church, he had a fine sense of honor with respect to pecuniary transactions, and his conduct in financial matters was beyond reproach.

He could sincerely say to Felix:

"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

Evidently Felix considered this a mere platitude at first, but finally he learned that he had "hoped" in vain for a bribe from the apostle (Acts 24:26).

When Paul besought Philemon to forgive his runaway slave and to accept him now as "a brother beloved" (*Phile. 15,16*) he was careful to offer to assume personally any indebtedness Onesimus may have incurred - and *this* was no empty gesture, for he declared: "*I Paul have written it with mine own hand; I will repay it*" (Vers. 18,19).

He could challenge those who knew him well: "*We have defrauded no man*" (II Cor. 7:2) "*Did I make a gain of you? . . . Did Titus make a gain of you? Walked we not in the same spirit ... in the same steps?*" (II Cor. 12:17,18). "*I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel*" (Acts 20:33) and, as proof, he could add: "*Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me*" (Ver. 34).

And thus, too, he managed the campaign to raise funds for the circumcision saints in Judaea.

The men listed in Acts 20:4 were doubtless trustees,¹⁰⁴ chosen by the churches themselves to transport their gifts to Jerusalem. To the Corinthians he had sent explicit instructions that whoever they should approve, *in writing*, would be delegated to bring their liberality to Jerusalem and that, *if it seemed proper*, he would head the delegation (I Cor. 16:3,4). And now he introduces to them "*the messengers of the churches*" of Macedonia (II Cor. 8:23) two men of God, "*chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace*" (Ver. 19).

All these precautions were taken, as he explains:

¹⁰⁴ Possibly excepting Timothy.

“... that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us:

"Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (II Cor. 8:20, 21).

Leaders in Christian work would do well to learn these lessons from the great apostle of grace, lest they bring reproach upon Christ and His cause by careless or illicit handling of funds committed to their trust.

HIS FUNDRAISING METHODS

It is an interesting fact that many who would commend the preacher for exhorting believers as to their testimony and conduct, would soon condemn him for exhorting them as to *giving*.

Indeed, some men of God have actually boasted that they tell no one but the Lord¹⁰⁵ about the needs of His work. This is a distinct departure, not only from Scripture, but from the *Pauline* Scriptures on this subject, for giving is as much a part of the Christian life as are testimony and conduct, and the man of God who forbears to exhort his hearers as to giving, on the ground that "the Lord knows all about it," may as well also forbear to exhort them as to their witness and walk on that basis.

This is not to deny, as we have said, that *some* fund-raising in the professing Church does indicate a lack of faith, spirituality and even honesty, and those who are responsible, under God, for the financing of His work should search their consciences and ask God for the sincerity, integrity and spirituality of Paul in this matter.

The letter which Paul wrote to the Corinthians at this time contains more instruction as to giving and fund-raising than any other.

In soliciting funds for the poor saints at Jerusalem, the apostle did not engage in dramatic emotional appeals or in schemes by which the donors would be giving more than they realized. On the contrary, he frankly tells them the need, and reminds them of their privilege and responsibility in the matter. Nor is there any indication of the hysteria that has often characterized frantic appeals for funds to carry on the Lord's work. He is *sane* and *reasonable* in the matter.

Indeed, he carefully *avoided* making dramatic and frantic appeals, for he had written them some time previously, urging them to *save systematically* toward this contribution (I Cor. 16:1,2). And rather than using high-pressure methods, he made it very clear to them that each should give only "*as he purposeth in his heart... not grudgingly, or of necessity*" (II Cor. 9:7).

¹⁰⁵ Though, inconsistently, they generally keep telling others how they tell *only the Lord!*

He exhibited a spirit of *fairness*, too, in his appeal for funds. "Upon the first day of the week," he had said, "Let every one of you lay by him in store, as *God hath prospered him*" (I Cor. 16:2) and in the letter before us he emphasizes this:

"For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.

"For I mean not that other men be eased and ye burdened" (II Cor. 8:12,13).

It must be remembered, however, that the carnal Corinthians had been far from liberal in their support of the Lord's work or of Paul, His servant. Doubtless the largest of the assemblies, they could easily have supplied Paul's meagre needs, yet, while toiling so earnestly among them he had had to work with his hands for his own support, and that while other churches, especially the Philipians, had sought him out to help him (Phil. 4:15, 16 cf. II Cor. 11:7-9).

Regarding the contribution to the Judaeian saints the Corinthians had exhibited the same trait. They had shown great zeal in the matter a year previous and had evidently begun the weekly collection, but this was now being neglected (II Cor. 8:10) and Titus' latest visit, having resulted only in more promises, the apostle sent him back with further instructions and exhortations about it.

With God-given tact the apostle tells them that it is, in a sense, "superfluous" to write to them about this ministry to the saints, for he knows the forwardness of their *minds* and has boasted to those of Macedonia "that Achaia was ready"¹⁰⁶ a year ago" (II Cor. 9:1,2). He informs them, too, that their *zeal* (not their performance) has "provoked very many" (II Cor. 9:2).

But their intentions must be carried out without further delay. Thus the apostle apprises them of the large contribution already made by the churches of Macedonia, and this not out of an abundance, but out of their "*deep poverty*." (8:13). Indeed, he bore the Macedonians record that they had earnestly besought him to accept a larger contribution than they could reasonably afford (II Cor. 8:3,4). And, he is careful to point out, this was all the result of a *healthy spiritual condition* (II Cor. 8:2,5).

To this challenge the apostle adds several others. They abound in other graces, why not in *this*? (II Cor. 8:7); should they not *prove the sincerity* of their professed love to Christ and His people? (II Cor. 8:8); they were ready and eager a year ago; now they should "*perform the doing of it*" (II Cor. 8:11); they now have an "abundance" with which to supply the "want" of others; some day the tables may be turned, so that *they* will need the help (II Cor. 8:14). And, of course, he advances what must always be the strongest argument of all:

¹⁰⁶ Not with the complete offering, but ready to put their plans into operation.

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

Paul had praised the Corinthians before others, but now found it necessary to send "the brethren" lest this "boasting ... should be in vain" and lest, perchance the delegates from Macedonia, coming with him, should find them unprepared, and both he and they should be made ashamed (II Cor. 9:3,4). The chief of these "brethren" was, of course, Titus, sent to "finish" what he had "begun" some considerable time previous (II Cor. 8:6). Together, these brethren were to "make up beforehand" the offering of which the Corinthians had now had ample "notice," that it might be ready as a surplus, gladly bestowed, rather than an incomplete offering turned over as a matter of necessity before it was ready (II Cor. 9:5). Thus the apostle challenges them:

"Wherefore show ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf" (II Cor. 8:24).

"HE WHICH SOWETH SPARINGLY SHALL REAP ALSO SPARINGLY; AND HE WHICH SOWETH BOUNTIFULLY SHALL REAP ALSO BOUNTIFULLY.

"EVERY MAN ACCORDING AS HE PURPOSETH IN HIS HEART, SO LET HIM GIVE, NOT GRUDGINGLY, OR OF NECESSITY; FOR GOD LOVETH A CHEERFUL GIVER.

"AND GOD IS ABLE TO MAKE ALL GRACE ABOUND TOWARD YOU; THAT YE, ALWAYS HAVING ALL SUFFICIENCY IN ALL THINGS, MAY ABOUND TO EVERY GOOD WORK" (II Cor. 9:6-8).

How many of God's children need these exhortations today! Even those in ordinary circumstances here in America have much of this world's goods - so much that too often they only want more for themselves and forget their responsibility toward God and others. The rich, generally begin by wanting "security." When they have that, they tell themselves, they will do their part in the Lord's work. As though there could be a place of greater security than the center of God's will! The result is almost always the same. They are never sure that they have enough security and their funds are always "tied up" in business so that they fail to meet the challenge and enjoy the privilege of having a substantial part in the Lord's work. Thank God for the exceptions, for they are few. Any leader in the cause of Christ witnesses the contrast between the Macedonians and the Corinthians over and over again as some who have so little bear so large a part of the financial load, while others, who have so much, share so little.

Before leaving the subject of this letter to the Corinthians, it should be observed that it contains much additional information about Paul's sufferings not

found in the Book of Acts.

