

LESSON ONE

(1:1-26)

The Church in Jerusalem 1:1 - 7:60

Introduction - Acts 1:1-5

1 *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God. 4 And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me, 5 for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit."*

The Introduction above pointed out that this book from Luke's hand continued his effort in behalf of a certain most excellent Theophilus, the effort designed to help Theophilus to know the truth about that which he had heard. We then study the book from the perspective: here is "truth" that we can use to establish our faith more firmly. It will open our eyes to many things, such as the fulfillment of God's plans which were made before the foundation of the world, especially in regard to the establishment of a church which was founded upon his son, Jesus. Every one who accepted the good news proclaimed became a member of the body of Christ identified as the "church," Acts 2:47. We may accept Jesus in the same way and receive the same results, since the account of the various conversions is clear, and remains the same for us as for them. Too, we can watch as the apostles carry out the commands of Jesus, and fulfill his plans, as expressed in such places as Luke 24:45-49; John 20:21-23. It will be most instructive to watch the divine interference in the various places that tells us that what was done was God's doing through the instrumentality of men. We may then rest easy in the knowledge that the church was no accident in

history nor produced by men, but rather that it was the culmination of God's will at the end of the ages. Of course, since such is true, the events leading up to it were of the same nature, such as Jesus' entrance into the human arena, etc. Luke - Acts was a tremendous production. May we enjoy Luke's efforts to the fullest.

1:1 - **book** - The Gospel included important events about Jesus. Acts revealed what Jesus continued through those commissioned to complete the task for which he came to earth. He came to provide a ransom for sinners, and also to provide a basis for the church, his body, a society of redeemed sinners.

to do and to teach - The present tense infinitives in Greek indicate that these things were characteristic of Jesus' life. Peter remarked in Acts 10:38 that Jesus "went about doing good." Jesus described himself as one who came to do God's will, Hebrews 10:7, and to give his life for a ransom for many, Mark 10:45. More than once it is said of God that he was pleased in his Son, Matthew 17:5; Luke 3:22; Cf. II Peter 1:17.

V. 2 - **until the day** - About ten days prior to Pentecost.

commandment - Jesus' teaching did not end in the upper room, but was continued during the period between his bodily resurrection and bodily ascension.

Holy Spirit - The teaching mentioned above was done both personally and through the agency of the personality known as the Holy Spirit. The exact relationships of God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not explained to us. The text in John 16 perhaps best shows what the work of the Holy Spirit was to carry on what Jesus did in person. The Acts account is quite helpful in showing how this was done. We can be grateful that God was always in control through the Holy Spirit. If we then do as the apostles directed in regard to becoming Christians, we can rest assured that God accepts us.

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V. 3 - **passion**- Normally descriptive of physical suffering, but inclusive here of Jesus' death.

proofs - The Gospels tell of eleven resurrection appearances, but quite clearly others took place which are not recorded. The Greek term carries the force of showing, convincingly. They were to be Jesus' witnesses (Luke 24:48), and he left the apostles with a clear-cut testimony to preach.

It is most important to establish the group with whom Jesus worked (in preparation for the beginning of the Church). The apostles are specifically highlighted as those who were chosen and sent by Jesus.

the kingdom of God - Much instruction was given about this matter, and though they still misunderstood (v. 6), yet the book of Acts and the epistles are best considered as their presentation of the kingdom, as explained by Jesus, and directed by the Holy Spirit. It is then equal to the church and composed of the same people.

the promise of the Father - Best taken as a promise from God, rather than about God. Read Luke 24:49, where the Holy Spirit is in mind, though not explicitly stated, as is true in Acts 1:5.

V. 5 - **John** - John's disciples had included at least Peter, Andrew, James and John. Philip and Nathaniel may have been, as well as others in Jesus' group.

Holy Spirit - The fulfillment of Joel 2:27-31, as recorded in Acts 2:1ff. Note how long God had been promising this event, and now it is about to happen.

1. What period of time did Luke's first treatise cover?
2. To whom did Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, give commands?
3. How long did Jesus appear to the apostles?
4. Of what did Jesus speak to the apostles?
5. Why were they commanded to wait in Jerusalem?

On the Mount of Olivet, 1:6-11

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." 9 And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

V. 6 - **do you restore** - The book shows how their narrow nationalism is finally eliminated, and the truth of the commission in Matthew 28

QUESTIONS

impressed upon them: everyone is included in the plan of God.

The struggle to understand the nature of the kingdom/church was difficult; conversion was needed. The Old Testament was a dispensation, the basic demand being that of faith, to be expressed through the Mosaic law. Now - the same command is given (believe), but in relationship to Jesus, and to be expressed and understood through what we know as the Church. We may see so much better than they, that we wonder about their blindness.

If the Old Testament dispensation was but the shadow, however, of things to come, how unclear was the reality, the Church? If we only had the Old Testament, how much of the "Church" would we have figured out?

V. 7 - **It is not for you to know** - Jesus through the Holy Spirit, and understanding which would naturally come, revealed most of the facts later. They needed something else far more important: power from God.

authority - The Greek term's use can be seen in Matthew 28:18; Mark 1:22; Luke 7:8; 20:20; John 1:12; Acts 5:4; 8:19; Romans 9:21; 13:1,2,3; II Thess. 3:9; Rev. 13:5; 17:12. It has the basic concept of freedom or right to act, do something; perhaps because such is inherent (as with God) or given, as to men.

V. 8 - **power** - Paul describes the Gospel as God's power. It is interesting that Acts 2 shows the apostles preached the Gospel: God's power. However, the power meant here is exactly equal to the Holy Spirit, v. 5.

witnesses - The Greek word is also translated "martyr." In 1:22, this point is made as they select Matthias to replace Judas.

The men, once forbidden to enter Samaria, or areas of Gentiles, were now enjoined to go there. It would take some doing for them to realize what

was meant, and to allow their Hebrew identity to be swallowed up in a larger fellowship.

end of the earth - Acts may be somewhat outlined here, but we may miss a more important point: how Christianity overcame provincial ideas and selfish concerns to envelop the whole world. Moreover, though Acts is somewhat history, it barely skims the surface of the means by which the Gospel was spread. Acts does tell clearly, the nature of the Church.

V. 9 - Read Luke 24:51, which records the same event, and shows Jesus blessing the apostles.

a cloud - Paul says "in glory," I Tim. 3:16. For the apostles, the relationship of a cloud with God and the things of God would surely come to mind.

It is to be noted that the apostles were promised by Jesus that he would be with them until the end of the age, Matthew 18:20; 28:20. Jesus' ascension would permit him to be glorified in power, Acts 2:36, and return in glory at his Second Coming, Mark 13:26; Matthew 25:31, etc. He was to be glorified in them, John 17:10. His presence was to be theirs by means of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

V. 11 - **men of Galilee** - This helps us to see the exact group of men to whom Jesus gave the final commission, and who received the promise in 2:1-4.

QUESTIONS

6. Who has time and season in his power?
7. What were the apostles to receive? For what purpose?

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8. Did they understand how many people the commission included?

9. How is Jesus to come back?

10. Do you suppose it was human to stand gazing after Jesus?

21 So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us - one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” 23 And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. 24 And they prayed and said, “Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen 25 to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside, to go to his own place.” 26 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles.

In the Upper Room, 1:12-26

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away; 13 and when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. 14 All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

15 In those days Peter stood up among the brethren (the company of persons was in all about a hundred and twenty), and said, 16 “Brethren, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David, concerning Judas who was guide to those who arrested Jesus. 17 For he was numbered among us, and was allotted his share in this ministry. 18 (Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. 19 And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) 20 For it is written in the book of Psalms,

‘Let his habitation become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it’; and ‘His office let another take.’

V. 12 - **a Sabbath day’s journey** - Here is the only place in the Bible where the exact distance is mentioned. Exodus 16:29 apparently was considered to be limited by Numbers 35:5, though not explicitly stated.

We might also note that Olivet is said to be a Sabbath day’s journey from Jerusalem, not that the apostles were. Luke 24:50 says they were in the vicinity of Bethany.

Between the ascension of Jesus and Pentecost, Acts 2:1, is a period of ten days, Luke 24:52-53 and Acts 1:12-14 give general descriptions of the apostles’ activities during this time. Verses 15-26 relate one important event of the period.

V. 14 - The apostles, minus Judas, along with other believers, and part of Jesus’ own family, are said to be together at this time. We have no idea where the upper room was. Since Jerusalem was flattened in AD 70, we cannot point out this place today.

V. 15 - **about 120** - Note “about.” Consider also that Paul mentioned over 500 believers in Galilee, perhaps in addition to these. Peter generally is the prominent personage in the first twelve chapters, Paul in chapters 13-28. In any group, someone will generally be the leader. However, the Scriptures do not state or imply that

Peter was considered “first among equals” by either the Lord or the apostles.