Here he tells about the "trouble" that had overwhelmed him in Asia, how he had been "pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that [he had] despaired even of life" (1:8). Here he tells of his physical frailty and the pain that he endured everywhere he went (II Cor. 4:7-5:10; 12-7-9). Here he tells about his mental anxiety at Troas (2:12,13) his struggles, fears and discouragement in Macedonia (7:5) and gives a long list of persecutions and sufferings thus far endured, including stripes, imprisonments, floggings, shipwrecks, a night and a day in the deep, exhausting journeys, all sorts of perils, hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness and - that burden from which he was never relieved: "*the care of all the churches*" (II Cor. 11: 23-28).

Surely the plea of one so utterly devoted to the cause of Christ should have its effect upon the Corinthian believers - and upon *us*. While "the brethren" went to Corinth with this new letter, Paul remained in Macedonia to let their ministry and his epistle do their work.

"Those parts" which the apostle "went over" at this time must have included a larger area of Macedonia than he had previously visited, for it is evidently while on this journey that he wrote that he had "preached the gospel of Christ" "round about unto Illyricum" and "now" had "no more place in these parts" (Rom. 15:19,23).

The apostle had pledged his word to visit Corinth, by the will of God, and we have no doubt that the "three months" in Greece were spent mainly at Corinth, at the home of one of the first converts there - *Gaius* (See I Cor. 1:14 cf. Rom. 16:23).

LETTERS TO GALATIA AND ROME

While we cannot, probably, be entirely certain as to the date of the Galatian epistle, or the place from which it was written, there appear to be some indications that it was at about this time when Paul received word from the churches of Galatia which filled him with astonishment and indignation. The Judaizers had been busy again and had been largely successful not only in bringing the Gentile believers there under the bondage of the law but, as in the case of the Corinthians, in minimizing Paul's apostleship and message. As a result of this "disobedience to the truth" (Gal. 3:1; 5:7) they had lost "the blessedness" they once had known (4:15) so that they "bit and devoured" each other (5:15).

So rapidly had the situation deteriorated in Galatia that Paul immediately penned a letter to them with his own hand, defending his God-given apostleship and re-emphasizing the importance of the special message of grace which the glorified Lord had committed to him. There is more of a tone of extreme urgency

in this letter to the Galatians than in any of his other epistles.

One of the indications that the Epistle to the Galatians was written at about this time is its internal similarity to the Roman epistle, both as to doctrine and emphasis.

That *Romans* was written at this time is almost certain, for it was evidently sent from Corinth, where Erastus was the city treasurer ([Rom.](#), [16:23](#) cf. [II Tim.](#) [4:20](#)) and Gaius Paul's host ([Rom.](#) [16:23](#) cf. [I Cor.](#) [1:14](#)). It was written after Aquila and Priscilla had returned to Rome ([Rom.](#) [16:3](#)) and after Paul had "purposed in the spirit" to go to Jerusalem and Rome ([Acts](#) [19:21](#)) indeed, when he was about to travel to Jerusalem with the "contribution for the poor saints" there ([Rom.](#) [15:25,26](#)).

Writing materials would doubtless be available at the home of Gaius, and Tertius, an amanuensis,¹⁰⁷ was ready to pen the letter at his dictation ([Rom.](#) [16:22,23](#)). Haply also, Phoebe, a well known deaconess, or servant, of the church at Cenchrea (the eastern seaport of Corinth) was about to leave for Rome on business at this time. It was doubtless she who carried the letter or at least accompanied those who did. Evidently Phoebe was a woman of some rank, and faithful as a Christian, for the apostle commends her as having been "a succourer [Lit., *one who stands before, a protector*] of many," including himself, and requests the believers at Rome to receive her and to assist her in her business in any way they can ([Rom.](#) [16:1,2](#)).

Godly women had a great, if subordinate part in Paul's ministry almost wherever he went. The first convert in Europe, at Philippi, was a woman ([Acts](#) [16:14](#)) and the women of the Philippian church had labored with Paul in the gospel ([Phil.](#) [4:3](#)) and probably were still doing so at the time he wrote the Philippians from prison in Rome ([Phil.](#) [1:3-5](#)). At Thessalonica the believers included "chief [leading] women not a few" ([Acts](#) [17:4](#)). At Berea, too, those who believed included "not a few" "honorable women who were Greeks" ([Acts](#) [17:12](#)). At Athens one of the only two converts named was a woman ([Acts](#) [17:34](#)). At Corinth and Cenchrea there were Priscilla ([Acts](#) [18:2, 26](#)) and Phoebe ([Rom.](#) [16:1](#)) and in his Epistle to the Romans the apostle names several others ([Rom.](#) [16](#)).

It is a noteworthy fact that considerably before Paul reached Rome a church had already been established there whose faith was "spoken of throughout the whole world" ([Rom.](#) [1:8](#)). Those who suppose these believers were the disciples of circumcision saints who had travelled there from Judaea, should take note that it was *Paul's* gospel, and *not* "the gospel of the kingdom" or "the gospel of the circumcision," that had already begun to reach distant lands and would soon

¹⁰⁷ A comparison of [Rom.](#) [16:22](#) with [I Cor.](#) [16:21](#), [II Thes.](#) [3:17](#) and even [Gal.](#) [6:11](#), indicate that it was not uncommon for Paul to dictate his letters to an amanuensis; indeed that it was uncommon for him to do otherwise.

reach out into all the known world (See [Rom. 16:25,26](#); [Col. 1:6, 23](#); [II Tim. 4:16,17](#); [Tit. 2:11](#)).

Doubtless the apostle, in his extensive journeys, gained many helpers who, for business or other reasons, travelled to the metropolis and were used to plant the gospel of the grace of God there. Indeed, the closing lines of his Epistle to the Romans indicates that he already knew a considerable number of the believers there.

BACK THROUGH MACEDONIA TO TROAS

After a three months' stay in Achaia, or Greece, the apostle set out, probably to Cenchrea, to sail across the Mediterranean Sea to Syria, but just as he was about to board ship he learned of a plot by the Jews to capture or kill him and changed his plans so as to return through Macedonia instead (Ver. 3). Whether this new route took him over land or by another ship we do not know, though the latter seems more probable.

It appears from Verses 4 to 6 that, to foil the assassins' plot, seven of those who "accompanied" Paul "into Asia" boarded the ship to Troas as scheduled, as though there had been no change in plans, while Paul and his "beloved physician"¹⁰⁸ went north to Macedonia and sailed from Philippi (or Neapolis, its nearby port) to meet the others at Troas.

And here we come upon another one of those symbolic narratives which have become familiar to us in the Book of Acts.

¹⁰⁸ The change of person to "us" and "we", in verses 5 and 6 and to the end of Acts, indicates that Luke had again joined the apostle and doubtless stayed with him until his imprisonment in Rome.

Chapter XXXVII - Acts 20:6-12

PAUL'S MINISTRY AT TROAS

THE MAN WHO FELL ASLEEP IN CHURCH

"And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.

"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

"And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together.

"And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.

"And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him.

"When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even til break of day, so he departed.

"And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted."
-Acts 20:6-12

It may be observed that this trip from Philippi to Troas took five days, while a previous trip from Troas to Philippi took only two ([Acts 16:11](#)). This could be because they encountered *storm* on this present occasion or otherwise *calm* (equally retarding) or even because they now encountered as a *headwind* the same wind that had previously sped them on their way.

A comparison of Acts 20:7 with I Cor. 16:2 seems to indicate that already it had become the custom of the believers to meet together on "the first day of the week," rather than on the Sabbath, so that Paul's "custom" of going into the synagogue on the Sabbath days was rather in order that he might minister to them *when they were assembled together*.

Probably the Christian believers met on *our* Saturday night, however, since according to Jewish reckoning sundown on Saturday evening marked the close of the Sabbath and the beginning of the next day. That it was night time is

evident from the interesting episode we are now to consider.

It must have been a rare treat to the congregation at Troas to find so many distinguished visitors present as they "came together to break bread." There was a friend from Berea and two from Thessalonica; another from Derbe and two others from their own province. There, also, was the well known and beloved Timothy, along with Dr. Luke and the Apostle Paul himself (Vers. 4-6).

Of course they asked Paul to be the speaker of the evening, especially since he was "ready to depart on the morrow" (Ver. 7).

What a rare privilege it was to sit at his feet: the former arch-enemy of Christ, now His special representative and a veteran in His service! In all probability he would relate to them how the glorified Lord had stopped him in his wild career, *saving* him, to "*show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern*" to those who should thereafter believe on Him (I Tim. 1:16) and committing to him "*the gospel of the grace of God*" (Acts 20:24).

Though he must leave on the morrow the apostle did not spare himself. He might not see them again, and there was so much to say by way of encouragement and exhortation, instruction and warning!

But who could not listen to such a man preach, even if he "continued his speech until midnight"? Who, in any congregation, could even become drowsy under *his* teaching?

Yet someone *did* fall asleep during that service -someone named *Eutychus*. Of course, he was a "young man." Perhaps he had been very active that day. Besides, there were "many lights" in the place of meeting and evidently a capacity audience, for this young man "sat in a window." All this might well tend to make one's eyes heavy.

Of course Eutychus, sitting where he did, did not mean to allow himself to fall so soundly asleep. Doubtless he fought sleep at first and then merely indulged in a bit of dozing, but before long he had "*fallen into a deep sleep; and as Paul was long preaching, he sank down with sleep*" (Ver. 9).

The results were by no means amusing for, losing his balance, Eutychus fell from his position in the window sill to the ground, three floors below "and was taken up dead"¹⁰⁹ (Ver. 9).

Picture the consternation that must have followed: Paul's preaching interrupted by cries of horror; men rushing down with lamps or torches; the joy of the night turned into lamentation as they view the bruised and lifeless form of Eutychus lying there on the ground below.

¹⁰⁹ As a physician, Luke had evidently satisfied himself on this point.

At this point Paul "fell on him, and embracing him"¹¹⁰ said, "Trouble not yourselves [Lit., "Do not be alarmed"]; for his life is in him"¹¹¹ (Ver. 10).

Eutychus means *Fortunate*, and fortunate he was that Paul was the preacher that night, for by the goodness and power of God the apostle restored him to life.

How could they close the meeting now? Yet Paul was to travel on again the next day. Thus we read that he came up again, partook of some refreshments¹¹² and "talked ["conversed," not "preached" as in Verse 7] a long while, even till the break of day."

"And so he departed" (Ver. 11). The "so" is emphasized in the Greek to call attention to the happy circumstances attending his departure.

"And they brought [Lit., "took away"] the young man alive, and were not a little comforted" (Ver. 12).

THE SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS EPISODE

The striking symbolic significance of this episode is immediately seen when we note the following facts:

1. Paul was the preacher.
2. He continued to preach for a long time.
3. Someone fell asleep under his preaching.
4. The sleeper fell from the third story window to the ground below and was "taken up dead."
5. Paul, under God, restored him to life.

PAUL IS PREACHING TODAY

¹¹⁰ Rather out of sympathy and affection, than to imitate Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:21; II Kings 4:34).

¹¹¹ There is no contradiction here. As in the cases of Elijah and Elisha, it was Paul's act that, under God, had brought Eutychus back to life.

¹¹² The *breaking of bread* is a familiar Hebraism for *dining together* (See Matt. 14:19; Acts 2:46, et al) and does not necessarily refer to the celebration of the Lord's supper. Further, the fact that the original word for "eat" in Verse 11 is *geuomai*, "to taste," would sooner indicate that the Lord's supper is *not* referred to, for the word used in the records of the Lord's supper is not *geuomai*, but *phago*, the more usual word for *eat*. The word *taste* is doubtless used here because, the anxiety being now passed, he *enjoyed* the food. In both Verses 7 and 11 the context must decide whether the breaking of bread refers to the Lord's supper or to a common meal.

Christ on earth had sent the twelve to proclaim "*repentance and remission of sins in His name among all nations, BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM*" (Luke 24:47).

They had begun at Jerusalem, crying to the men of Israel":

"REPENT, AND BE BAPTIZED EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS ..." (Acts 2:38).

Shortly after Pentecost, Peter had said to his Jewish hearers:

"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).

From the words of our Lord and of Spirit-filled Peter, as well as from the Scriptures written up to that time, it is clear that it was God's revealed purpose to bless the nations *through redeemed Israel*.

Israel as a nation, however, spurned the call to repentance and continued to reject her Messiah, even waging organized war against Him.

It was then that God showed "*the exceeding riches of His grace,*" by saving Saul, the leader of the rebellion, and sending him forth with an offer of reconciliation by grace through faith.

Gal. 2:7-9 shows how the twelve, who had been sent to "all nations," now recognized (through their leaders) the change in program and acknowledged Paul as "the apostle of the Gentiles."

The so-called "great commission" had been brought to a standstill by Israel's disobedience. The establishment of the kingdom was to be held in abeyance. God had "concluded them all in unbelief *that He might have mercy upon all*" and Paul was sent forth to proclaim this glad news. To him was committed "*the dispensation of the grace of God*" (Eph. 3:1-3).

PAUL HAS BEEN PREACHING LONG

Paul has been preaching long - even longer than Moses. Moses preached for about fifteen hundred years; Paul has been preaching for more than nineteen hundred. The law reigned for about fifteen centuries; grace has been reigning for nineteen centuries. How great is the longsuffering of God!

In I Tim. 1:16 Paul explains:

"HOWBEIT FOR THIS CAUSE I OBTAINED MERCY, THAT IN ME FIRST [OR "CHIEFLY"] JESUS CHRIST MIGHT SHOW FORTH ALL LONG-SUFFERING, FOR A PATTERN TO THEM WHICH SHOULD HEREAFTER BELIEVE ON HIM TO LIFE EVERLASTING."

In II Pet. 3:9 and 15 *Peter* explains that the Lord "is not slack concerning His promise" to judge and reign, "but is *longsuffering* to usward, *not willing that any should perish*, but that all should come to repentance," and bids us "account that":

"THE LONGSUFFERING OF OUR LORD IS SALVATION; EVEN AS OUR BELOVED BROTHER PAUL ALSO ACCORDING TO THE WISDOM GIVEN UNTO HIM HATH WRITTEN UNTO YOU."

And *still* the day of wrath has not come! Still the message of grace goes forth! *Still* Paul is preaching!

AND THERE ARE MANY LIGHTS

If there is one fact which is recognized by all who have come to rejoice in the message of Paul, it is the fact that it explains so many otherwise difficult passages of Scripture and solves so many otherwise insurmountable problems. Where Paul preaches there are "many lights." Of course! His message was not called "*the secret*" for nothing!

It is indescribably wonderful to have one difficult passage after another become clear as this sacred secret is unfolded; to see light after light go on. Yet the very increase of the light we receive on the Word can lull us to sleep if we are not convicted and exercised by it. And this is just what has happened.

THE CHURCH FELL ASLEEP UNDER PAUL'S PREACHING

Not all at once, to be sure, but one after another, the Church lost hold of those glorious truths which are so distinctively Pauline: The "*mystery*" of the Body of Christ, its heavenly calling and position, the *rapture*, the blessed hope of our Lord's coming *for us* before He declares war on the ungodly; and even the truth of *justification by faith alone*. All these were let go, one by one until, during the dark ages the Church had fallen into "a *deep sleep*" and, like Eutychus, had "*sunk down with sleep*."

THE CHURCH FELL FROM ITS POSITION IN THE THIRD LOFT

Paul speaks of having been caught up to the *third* heaven (II Cor. 12:2). This is the highest, as far as Scripture is concerned, and it reminds us that we, who trust in Christ, have been made to sit together with Him "in *heavenly places* [Gr. *epouranious*, the *upper-heavenlies*]" (Eph. 1:20; 2:6) there to be blessed with "*all spiritual blessings*" (Eph. 1: 3).

As the Church fell asleep under Paul's preaching the appreciation and enjoyment of all this was lost and the life of the Church was gone. Could it be awakened from this sleep of death? How it needed someone in those dark ages to cry: "*Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!*" (Eph. 5:14).

Eutychus! *Fortunate!*

Surely it was only infinite grace that raised up men like Martin Luther and later John Darby and others to awaken the Church and restore it to life again.

PAUL USED TO RESTORE THE CHURCH TO LIFE AGAIN

Actually, however, it was not Luther or Darby or any of the great men of God since the dark ages, who were used to restore the Church to life, for they preached nothing new. Luther, with his "*grace alone*" and "*the just shall live by faith*," and Darby, with his proclamation of the "*one body*" and the "*blessed hope*," were only recovering truths first revealed through Paul.

As it was Paul who was used to restore Eutychus to life, so it is Paul who has been used to restore the Church of this dispensation to life, as men like Luther, Calvin and Darby have been raised up to gradually recover the glorious truths of the Pauline revelation.

One thing remains to complete the picture. Eutychus must be restored to his position in the "third loft." The Church must once more be induced to *occupy* her position in the heavenlies, for there are still thousands of true believers who neither understand nor enjoy their God-given position in the heavenlies in Christ.