V. 16 - **brethren** - A term used both specifically and generally. The LXX used the term to designate a member of the same 1) family, 2) community, or 3) a neighbor. The N.T. uses it for a member of the same family, either physical or spiritual. See, for example, such texts as Matthew 1:2; 4:18; 5:22; 7:3-5; 12:46, 48; 18:15, 21, 35; 22:24-25; 23:8; 28:10; Mark 6:3; Luke 3:19; John 7:3; 11:2; Acts 7:2; 11:1; 13:15; 15:1; Romans 1:13; I Cor. 1:1; and many others like these.

scripture...Holy Spirit...David - We need to pay close attention to this verse and to what it tells us about 1) nature of Scripture and 2) the method (how) of inspiration. Peter’s usage of the term “scripture” is typical of those recorded in the N.T., including Jesus. Similar expressions are “it is written” and “Scripture says.”

Invariably the term is applied to what now constitutes our Bible, excluding the apocryphal books which are printed in most Catholic editions. These books were considered authoritative since they were from God. Hence, whenever anyone quoted from an O.T. text, the quote was considered the final word on the subject. For an extensive study on this subject, see Clark Pinnock’s *Biblical Revelation* from Moody Press. See also *New Testament Evidences* from College Press.

V. 17 - **he was numbered** - Judas was chosen by Jesus as an apostle, but became a traitor of his own choosing.

share - The Greek word is seen in 1:26, in Luke 1:9; John 19:24. **was allotted** - This translates a verb meaning to obtain by lot or to determine by casting lots. It is found in Luke 1:9 and John 19:24. The word was used of choices made, whether divine (as with Judas and Matthias) or human.

ministry - The Greek word looks like **deaconship**; but it meant **service** in such a broad

sense that it includes apostleship here and in 1:25, as also in Acts 20:24; 21:19; Rom. 11:13; II Cor. 4:1; 6:3 and others. We should realize that the apostasy of Judas created a vacancy that needed to be filled at this time. The death of James in Ch. 12 did not create a vacancy that then had to be filled. The apostleship was not something that could be transferred. Paul’s choice was in addition to these twelve men.

V. 18,19 - Apparently a parenthesis by Luke. See Matthew 27:1ff for the parallel account. Each account can be understood to be truthful even if they describe the whole event somewhat differently. They can be harmonized if desired, eliminating what some see as a contradiction.

The text as it stands seems to be an explanation by Luke to Theophilus of some events which took place but were not too clear at the time of the writing. Luke pointed out the extra items not mentioned by Peter, since those who were listening to Peter knew about Judas and would not have needed an explanation.

V. 20 - Psalms 69:25 and 109:8 are quoted. Doubtless Peter had never associated these Psalms with Judas or Jesus, and is expressing facts only now understandable. Of importance is the idea that the apostles were to be guided into truth (John 16), and this is some of that guidance.

habitation - Generally, a dwelling place, a home; but here a place within a group.

office - The Greek term and its various forms means overseer, or as found in I Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:7; I Peter 2:12, 25. In the case of the apostles, they were the initial group in reference to the whole church. Men to oversee the individual assemblies were to be chosen to care for the local groups, but such did not and do not have only the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The N.T. was/is their guide.

V. 21 - **one of the men** - Whose qualifications are 1) accompanied Jesus, beginning

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with John's immersion, 2) witnessed Jesus' resurrection, and 3) chosen by the Lord. There was no need of other than those who knew the facts.

V. 22 - **resurrection** - They never preached other than a crucified and resurrected Christ, the salvation of those believing, the stone of stumbling to those who did not, Rom. 9:33; I Cor. 1:18. Of course, I Cor. 15 develops this subject extensively.

V. 24 - **Lord, who knowest the hearts** - How well the apostles could testify to this fact! Jesus may be meant, since he had just been mentioned in v. 21, and also had selected the twelve originally, etc.

of all men - Just what the men meant by this prayer is uncertain. Did they feel unable to discern their own desires as well as the worth of the two men, about which they could only guess? Likewise, their method of selection is of interest, since we do not know why they chose the particular method they did. However, such questions are futile and we desist.

V. 25 - **place** - The men were careful to not designate where this is, though Jesus did in John 17:12 (which prayer they heard), nor to speak evil of Judas, though they must surely have felt strongly about that which he did.

ministry and apostleship - the two terms are not identical, but do overlap.

V. 26 - **apostles** - Though the twelve are explicitly identified in this chapter, others are also called apostles in the New Testament, such as Paul; James (Galatians 1:19); Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14; Andronicus and Junias (Rom. 16:7). See also Philippians 2:25 and II Cor. 8:23. Yet none of these ever claimed to be among the 12 nor to have their prerogatives, except Paul.

The testimony of the twelve was considered normative by the early church since God was directing them. This same fact was true about Paul. Therefore, the measure of any message preached or

written was that which was considered to be from these men, and from these men alone, or those who had associated with them, as Mark or Luke.

QUESTIONS

11. Why did Luke specifically identify in v. 13 who had watched Jesus ascend?
 12. How long was it between the ascension and Pentecost?
 13. What did the apostles do in this period?
 14. Why did the Scripture have to be fulfilled? How was it (what the Holy Spirit spoke through David) fulfilled?
 15. What specific qualities did the apostles indicate must be present in the man replacing Judas? Why?
 16. Just exactly what qualifications did the apostles have that others did not have?
- ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 1**
1. Christ's "suffering" or "passion" refers to what event?
 2. How many of Christ's Resurrection appearances are detailed in the Gospels?

3. The phrase “The Kingdom of God” is equal to what commonly used word?
4. John the Baptist’s disciples had included at least four men--name them.
5. In Acts 1:8, the Greek word for “witnesses” can also be translated as _____
6. How many days separated the ascension of Jesus and Pentecost? 7. What two Old Testament passages are quoted in Acts 1:20?
8. When were the apostles to receive power?
9. How far were the apostles to be witnesses for Christ?
10. What happened to Jesus after he spoke His final words to the apostles?
11. What were the three requirements of the one to replace Judas as an apostle (Acts 1:21 - 22)?
12. Name the two men who were selected to replace Judas as an apostle. Which one was chosen? How was he chosen?

LESSON TWO

(2:1-36)

In An Apartment of the Temple 2:1-36

2 *When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were*

sitting. 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 And they were amazed and wondered, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Lybia belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” 12 And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 15 For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17 ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;

18 yea, and on my manservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

19 And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;

20 the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day.

21 And it shall be that whoever calls on the

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name of the Lord shall be saved.'

22 *"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know, 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 24 But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. 25 For David says concerning him,*

'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; 26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will dwell in hope. 27 For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption. 28 Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence.'

29 *"Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, an his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all were witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens; but he himself says,*

'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, 35 till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet.'

36 *Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."*

The News has come! The twelve were commanded to stay in Jerusalem, which they did, and are now prepared to receive the power from on high (Luke 24:49), the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). Luke

24:53 shows the apostles, the "witnesses of these things," in the temple, continually in praise to God.

Without doubt, God chose the time of Pentecost because many Jews would be in Jerusalem and present to hear the Gospel proclamation. Likewise, Jerusalem was chosen as the place of presentation, not only because of the above fact, but also because the facts of the Gospel were known to most (remember that Jesus was crucified at Passover time) and any unfounded claims (such as the resurrection) could easily be checked.

V. 1 - **Pentecost** - Normally occurred 50 days after Passover. See Exodus 23:16; 34:22; Leviticus 23:15-21; Numbers 28:26-31; Deuteronomy 16:9-12.

they - The nearest grammatical antecedent is "apostles" in 1:26. This does not prove "they" to have been the apostles. The remainder of the chapter treats the apostles, however, and not any others who were with them. The ministry of Jesus to the apostles, the events in chapter one, the subsequent events in Acts which show the unique place the apostles held in the church: all combine to argue for the apostles and against any others. Those who hold that the "120" are the group which received the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 do so without any basis in fact, rather upon poor exegesis and wishful thinking. Such a position makes it possible for everyone to be "baptized" in the Holy Spirit as the apostles were, a strictly non-scriptural point of view.

V. 2 - **sound** - The Greek word means noise, or echo. "Sound" is a good word. The idea to be conveyed is this: the sound heard is not simply a wind, but like a rushing mighty wind, as of a tornado. The significance for the apostles may have been varied, depending upon their state of mind.

The promise of Jesus of a mighty power to come upon the apostles was described by the term "Holy Spirit". We do not, as a rule, connect the Holy Spirit with wind, or wind with God.