Whether Eutychus *did* actually return to the "third loft" again, the Scripture does not clearly state, perhaps lest we should *presume* that the Church will thus return to her God-given place before the dispensation closes.

We *do* know, however, that after it was all over they "brought [i.e., *brought away*] the young man alive, and were not a little comforted" (Ver. 12).

And so - who knows how soon? - the Church which is His Body will be taken away from this scene forever to be with the Lord. "*Wherefore comfort one*

another with these words" (I Thes. 4:13-18).

In the raising of *Dorcas* (Lit., *Gazelle*) by *Peter*, the emphasis is upon her *activities and good works* ([Acts 9:36](#)). In the raising of *Eutychus* by Paul, no such emphasis is found. He was simply "Fortunate." Thus, symbolically, God's dealings with Israel and with the Body of Christ are compared.

Chapter XXXVIII - Acts 20:13-38

PAUL'S LAST RETURN TO JERUSALEM

FROM TROAS TO MILETUS

"And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot.

"And when he met with us at Assoa, we took him in and came to Mitylene.

"And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogylium; and the next day we came to Miletus.

"For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost."

-Acts 20:13-16

Paul's seven companions were sent ahead by ship to Assos, while he himself went by foot to meet them. The journey by sea was about forty miles, while that by land was only twenty.

It has been supposed that the apostle adopted this plan that he might enjoy a few more precious hours of fellowship with the disciples at Troas.

The fact that Verse 11 states that he had already "departed," however, and the fact that he chose to travel *alone*, without even Luke (Ver. 14) would seem rather to indicate a desire for *solitude* after the busy time at Troas. Christian fellowship is a blessed experience, but even an apostle would need time for prayer and meditation.¹¹³

It appears that after taking Paul in at Assos the ship stopped every evening. The reason for this seems quite evident. The summer winds in the Aegean Sea begin blowing from the north early in the morning and die down in the late afternoon.

There has been considerable debate as to whether a regular trading vessel was used on this occasion or whether Paul and his company had engaged a small coast vessel for their private use. Such able expositors as Geikie say they hired their own vessel, while Howson and others insist that this is "surely quite a mistake."

¹¹³ Especially since the Holy Spirit was witnessing "in every city" that "bonds and afflictions" awaited him, and he feared he would not come this way again (Acts 20:23,25).

The apparent indications that the vessel was privately engaged are as follows: The ship, if a trader, would have followed her own course. Here, however, she stopped at Assos, apparently only to pick up Paul, and passed by Ephesus simply because Paul was in a hurry and did not wish to stop there. Furthermore, nothing is stated about any other business on this voyage.

Still it seems to us gratuitous to assume from this that Paul and his company had hired the vessel for themselves.

Doubtless this was a smaller vessel designed only for use along the coast, for it sailed only from Troas to Patara ([Acts 21:1](#)). But it seems too much to assume that because no other business is mentioned it sailed to Assos only to pick up Paul. Paul may well have decided to walk to Assos because he knew the vessel was to stop there.

But even if it did sail to Assos only to take Paul aboard; this still does not prove that it was *privately hired* by Paul and his company, for the captain of a small coastal vessel might well be glad thus to accommodate a company of nine passengers. And as to *sailing by* Ephesus, the text does not state that Paul had determined that the *ship* should do this, but that he should do this, i.e., that *he* would stay aboard rather than disembark there. Indeed, the passage may mean simply that Paul chose a ship in the first place which sailed past Ephesus.

The apostle passed by Ephesus because he hastened to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost and he well knew that he could not appear on the scene among so many converts, friends and co-workers without being detained for a considerable length of time. He would therefore disembark instead at Miletus, some thirty miles further, and from there summon only the elders of the church for a farewell message of encouragement and exhortation. In this way more lasting results might be attained.

WAS PAUL OUT OF THE WILL OF GOD IN GOING TO JERUSALEM?

Perhaps this is the place to consider whether Paul was right or wrong in making this last journey to Jerusalem. This is by no means easy to determine and, depend upon it: those who deal with the subject as though it were a simple matter have given serious consideration to only one side of it - *their* side.

In our research on this subject we were amazed at two things: 1.) the extreme scarcity of comprehensive writings on a subject so manifestly significant, and 2.) the fact that the brief comments in most commentaries on Acts are so one-sided, ignoring the arguments on one side or the other, according to the author's

views.¹¹⁴

We venture, therefore, to list the main Scriptural arguments on both sides and then see how they may be reconciled.

THE ARGUMENTS FOR PAUL'S GOING TO JERUSALEM AT THIS TIME

These are mostly as follows:

1. Paul's plans were not made "according to the flesh" (II Cor. 1:15-17).
2. Later, standing before the Sanhedrin, and still later, in a letter to Timothy, he declared that from his youth he had served God with a clear conscience (Acts 23:1; II Tim. 1:3).
3. He declared his determination to continue the journey to Jerusalem that he might finish his course and his ministry "with joy" (Acts 20:24).
4. When his friends could not dissuade him from his purpose, they said: "*The will of the Lord be done*" (Acts 21:14).
5. After Paul had reached Jerusalem the Lord, rather than rebuking him, encouraged him saying: "*Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome*" (Acts 23:11).
6. Shortly before his death Paul wrote: "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith,*" (II Tim. 4:7) which, it is alleged, he could not have said had he been out of the will of the Lord in making this journey to Jerusalem.

But these arguments are not as conclusive as they may seem at first sight.

While we agree that it was not the *flesh* that prompted the apostle to go to Jerusalem at this time, it should be observed that in II Cor. 1:15-17 the apostle does not refer to *all* his plans, or purposes, much less to his purpose to visit Jerusalem for the last time. In this passage he refers to his former plan to visit the *Corinthians* (Ver. 15). It is with respect to the change in this plan that he protests: "*Did I use lightness? Or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh?*" (Ver. 17).

As to the apostle's assertions that from his youth he had lived before God "in all good conscience," it is certainly clear from his own writings that he was far from perfect and that these statements refer, not to all the details of his life, but

¹¹⁴ This is also so with regard to Paul's subjection to Jewish ritualism while at Jerusalem, but this will be considered later.

rather to his adopted course, in first opposing Christ, then turning to Him and serving Him. Moreover, the fact that he even persecuted Christ with a clear conscience ([Acts 26:9](#)) proves that it is possible to do *wrong* with a clear, though warped, conscience.

Numbers 3 and 4 above will be dealt with later, but we pause here to touch briefly upon Numbers 5 and 6.

No one would deny that Paul's *motives* in going to Jerusalem at this time were the highest; that he went with a heart filled with love to Christ and to his kinsmen; risking his very life in going. Is it strange, then, that God should encourage him after his noble stand before the angry multitude at Jerusalem and before the Sanhedrin? Would we not *expect* God to do this? This is no proof that Paul was in the directive will of God in going to Jerusalem at this time.

Nor does his statement in II Tim. 4:7 prove this. Take the apostle's heated controversy with Barnabas, his insult to the high priest (for which he apologized) and add any other failures you can find in the record; then compare them with the rest of the record and see whether he was not more than justified in declaring: "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*" Who of us has done half so well?

THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST PAUL'S GOING TO JERUSALEM AT THIS TIME

These, in turn, are mostly as follows:

1. Paul went to Jerusalem at this time, among other things, "*to testify the gospel of the grace of God*" ([Acts 20:24](#)) but long before this God had commanded Paul to leave Jerusalem, explaining: "*for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me*" ([Acts 22:18](#)).

2. There is no record that he testified "the gospel of the grace of God" on this visit to Jerusalem. He certainly did not do so by subjecting himself to a Jewish ceremony.

3. There is no record that the Lord Jesus or the Holy Spirit directed Paul to make this visit to Jerusalem (Ctr. [Gal. 2:2](#)). If he had been so directed, surely it would have been so stated, in view of all the warnings and pleas against his going.

4. While on the way, he received several warnings *from the Spirit* as to what would befall him if he went up to Jerusalem ([Acts 20:23](#); [21:10,11](#)) and it is distinctly stated that the disciples at Tyre "*said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem*" ([Acts 21:4](#)).

5. He was taken from Jerusalem to Rome as "*the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles*" (Eph. 3:1). He was also a prisoner *for* Christ, but in *this* connection he was the prisoner of Christ for the sake *of* the Gentiles.

PAUL'S SPIRIT AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

An important question to be taken into consideration here is just how much the Holy Spirit and how much Paul's own spirit was involved in this episode.