However, for the men sitting in the house, the situation was different. The Greek term (if they spoke it); the Aramaic term (which probably they spoke): the Hebrew term (the language in which most of their Bible was), all had the varied meanings of wind, breath, etc.; then spirit, mind, attitude/disposition, and God. The O.T. used the Hebrew term in all these ways. Here are some examples: as wind, Genesis 8:1, “and God made a wind blow”; as breath, Job 27:3, “as long as my breath is in me”; as one’s disposition/attitude (“spirit”), Numbers 5:14, “and if the spirit of jealousy”; as that part of man from God which returns to God at separation of spirit and body, Isaiah 57:16 “from me (God) proceeds the spirit, and I have made the breath of life”; (Note the idea in Eccles. 3:21; 8:8; James 2:26) and of God, Genesis 1:2; Job 33:4, “the spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (It is thus often a phrase which equals God, as in Psalms 33:6; Isaiah 30:33). These ideas could be multiplied but this will suffice to help us see that the sound like that of a rushing mighty wind would have created in the minds of the “twelve” the concept of God in their presence, a God of power, might, ability.

house - Can refer to the temple, as in 7:47.

V. 3 - **tongues** - Symbolized like a flame of fire (though not actually fire).

Both the wind and the fire were O.T. symbols of God, as in II Sam. 5:24; I Kings 19:11,12; Psalms 104:3; Ezekiel 37:9; Exodus 3:2; Deuteronomy 5:4; Hebrews 12:29. Recall John 1:32, when the Spirit descended as a dove upon Jesus, “abiding upon him.” The Spirit of God lives in Christians, II Cor. 1:22. Hence, the Spirit may take different forms in relationship to man.

As we consider the Holy Spirit coming upon these men, it will be instructive to compare Luke’s Gospel with Luke’s history. Consider Luke 1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25; 3:22; 4:1; etc. Then Acts ch. 2, 7:55; 8:17, 29; 10:19; etc. Luke shows the coming

of the Spirit in both sound and sight to direct the lives of these twelve men, upon whose shoulders the proclamation of an everlasting Gospel rested.

It has been pointed out that though this day of Pentecost seems of great importance, it is not found to be so in early church writings (including the N.T.); the day of Christ’s resurrection is the day of prominence.

V. 4 - **tongues** - Identified as a language, spoken and understood. Note the expressions which show the identification of tongue with language in verses 6, 8, 11. I Cor. 14:21 makes a positive equation of “tongue” with language. There is nothing in the N.T. to cause any other interpretation than this: tongue = language. Those who make “tongue” equal to something else, do it in opposition to the evident usage, and not because of any usage.

V. 5 - Luke identified various groups (v. 9-11) who were hearing and seeing the heavenly event, as the apostles spoke “the mighty works of God.” The people were characterized as devout (cf. Luke 2:25), and dwellers in Jerusalem. It may be that they dwelt there permanently, or were temporary dwellers from Passover to Pentecost. The point is made that all were Jews, in sympathy if not by birth.

One can think of the tower of Babel where God brought confusion by mixing languages. Now He unites through the same medium. It is important to note that no Scripture can be cited that shows such a gift was used to “evangelize” or used other than in a meeting of brethren.

V. 6 - **they were bewildered** - Though all “dwelt” in Jerusalem (and perhaps all understood a common language like Aramaic) various language groups were represented among them. The sound drew them together, but the bewilderment came when the realization came that all were hearing in their own particular language despite the fact that the twelve apostles (the ones who were speaking) were Galileans (and not, therefore, capable of speaking so many different languages). As a matter

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of interest, notice how widely Jews were dispersed in the world. Peter's epistles were addressed to the "dispersed," I Peter 1:1ff.

V. 11 - **our own tongues** - The usage of the Greek term is the same in verse 4.

mighty works - We are not told what these things were, so it is useless to speculate.

V. 12 - **all were amazed** - The exact results intended by the "wind" and languages. The signs were not the message, but to get attention for the message. The phenomena were, however, a partial fulfillment of God's prophetic statements through his prophet Joel, as Peter will say. God had been preparing for this event since before the foundation of the world. It is now the fullness of time and the mystery, long hidden, is to be revealed, a mystery that concerned Jesus and the unique role he filled in man's history, being the actual basis for man's redemption, and forming the foundation of the church (the kingdom of God, which also was/is Christ's body), within hours of being a historical reality.

V. 13 - **new wine** - The Greek word means a wine that is sweet. Since the time was spring, no "new" grape juice had been made from "sweet" grapes and preserved by one of several methods. If the skeptics' remarks are taken at face value, "new wine" could produce inebriation.

mocking - Some were predisposed to explain the phenomena in terms contrary to the truth. Such had always been so, and would continue to be. Consider the parable of Jesus in Luke 8, the comment and quote of an O.T. text from Isaiah in Matthew 13:14-15; and Paul's use of a like text from Habakkuk 1:5 in Acts 13:41; and use of the Isaiah text in Acts 28:26-28. (The basic Greek term was used in ch. 17:32 to describe what some did when Paul preached about the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead.) They jeered at the signs and perhaps also those who were minded to accept said signs as from God. Peter had a ready

response to the amazement of some, the skepticism of others.

V. 14 - **Peter** - He will now begin a sermon, not only intended to allay the charge of some (v. 13) but to show that the Jews should have been prepared for what had happened to Jesus, and what was now beginning to happen in the "church age."

The first major task of the apostles was to show the Jews the cross as it related to God's plan for the Messiah. Their problem was manifold, but basically involved seeing Jesus as both God and man, and both a Messiah and a suffering servant.

the eleven - As with another term, "the twelve," those who accompanied Jesus were meant, and excludes the "120" as remarked above.

men of Judea - He addressed the crowd, though we know not if all understood, or if some did, because we know not if the crowd could all understand a common language, or if only some did (hence the need to have other languages spoken by the apostles). As obvious, but not able to be settled, we don't know if, in addition to the miracle of sound, sight, speech, there was also a miracle of hearing.

V. 15 - **These are not drunk** - Whether or not the scoffers really meant what they said is anybody's guess. They may have suggested it to avoid praise (cf. v.11) or because they did not understand the phenomenon, or because they understood, but did not wish to believe, etc. As Peter stated, drunkenness was unlikely, and offered a more reasonable interpretation of the manifestation.

V. 16 - **this is what** - Peter asserts that God had planned just such an event to usher in a new era, the last days, in which the pouring out of the Spirit would be one event. Turn it around, and Peter said: what was spoken by the prophet Joel is fulfilled in what you are hearing, seeing, etc. Peter said, in effect, that everything he quoted from Joel was then being fulfilled. Many try to take the

prophecy apart, and asserts each piece must be more or less literally fulfilled. Peter seems to assert the opposite. The gist of Joel was the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. The subsequent events were results of this cause. It is then unnecessary to look for or expect any fulfillment of Joel beyond the apostles.

As a general conclusion in consideration of N.T. quotes from O.T. texts, one should not assert what the N.T. does not assert. Contrariwise, if the N.T. asserts a fulfillment, then the safest and best course is to accept it. As illustrations, see Matthew 1:23; 2:15, 17; 4:15-16; Acts 13:33-41; 15:15-17; etc. Peter certainly interprets Joel by that which he said, and the interpretation was inspired. That is hard to argue with.

V. 17 - **pour out my spirit** - As with 2:38, the question is: was the Spirit Himself given (poured out) or gifts from the Spirit? The O.T. Hebrew text says “poured out” but that doesn’t settle the matter. It seems from various texts that either position could be true insofar as the apostles were concerned. Certainly if the person of the Holy Spirit is meant, it can only be in a manner of speaking, as best we know, since we can’t conceive of one distinct person being in twelve different bodies at the same time. However, since God is not limited as we are, such is quite possible. See John 14:23; Rom. 5:5; Eph. 1:13; I Cor. 6:19; II Cor. 1:21,22; I Thess. 4:8. The end result was what was important, and we can see that for ourselves.

V. 20 - **day of the Lord** - Normally used in the N.T. epistles to mean the Second Coming, as in I Cor. 1:8; II Cor. 1:14, Phil. 1:10; I Thess. 5:2; II Thess. 2:8; I Tim. 6:14. Of course, there may have been more than one “day of the Lord,” with one yet to come when the epistles were written. It may also be true that Joel’s expression included all the time in the “last days,” so that his prophecy included the Second Coming. Again, as remarked about, the gist of Joel’s prophecy was what was occurring that day to the twelve.

V. 21 - **whoever calls** - Paul has the same statement in Romans 10:13. It apparently means that any person, regardless of who it is, may receive salvation if said person turns to the Lord for salvation. Of course, this idea of universal salvation was foreign to Jewish concepts, in the main, and definitely not understood by Peter, the speaker, the other apostles, or those listening. The whole Acts account gives various struggles of the early Christians to overcome their provincial thinking, and see the truth of the statement in Romans 3, that God is “the God of the Gentiles also.”

name of the Lord - This expression equals the person of the Lord. Many times “name” means the person, as in Acts 3:16; etc. We might notice that this is one of several times when the texts referring to God in the Old Testament are applied to Jesus in the N.T. Consider Isaiah 45:23 and Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10-11; Psalms 34:8 and I Peter 2:3; Isaiah 8:13 and I Peter 3:15.