Five times in the record the word *spirit* (Gr. *Pneuma*) is used, and we believe that in each case it is clear whether Paul's spirit or the Holy Spirit is referred to.

In Acts 19:21 we read that "*Paul purposed in the spirit ... to go to Jerusalem.*" Now this phrase "in the spirit" is familiarly used of man's own spirit¹¹⁵ and had there not been a point to prove no one, probably, would ever have questioned the natural interpretation, that Paul resolved in his spirit to go to Jerusalem.

In this connection it should not be overlooked that the passage distinctly states that it was *Paul who purposed* to go to Jerusalem. If God had purposed his going, it would have been said that the Holy Spirit *led* or *instructed* him to go.

This, of course, is not to deny that the term "in the spirit" is used to show that it was the highest part of Paul's being, that part which held communion with God, that moved him to go.¹¹⁶

In Acts 20:22 the apostle says of himself: "*And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem,*" i.e., he felt himself bound to go. That his own spirit is referred to here, is evident from the fact that he *then* proceeds to say that "*the Holy Ghost [Gr., the Spirit, the Holy]*" witnesses in every city that bonds and afflictions await him (Ver. 23).

A considerable majority of translations render the word spirit with a small "s" in both Acts 19:21 and 20:22 as the natural meaning of the original. That this is correct is further confirmed by the fact that unquestionably the Holy Spirit is referred to in all three of the warnings and exhortations not to go to Jerusalem. If the above two passages, then, also referred to the Holy Spirit we would be confronted with the contradictory situation of the Holy Spirit influencing him both to go and not to go.

We have just seen that Paul himself declared that "the Holy Spirit" had warned him of the results if he went to Jerusalem at this time. The other two passages are Acts 21:4, where the disciples at Tyre "*said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem*" and Acts 21:10, 11, where "*Agabus*

¹¹⁵ See Acts 18:5,25; I Cor. 5:3; II Cor. 2:13, all of which, like 19:21, contain the definite article in the original.

¹¹⁶ But even the believer's *spirit* may err, as implied in I Thes. 5:23.

. . . took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles."

There can be no question that Luke and Paul's other companions, as well as "they of that place," viewed Agabus' prophecy as a warning from God as to what would befall Paul if he persisted in his purpose to go to Jerusalem, for they *all* besought him - *with tears* - "not to go up to Jerusalem," and it was only "*when he would not be persuaded*" that they said: "*The will of the Lord* [i.e., His *permissive will*] *be done*" (Vers. 12-14).

THE SOLUTION

Having examined the foregoing passages on both sides of the question we are in a better position to find the solution to the problem. Certainly we can see that to say lightly either that Paul was wholly right or that he was wholly wrong; either that he was *in* or *out* of the will of God in the matter, is to take a shallow view of a complex problem. Human nature and human experience are not so simple as all that.

There is no indication in the record that Paul was in the *directive* will of God in going to Jerusalem, yet it is evident also that he was not *consciously* out of God's will in going; indeed, he felt himself bound, by the highest part of his nature, to go.

The apostle had three reasons for going to Jerusalem at this time: 1.) "*to minister unto the saints*" (Rom. 15:25) 2.) "*to worship*" (Acts 20:16; 24:11) and 3.) "*to testify the gospel of the grace of God*" (Acts 20:24). The first two were to foster better relations between the Jewish believers and the Gentile churches and to show both believers and unbelievers at Jerusalem that he did not despise the law of Moses. The third reason, however, was the most important.

We view the whole scene as follows:

Years before, upon his first return to Jerusalem after his conversion, the Lord had said to him:

"Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me" (Acts 22.18).

At that time Paul had even debated the question with the Lord. These people, he argued, knew how he had led them in the persecution against Christ; how he had imprisoned and had beaten in every synagogue those who believed on Christ, and had consented and helped in the stoning of Stephen. Surely they would listen to him and his testimony might well turn them from their enmity to trust in Christ. But the Lord knew better and replied summarily:

"Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles" (Acts 22:21).

Yet, though sent to the Gentiles with glorious good news, the apostle's heart kept bleeding for his beloved people, whom he had led in rebellion against Christ. In Rom. 9:1-3 he writes of his "*great heaviness and continual sorrow*" over their condition, and solemnly swears before God that if it were possible he could wish himself accursed for them, and a few lines farther on he writes fervently that his "*heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved*" (Rom. 10:1).

Not only did the apostle pity his headstrong kinsmen; he felt responsible for having led them, some years back, in their opposition to Christ. Also, he felt responsible to *the Lord* for having stirred up all this hatred against *Him*.

Thus it was that even though the Holy Spirit bore witness in every city that bonds and afflictions awaited him if he went to Jerusalem, he still felt "*bound in the spirit*" to go; he felt that he *must* go to finish his appointed course and his ministry.¹¹⁷

The declaration of the disciples at Tyre is, of course, the strongest argument of those who contend that Paul was wholly wrong and out of the will of God in going. These disciples evidently had the gift of prophecy. They "said to Paul *through the Spirit*, that he should *not* go up to Jerusalem" (Acts 21:4).

The Greek word for "*not*" here, however, is not *ou* but *me*. It is *subjective* rather than *objective*, dealing with thoughts and feelings rather than with facts, as *ou* does. While *ou* denies a thing directly and absolutely, *me* does so according to judgment, preference, etc. This is why *me* is sometimes used as a conjunction: "lest," "that . . . not," etc.

The Spirit's word through the Tyrean disciples, then, was not a *command* but rather advice and a warning that he should not go up to Jerusalem, i.e., lest he suffer the afflictions predicted.

The greatest test, probably, came when at Caesarea the prophet Agabus,¹¹⁸ in a dramatic and impressive warning, predicted the apostle's arrest and imprisonment at Jerusalem, causing both his companions in travel and his Caesarean friends to beseech him, weeping, not to persist in his purpose ([Acts 21:10-12](#)).

¹¹⁷ A footnote in the *Scofield Reference Bible* (P. 1178) suggests that Paul had the "law-bound Jewish *believers*" in mind when he of "testifying the gospel of the grace of God." This seems improbable to us since he had already "communicated" his message to those at Jerusalem (Gal. 2:7-9) and had even "disputed" with them about it so that a testimony to them about the gospel of would not be required to finish his course. It was the Jewish multitude and their leaders to whom he had not yet been able to give this testimony.

¹¹⁸ Already known as a true prophet (Acts 11:27,28).

Once more his response clearly indicates that he did not consider this a condemnation of his action but rather a test of his faithfulness (Ver. 13).

Thus while Paul was not *directed* to go to Jerusalem on this occasion (as he had been on another, Gal. 2:2) and indeed was warned of bonds and afflictions if he went, he still did so out of a sense of faithfulness to his Lord, and God used it to give Israel one more impassioned plea from the lips of one who had been warned not to go to them; who had been told that they would not listen; who stood before them now in chains, relating the story of *his* conversion, if, perchance, it might lead to *theirs*.

After this he was taken to Rome to become "the prisoner of Jesus Christ for [the] Gentiles" (Eph. 3:1). We are nonplussed, we must confess, to find that so few commentators have grasped the significance of this phrase. It does not say that Paul was a prisoner *for* Christ (though this is also true). It does not say he was a prisoner of the Jews or of the Romans. It says he was the prisoner "*OF Jesus Christ, FOR you Gentiles,*" i.e., Jesus Christ was holding him in prison for the sake of the Gentiles, not as punishment, of course, but because his heart kept turning back to his kinsmen according to the flesh; to those for whose apostasy he held himself so largely responsible.

This solution, we believe, is consistent with the whole record and those who accuse us of exalting Paul above Christ should bear witness that we thus "magnify his office" without exalting him.

PAUL'S FAREWELL TO THE EPHESIAN ELDERS

"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.

"And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,

"Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:

"And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house,

"Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

"And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:

"Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

"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.

"And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.

"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.

"For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.

"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

"Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

"Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

"I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.

"Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.

"I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

"And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, prayed with them all.

"And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him,

"Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his

face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship."

-Acts 20:17-38.

If perchance the reader has passed over the above passage from Acts to get to our comments on it, we suggest turning back to read every word of it, for here we have the inspired record of one of the most touching incidents in the apostle's life: his farewell to the Ephesian elders. No discourse in Acts is so full of tender solicitude for his helpers in the work, along with jealousy for the purity of his God-given message, as this parting exhortation to those among whom he had labored longer than in any other city. This is the first time, too, that we read of warm manifestations of love toward Paul. Hitherto Luke, by the Spirit, has told us much about the hate and opposition of his enemies, but nothing of the affection and devotion of the Galatians ([Gal. 4:14,15](#)) the Thessalonians ([I Thes. 3:6](#)) the Philippians ([Phil. 1:25,26; 4:15,16](#)) and others.