V. 22 - **Jesus of Nazareth** - This phrase identifies who is the subject of Peter’s remarks. Many were called “Jesus.” We need to remember that the real issue is this: do you and I believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God? Peter affirmed this proposition in Matthew 16:16, as did the other apostles.

Peter proclaimed that the events were part of God’s plan; the above fact (including explicit details about Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection) that was prophesied by Joel to happen in the “last days” - all was taking place just as God had intended.

mighty works, wonders and signs - Three aspects of any miracle, viewed from what it took to do it (mighty work), the response it caused in the viewer (wonder), and that it (sign) pointed to something beyond itself.

you yourselves know - The Gospels are replete with miracles no one could deny. The case is much like that in Acts 4:16. Many of those in the

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audience had knowledge of Jesus' works, or were themselves among the blessed. It was as Nicodemus said in John 3, "We know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, except God be with him."

V. 23 - this Jesus...delivered up - Further evidence that God had planned to redeem man, and counted the cost to do so. Consider what light this sheds on the "scandal of the cross": it was God's plan! For God, the events of the cross were the means of the reconciliation of the world. It was only to the minds of men out of tune with God that the cross was a scandal.

lawless men - Probably the Romans, but could well mean men with no restraints, such as the Jewish leaders or Pilate; whose only restraint was what worked for them personally. Jesus' death was not a matter of helplessness: God foreknew it; but men were still guilty of it, because they, with power of personal judgment willed it to be so. The crowds shouted to Pilate, "Crucify him (Jesus)." They accepted blame for his blood, Matthew 27:25.

V. 24 - God raised him up - Note how clear and bold Peter is, within a city where the facts he preached could be easily checked. Only an abundance of evidence could have changed the apostles into such forthright witnesses. Consider also how much Peter's ideas about Jesus' death and resurrection had changed since he first heard about it.

pangs of death - Probably best understood as referring to that which held Jesus (i.e., death), which is likened to the trap or snare that held whatever it caught. In Jesus' case, God planned that death would not triumph over Him who is Life. As Peter said, "It was not possible" for death to hold Jesus. Obviously the resurrection provided the best perspective from which to view the crucifixion, then or now.

V. 25 - This is one of the interesting usages of prophecy Peter makes, through the leading of the Holy Spirit. The text (from Psalms 16), as Peter

explained in verses 29-31, could not refer to David, and to no one else but the Messiah. In it, the Messiah had expressed the confidence that a resurrection (in his case) would occur, since he, being raised, would enjoy the presence of God after the resurrection from the state of the dead.

In this connection, consider how often Jesus spoke of his resurrection. The epistles show what the resurrection means to us as they elaborate upon the meaning and application of Jesus' death in our behalf.

V. 27 - Hades (Hebrew "sheol") - The term really describes, not so much the actual grave, or the decay of the flesh, but rather the dead in total, all those who have died, regardless of their actual state. The meaning, then, is that the one David is quoting expected to be restored to life again, not remain among the dead. Of course, the apostles were witnesses of this fact, additionally substantiated by Peter's argument in verses 29-31, that David could not have been speaking of himself, the facts being contrary to it. The Psalmist was then shown to have been speaking of the Messiah who was to come, and now identified to be Jesus. For us as Christians, knowing that Jesus existed before the time of the Psalmist (since Jesus is eternal in nature), we can understand that Jesus through the Psalmist foretold his own death, resurrection, etc.

The Greek word for Hades occurs ten times in the N.T.: Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:31; Revelation 1:18; 6:8; 20:13,14 and our text. It is equal to the O.T. "Sheol". The Greek word for hell occurs in the following places: Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6. It is important to note that we should not read hell in our text, since that gives a misunderstanding of the actual events. Jesus did not go to hell as we think of it, but rather to Hades which is simply the place of the dead, inclusive of all the dead.

corruption - To be understood in parallel with Hades, and meant the state/place of the dead, rather than referring to the physical body, per se.

V. 28 - **thy presence** - The Greek says “with your face” meaning God’s actual presence. The Greek term “face” often meant the person or the person’s presence.