Now we can thank God for the plot on his life as he was about to sail direct to Syria (20:3) for had he not been forced to change his plans he could never have made this farewell address to the Ephesian elders, and this precious gem would never have been placed in the crown of inspired truth.

It is important to note that the apostle sent to Ephesus for the *elders* of the church alone. He wished to speak especially to *them* regarding the work in Asia. Thus the address has special significance to pastors and leaders in Christian work. As the apostle reviews his ministry among them we do well to ask ourselves whether we measure up. As he warns and exhorts we do well to take thoughtful heed.

PAUL REVIEWS HIS MINISTRY IN EPHESUS

There must have been much excitement and joy among the leaders of the church at Ephesus when they received the message that their beloved Paul, whom they had not seen since the great uprising over Diana, was at Miletus and waiting to speak with them. Doubtless they came with all haste and, as soon as possible, gathered around him to hear what it was he wished to say.

"Ye know," he began, "from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons" (Ver. 18).

He had served his Lord humbly, as His bondsman,¹¹⁹ with many tears and testings which befell him principally by the lying in wait of the Jews. Thus the plot of Acts 20:3 was but one of many such plots. Everywhere he went his life was in danger. Sometimes the pressure became so great that he burst forth in tears of exasperation and anxiety.

¹¹⁹ This is the root of the word "serving."

Meantime he had faithfully ministered to their spiritual needs, keeping back "nothing that was profitable" to them. Considering, indeed, the *capacity* of his hearers, but never his own advantage, he taught them all that was good for them, not shunning to declare to them "all the counsel of God"¹²⁰ (Cf. [II Cor. 4:2](#); [I Thes. 2:4](#)).

Alas, how many men of God there are today who do "keep back" truths which would be most profitable to their hearers; who avoid declaring all the counsel of God, lest they lose a few speaking engagements, a comfortable position or a bit of human applause. Such *cannot* say to *their* hearers, as the apostle could to his:

"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood¹²¹ of all men"¹²² (Ver. 26).

But not only had the apostle been consistent in his conduct and faithful in his ministry; he had put all his energy into it, giving of himself above measure, like a man running to win a race.

He had taught them not only "publicly," but also "from house to house" (Ver. 20). He did not, like so many modern pastors, neglect family visitation. He knew the value of personal contact, and we may be assured that the believers at Ephesus learned some of their most precious lessons and that many were even saved, as Paul dealt with them in their own homes.

Of course the apostle kept no regular hours "*By the space of three years,*"¹²³ he says, "*I ceased not to warn every one night and day,*" and that, "*with tears,*" so anxious was he lest his words might be in vain (Ver. 31). In the light of this let us, who are in places of spiritual leadership, ask ourselves how many tears of anxiety or solicitude we have shed for those whose spiritual welfare God has entrusted to us.

But above all this, so far was the apostle from seeking material gain from his labors that he could stretch forth his hands before them and remind them that *they themselves* knew how those hands had provided not only for his own needs, but also for the needs of those who were with him¹²⁴ (Ver. 34).

Paul had written to the Corinthians reminding them that it is only *right* that the

¹²⁰ As far as it had been revealed to him, of course, for there was still more to be revealed (See Acts 26:16; II Cor. 12:1).

¹²¹ This is a Hebrew idiom disavowing responsibility for the failure of others.

¹²² The word "men" is not in the original. The next verse shows that the apostle meant all *concerned*, all who had come under his teaching.

¹²³ The three years including *three months* at the synagogue (19:8) *two years* at the school of Tyrannus (19:9,10) and a "season" after the departure of Timothy and Erastus (19:22).

¹²⁴ Paul seems always to have had a band of helpers with him, aiding him in the discharge of the many duties in which he was involved by the care of all the churches.

congregation should see to the financial support of its pastor (I Cor. 9:7-14) since the true pastor gives far, far more than he receives; indeed, he had stressed the point that "so hath the Lord *ordained*, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (Ver. 14).

But now he was addressing *pastors*, explaining how sometimes they must cheerfully forego these prerogatives and reminding them of his own example of financial self-reliance (Vers. 34,35).

In this connection the apostle reminds them of certain "words of the Lord Jesus" which were known to them but are not recorded in any of the four Gospels:

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Ver. 35).

How true is this declaration by our Lord, yet how little is it believed! If pastors really believed it they would the more "gladly spend and be spent" for their congregations. If their hearers believed it they would provide more generously for both the worker and the work.

The apostle did not say all this in a spirit of pride but with evident deep humility, yet his words indicate a consciousness of complete and unflinching fidelity to his God-given ministry. Thrice he says, "*Ye know I take you to record Ye yourselves know*" (Vers. 18,26,34). And his assertions must have been true or he would not have been able to make such an appeal to those with whom he had lived and worked so intimately for three years. Indeed, the affectionate and tearful response of his hearers prove them true.

WHAT THE APOSTLE PREACHED

Some who have gone to dispensational extremes, reading that Paul had preached repentance and the kingdom of God, immediately conclude that the apostle must have had some special temporary ministry, connected with Israel and the Messianic kingdom until after the close of Acts when the mystery was revealed to him.

This is incorrect, for the apostle had by this time already written to several of the churches about various phases of the mystery, even though all its glories had not yet been revealed ([Rom. 11:25; 16:25; I Cor. 2:7; 15:51-53; I Thes. 4:15-18](#), etc.).

In Verse 24 of our passage the apostle makes it clear that the particular ministry he had received of the Lord Jesus was "*to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*" This was *his special ministry*. But this does not mean that he would not *confirm* what Peter and the twelve had taught about the Messiahship of Christ. Could anyone suppose that those who persisted in *denying* that the crucified

Jesus was the true Messiah could possibly trust Him as their personal Savior? Assuredly not! And thus it was that Paul sought first to convince the Jews everywhere that "Jesus is the Christ."

So it is also that in the passage before us he declares that he had testified to both Jews and Greeks, "*repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Ver. 21).

Now it is quite true that as *repentance* was the message of John the Baptist, Christ and the twelve, so *grace* is the message for today. But this does not mean that repentance has no place today. Repentance is not *penitence*; much less is it *penance*. It is rather a change of mind and attitude. Grace had been *Paul's* special message up to this time yet repentance was a *part* of that message, as was also faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

As to his preaching "the kingdom of God" (Ver. 25) he still speaks of "inheriting" the kingdom of God in Eph. 5:5 and of his "fellow workers unto the kingdom of God" in Col. 4:11, both of which passages were written considerably after the close of Acts.

It must be remembered that this term, unlike "the kingdom of heaven,"¹²⁵ is a very broad one. We find it used in both the opening and closing verses of the Acts and in each case the context must be kept in view.

When our Lord, before His ascension, taught the eleven "the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3) He dealt with the *earthly establishment* of that kingdom, which the apostles hoped for and which Peter was soon to offer to Israel (Acts 3:19-21). But when Paul, in bondage in Rome, preached the kingdom of God (Acts 28:31) he would, of course, tell what had become of the offer of its establishment on earth, and explain how this was now being held in abeyance (Cf. Rom. 11:25-27).

Above all let us observe carefully that "the ministry" which Paul had "received of the Lord Jesus," was the proclamation of "*the gospel of the grace of God*" (Ver. 24). It was by preaching this message that he hoped to finish the course which he had begun so long ago.

WHAT THE FUTURE HELD IN STORE FOR HIM

There was no turning back for the apostle. He would continue, "bound in the spirit,"¹²⁶ to Jerusalem, even though the Holy Spirit had been witnessing all along

¹²⁵ Found only in Matthew.

¹²⁶ This term is an idiom meaning to feel one's self responsible. The "spirit" here, as we have shown, is his own, not the Holy Spirit, which is distinguished from Paul's spirit in the next verse by

the way that "bonds and afflictions" awaited him there.

All of us who have been called into places of service for the Lord would do well to meditate often on the next verse, in which Paul expresses his attitude toward the sufferings which would inevitably overtake him as he pursued his journey to that caldron of hate where the Lord had been rejected and crucified.

To describe it he uses the most familiar of all his metaphors: the footrace. He can allow his mind to dwell on nothing except the *race* and the finishing of his course. None of the alarming predictions divert him from his purpose. He does not even consider his own life to be of any account, that he might successfully finish his course.¹²⁷

The apostle seemed convinced that he would never again see the Ephesian elders. Whether or not this knowledge was absolute, he certainly contemplated no further ministry among them. Whether or not he may after all have revisited Asia under the conditions referred to in II Tim. 1:15; whether he may even have been permitted to carry out his purpose to journey to Spain (Rom. 15:24) will be discussed in a later chapter, but it is evident that he did not expect the brethren at Ephesus to see his face again.

What the future ultimately held in store for the faithful apostle was the prize to which he alludes in Verse 24. He had indeed run to "obtain" (1 Cor. 9:24) and had not run "in vain" (Phil. 2:16). As he finished his "course" years later, he stood ready to receive "a crown" (II Tim. 4:7,8).

THE CALL TO FAITHFULNESS

We turn now from what the future held in store for Paul to what the future held in store for the church at Ephesus.

"Grievous wolves" would enter from without, not sparing the flock" (Ver. 29). And, what is always more disconcerting, apostates would arise *from within*, "speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Ver. 30). How naturally ready unstable believers are to follow such, may be gathered from what had taken place at Corinth, where so many sought to follow Apollos - who even *refused a following!* In the case of the Ephesian church, whose elders Paul was now addressing, we are given ample confirmation of the truth of his warning. It was not long before Hymenaeus and Alexander had "made shipwreck" of the faith and had become blasphemers (I Tim. 1:19,20). And this Hymenaeus, along with another, Philetus, succeeded in "overthrowing the faith of some" (II Tim. 2:17,18). Indeed, in his last letter the apostle had to write to Timothy: "*This thou*

the addition of the word "Holy" and (in the original) by the familiar repetition of the definite article: "*the Spirit, the Holy.*"

¹²⁷ The words "with joy" are omitted in some MSS.

knowest, that all they which are in Asia¹²⁸ be turned away from me" (II Tim. 1:15).

Paul well knew that such things would take place; he knew that the world, the flesh and the devil would conspire together to overthrow what he had so tirelessly labored to build. Thus it is that he exhorts them:

"Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Ver. 31).

Christian leaders do well to take this exhortation deeply to heart. Churches, however true to the Word and to Christ, do not naturally remain that way; they naturally depart from the faith and its Author. Indeed, this is true of every one of us individually. Not one of us dare trust himself. Each must look to God continually for grace to remain true, for the destructive influences, within as well as without, are strong. Thus it is that the apostle here states that he had "ceased not to warn *every one*"¹²⁹ and thus it is that he exhorted the elders of the Church: "*Therefore watch*" (Ver. 31) and "*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers*" (Ver. 28).

In view of his departure from them, and in view of the spiritual perils that threatened, the apostle now concluded his exhortation by commending them to God and His Word,¹³⁰ but more particularly to "*the word of His grace, which,*" he said, "*is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified*" (Ver. 32).

"*The word of His grace*" was, of course, the particular message which Paul had been commissioned to proclaim. It was the message for the dispensation now dawning, and it was *this message* that God would use to establish them in the faith, especially as its glories were further revealed to Paul and through him in his epistles.

How similar is this benediction to that found in a letter the apostle had so recently written:

"Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Rom. 16:25).

It is because the Church has failed to follow these instructions for her own spiritual health and growth that she is so weak and ill today. May God awaken

¹²⁸ It is granted that the "all" here may refer to a certain company which Timothy would recognize, or to the believers in Asia as a *body*. In any case it is evident that there was serious and widespread defection.

¹²⁹ See also Col. 1:28.

¹³⁰ There is no thought of apostolic succession. The apostle does not commit them to Timothy but "*to God and the word of His grace.*"

His people to these truths and cause them to return in faith to the *one* great body of truth which alone can establish them and build them up spiritually: "*the word of His grace*"; "*the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery.*"

THE PARTING

The parting scene is almost too sacred to intrude upon.

Having finished his discourse the apostle knelt down on the shore with his beloved co-workers for a parting prayer. Luke has not recorded the prayer for us. Perhaps this would have been impossible anyway, for presently there was a mutual outbreak of grief as all present "wept sore" and "fell on Paul's neck, and kissed [Lit., ardently kissed] him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they should see his face no more" (Vers. 36-38).

Actually they should have sorrowed most of all at his prediction that apostates would arise from among themselves, but this must have been difficult for them to take in under the circumstances, and their love for Paul and their sorrow at the thought of seeing his face no more showed how much his ministry and message had meant to them.

It is touching to see the grief-stricken group accompany the apostle to the waiting ship, there clinging to him until it became necessary for him to tear himself away from them.¹³¹

THE TEARS OF PAUL

Other writers, notably Dean Howson, have observed that the tears which Paul shed during his ministry for Christ had, like those of his Savior, manifested three aspects of his nature, and that we find all three of them in this one passage in Acts.

Our Lord while on earth had shed tears of *suffering and anguish* at the cross ([Heb. 5:7](#)) tears of *pastoral solicitude* as He wept over Jerusalem ([Luke 19:41](#)) and tears of *natural affection* as He wept with the bereaved at Lazarus' tomb ([John 11:35](#)).

In this respect Paul reflected the nature of his Master and Lord as indicated in the very passage we have been considering.

First, he speaks of his "*many tears*" occasioned by "the lying in wait of the Jews" (Ver. 19). These were tears of *suffering and anguish*, wrung from his eyes by the bitter, constant, relentless opposition of the Jews to his ministry. His life, as we have seen, was in constant danger as they plotted against him, stirred up

¹³¹ The words "gotten from," in 21:1 mean, literally, "torn away" or "pulled away."

the masses against him or sought to ambush him. He had to stand his ground, flee for his life or hide from his pursuers, as circumstances (and sometimes the Lord) indicated. He had to make quick decisions, alter important plans, leave young converts and devoted friends again and again because of the violent opposition of his kinsmen. All this told on his nervous system so that he frequently burst into tears simply because the pressure was too great.

But like his Lord too, he shed tears of *pastoral solicitude*. "I ceased not to warn everyone night and day," he says, "*with tears*" (Acts 20:31). Little wonder his ministry was so effective! He wept as he dealt with his children in the faith about their lives and doctrine - he wept lest his warnings fall on deaf ears.

But he also wept tears of *natural affection*. While it is true that it is said of the Ephesian elders that "they all wept sore" (Ver. 37) who will question that Paul wept with them? It was *his love* for them that had won their hearts, and now with them he shed tears of natural human affection.

Paul's last journey to Jerusalem has both its comparisons and its contrasts with our Lord's journey thence to suffer and die.

Our Lord, of course, went to Jerusalem to die for the sins of others, while Paul went because, having led his nation in opposition to Christ, he now felt responsible to witness to them of Christ. Also, Christ went to Jerusalem in the *directive* will of God, while Paul did not. But his sufferings at Jerusalem, like those of Christ, were predicted beforehand. Also, Paul, like his Lord, was surrounded by sorrowing friends on his way to Jerusalem. He, like Christ, was himself distressed at the prospects of his suffering (Acts 21:13; Rom. 15:30,31; Cf. John 12:27). Like his Lord, the apostle also found himself the center of Jewish enmity and like his Lord he had to hear them cry: "*Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live*" (Acts 22:22).

Chapter XXXIX - Acts 21:1-14

THE GATHERING STORM

FROM MILETUS TO CAESAREA

"And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara:

"And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth.

"Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden.

"And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.

"And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, til we were out of the city, and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.

"And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again.

"And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.

"And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.

"And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

"And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus.

"And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

"And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.

"Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

"And when he would not be persuaded we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done."

-Acts 21:1-14

THE JOURNEY TO TYRE

Leaving Miletus, the apostle and his company sailed "with a straight course" to nearby Coos or Cos, famous then, as now, for its wines, fruits and silks. Here they evidently stayed overnight, proceeding on "the following day" to world-renowned Rhodes.

This famous city, named after "the island of roses" on which it was situated, was one of the busiest harbors on the archipelago. And there, some 340 years before, had been erected one of "the seven wonders of the world," a great bronze statue of Apollo which stood 105 feet high. Some historians say that the great Colossus stood astride the harbor, but this is questioned by others. About 224 B.C., however, an earthquake hurled it into the sea, where it remained a mass of bronze until about 656 A.D., when the Saracens took possession of the island and sold the metal to a Jewish dealer who employed 900 camels to carry it away.

At the time when Paul entered the harbor, if historians are correct, the harbor was still strewn with pieces of the Colossus, only parts of the two legs still standing on their bases. Perhaps he recalled the fate of the god Dagon and smiled as he viewed the wreckage.

The text does not say that the party stayed overnight at Rhodes, and it is possible that the ship went right on to Patara the same day. Doubtless they sailed only by day on this part of the journey, but the prevalence of the northwest wind in the Aegean Sea would speed them along. Dr. Clarke, in a firsthand report, says of this: "It is surprising for what a length of time, and how often, the NW rages in the Archipelago. It prevails almost unceasingly through the greater part of the year" (Vol. III, P. 380).

Patara, a harbor on the coast of Lycia, was evidently the ship's destination, but here the apostle and his company were fortunate enough to find another ship just ready to sail across the Mediterranean to Tyre. Nothing is said here about staying overnight. We do not find the phrase "the next day" or "the day following." Rather, the record, especially in the original, gives the impression that no time was lost. Evidently they changed ships *immediately* and set sail *that night* for Tyre, about 400 miles across the sea.

Now with all canvas spread and a northwest wind helping, they need not fear sailing by night. "Even the timidity of ancient navigation," says Clarke, "did not refuse, with a fair wind, to pass by night over this safe and unobstructed piece of water."

The phrase, "When we had discovered Cyprus," is expressive in the original. It indicates that they were sailing fast; that Cyprus loomed suddenly into view and then disappeared as quickly out of sight again. Doubtless the apostle thought with joy of his namesake as he passed the island.

Soon they landed at Tyre, where "the ship was to unlade her burden" (Ver. 3). At this time Tyre was in the state of decline from her glory in the days when such dire prophecies were made against her, to her desolation at the time of their fulfillment.

Luke's account of the entire voyage, from Troas to Tyre, gives the impression that the weather had all along been highly favorable. Moreover, the advantage of finding a ship at Patara waiting to sail had not only relieved Paul of his anxiety about reaching Jerusalem in time for Pentecost, but had given him considerable time to spare.

"Finding disciples,"¹³² therefore, the company "tarried there seven days" (Ver. 4) evidently the length of time it would take for the ship, a large sea-going vessel, to unload her cargo and reload.

THE SPIRIT'S WARNING NOT TO GO TO JERUSALEM

Here, as we have seen, the disciples "said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem" (Ver. 4).

As we have pointed out, it was not mere concern for Paul's welfare that constrained these disciples to urge him not to continue on his way to Jerusalem; they spoke "*by the Spirit.*" We have also shown that the phraseology, in the Greek, does not indicate a direct prohibition, but rather a *warning* and a *plea*. It is probable, further, that Paul understood that this warning was from the Spirit, for he had already said: "*The Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and affliction abide me*" (20:23).

His responses to such pleas and warnings indicate strongly that he did not regard them as a divine prohibition against his going to Jerusalem, but considered them rather as a challenge and a test of his faithfulness (See [20:24](#); [21:13](#)).

¹³² The original indicates a search. Probably Paul did not know any believers at Tyre, though they doubtless had heard much about him.

Thus, while the apostle's motives and purposes were noble indeed, it cannot be said that he was in the directive will of God in going to Jerusalem. Surely the Spirit's persistent warnings *against* going to Jerusalem were not to be construed as His leading to go there.

THE FAREWELL AT TYRE

The account of the farewell at Tyre is particularly touching. Evidently the disciples here had not known Paul personally, so that the parting scene would not be the same as that at Miletus, for example. But the remarkable fact is that in these few days Paul had already found such a place in their affections that all together they accompanied him and his party to the ship to say farewell. The addition of the "wives and children" here makes the group specially picturesque and touching.

Before parting, the whole company knelt down on the shore to pray; Paul, his eight companions and the Tyrean believers, perhaps all of them pouring out intercessory supplications for each other. The children would never forget it!

But sailing-time at length arrived and Paul and his company had to say farewell, board ship and sail away, as their new-found friends returned sorrowfully to their homes.

AGABUS' PROPHECY

Proceeding on their way the apostle and his companions stopped at Ptolemais to greet "the brethren" there, staying with them for one day,¹³³ and then continued on to Caesarea, where Paul spent his last days of freedom. Their host there was the well known Philip, like Paul a Hellenist, and therefore probably more sympathetic to Paul's cause than the Hebrew believers were.

Philip had originally been one of the seven treasurers who had had oversight of "the daily ministrations" in Pentecostal days when the believers at Jerusalem had had "all things common" (See [Acts 6:1-5](#)). Since that time, however, the Jerusalem church had been scattered by a "great persecution" and Philip had been used rather as an evangelist (See [Acts 8:4-40](#)). But while Philip was perhaps no longer actively a treasurer of the Church at Jerusalem, the fact that in addition to being called "Philip the evangelist" here, he is also designated as "one of the seven," may well imply that he still had enough association with, or knowledge of, financial matters in the Church at Jerusalem to have relieved Paul of the necessity of personally delivering the "collection" he had gathered for its poor.

This Philip also had four daughters which had given themselves to God's service as prophetesses (21:9). There was nothing wrong, of course, in women

¹³³ Evidently the length of time their ship remained in port.

prophesying in those days, for Joel had specifically predicted with regard to Pentecost: "*Your daughters shall prophesy,*" (Acts 2:17) and in the light of the Spirit's witness "in every city" along Paul's journey that "bonds and afflictions" awaited him at Jerusalem, it is not to be doubted that these damsels added their Spirit-inspired testimony to those already given.

But the most impressive and solemn warning of all was yet to be conveyed by Agabus, a known and trusted prophet who had, years before, predicted the great famine which was to impoverish the Judaeans saints. At that time he had been instrumental in procuring the first Gentile contribution for the poor believers of Judaea. This time, however, he came to deliver a dramatic warning as to what would befall the apostle if he persisted in his purpose to go to Jerusalem.

The feeling which led to the murderous plot against Paul's life recorded in Acts 23:12, could hardly have been a secret to a prophet living in Judaea. And now having learned, either supernaturally or by report,¹³⁴ about the apostle's approach, Agabus goes down to Caesarea to warn him, evidently finding him with a company of his associates and friends. Adopting the symbolic manner of many Old Testament prophets, he approaches the apostle and takes off the girdle by which his robe is held together, using it to bind his own hands and feet, and saying:

"So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles" (Ver. 11).

Now it is certain that this passage, read simply and naturally, could be interpreted in no other way than as a warning against Paul's proceeding further to Jerusalem. That Agabus indeed spoke as a prophet of God is proven, not only by the literal fulfilment of his prophecy in Acts 11, but also by the literal fulfilment of this prophecy here.

The question, of course, is whether the Spirit thus warned him to *deter* him from his purpose or to *prepare* him for the ordeal. We believe the former is the case. Has it ever been God's way to prepare His servants for testings by warning them about them? Has He not rather done this by encouraging them as to His faithfulness? Certainly this is so in the case of Paul himself (See [18:9](#); [23:11](#); [27:23-25](#)).

Certainly all those present understood Agabus' prophecy as a warning to Paul that he should not proceed, for both his co-workers, including even Luke, and the believers at Caesarea began to plead with him, with tears, to abandon his purpose (Vers. 12,13).

If Paul had the hate of the Jews and the dislike, or at least suspicion, of many of the believers at Jerusalem, he surely also had the ardent love of a host of

¹³⁴ There would have been plenty of time for such a report to reach him (See Ver. 10).

saints who appreciated his ministry as the apostle of grace, for wherever he paused to say farewell there were touching demonstrations of affection toward him.

Paul's response to the pleas of his friends reveals something of the greatness of the man and of his motives. With a heart bleeding for his kinsmen and with a deep sense of obligation toward the Christ he had taught them to hate, he was not able to view Agabus' warning in the same way as did his friends. He was no fanatic or would-be martyr; he was a veteran in persecution, with scars to show, yet he was by no means a stoic. Rather, he had a sensitive, affectionate nature, and the tearful appeals of his companions and friends were crushing him and caused him to exclaim:

"What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Ver. 13).

If any fault can be found with the great apostle for persisting in his purpose to go to Jerusalem at this time, surely no one can question the loftiness of his motives, nor the depth of his devotion to Christ. Those who charge him with consciously, willfully disobeying God in this matter, should search their hearts to see if their own motives are nearly so high or their devotion nearly so deep.

Finally all present ceased pleading with the apostle, saying: "*The will of the Lord be done.*" In the light of the context it is, of course, erroneous to conclude from this that Paul's friends now saw Paul's purpose to be in accord with the directive will of God. They rather spoke of God's *permissive* will, resigning themselves to what was seen to be inevitable.