V. 29 - David’s tomb was within the city walls, as seems evident from Nehemiah 3:16. Solomon was apparently also buried there. (The “tombs of the kings” now extant are apparently not the ones Peter had in mind, since they date only from the Roman period.) This the Jews listening all knew. Hence, the Psalm could only refer to the Messiah, who was being preached to them as Jesus of Nazareth.

V. 30 - **God had sworn** - The text Peter has in mind is II Sam. 7:12-16; and Psalms 132:11-12. Note Luke’s record of Gabriel’s remarks to Mary, Luke 1:32-33. Since the Messiah’s resurrection was a matter of prophecy, thus truth, the Jews could not argue the point. All Peter needed to do was show that Jesus was the subject of that prophecy.

V. 32 - **we are witnesses** - The proof positive of the resurrection of Jesus was in the twelve apostles who were eyewitnesses of the matter.

V. 33 - **Being exalted** - The promise to David had been fulfilled at last, since Jesus was the fulfillment. The greatest era in the Jews’ history, known as the “last days,” had come. Paul remarked as much in I Cor. 10:11. The thing that was different, however, was that Jesus was exalted in heaven at God’s right hand, while the Jewish people, as a nation, had supposed that the Messiah would sit upon a throne in the (earthly) city of Jerusalem, and establish an earthly kingdom. Of course, they were sadly and badly mistaken. The kingdom to be brought into existence by the Messiah was to be spiritual in nature, not material, and its king was to reign from heaven not upon earth. This point about “Jerusalem” was enlarged and clarified by Paul in Galatians 4:21-31. The kingdom of which the Messiah was to be king was/is the Church, the body of Christ. In this way, Jesus sat upon the throne of his father David, ruling

over a kingdom that, by its very nature, could have and would have no end (since the kingdom was not material in nature, but spiritual. Material things, all of them, have an end, I John 2:15-17).

the promise (of the Father) - See Luke 24:49. It is noteworthy that God is said to do this in Joel, and Acts 2:17; while here Jesus is said to “pour out” the Holy Spirit, or at least gifts of the Holy Spirit, accounting for what they saw and heard. Hence, Jesus and God are said to have done the same things; another item which shows Jesus’ deity.

V. 34 - **David did not ascend** - Peter again appeals to Scripture to establish his case, using the same Scripture Jesus had used earlier to show the misunderstanding of the Jews (see Matt. 22:41-45). It was Jesus who ascended into the heavens to begin to reign, not David. We do not think that Peter affirmed anything about what David did at death, but rather stated what happened to Jesus as the subject of prophecy.

V. 36 - **Let...Israel know** - By virtue of the prophecies, the testimonies and the empirical evidence, the fact was clear: Jesus of Nazareth was Lord and Messiah, the person the Jews had crucified. (Note John 17:5, 24-26; I Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:20-23; etc.). Observe also how David’s “Lord” and Peter’s “Lord” are declared to be one and the same, and that “Lord” and “Messiah” were equated, all in reference to Jesus.

Now, as we begin study of 2:38, we must recognize the following: The basics are to be considered in this text, and 2:42. It must be recognized that good and honest men have labored long over this whole section and yet have differed over what is therein said. It will not do, therefore, to argue that the Bible “says” it (whatever), and suppose that statement will end the discussion. The question to be resolved is: what does the Bible “say,” here or elsewhere? May we then approach the text within that sphere of thought, and do our best to understand exactly what God did say to us. It may further be added that even if we, or anyone

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else, is able to discern the exact import of these verses, that gives no reason for pride, nor does it mean that practice will be equal to understanding. God may well save because of faith and despite some/much misunderstanding (with the resultant disobedience or lack of obedience). Stated differently, grace may be greatened to some/many as God so desires. Be that as it may, no one is hereby relieved from knowing and doing as well as possible. Neither are we privileged to offer salvation other than as God directed.

QUESTIONS

17. Did God plan for the Pentecost event to happen?

18. How many of the Jews were to be in Jerusalem for this feast? (See Ex. 23:14-17; Lev. 23:15-21; Deut. 16:9-12).

19. With whom did Peter stand up? To whom did the crowd address their questions?

20. How many things did God plan or perform in regard to Jesus, according to Peter's sermon?

21. What was the point about David's tomb?

22. Peter said the Jews had done what to Jesus?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 2

1. Pentecost occurred how many days after the Passover?

2. How many people are referred to by the "they" in Acts 2:1?

3. Wind and fire are Old Testament symbols of what Being?

4. To give an explanation of what had happened, Peter stood up with whom (Acts 2:14)?

5. The "day of the Lord", as normally used in the New Testament, refers to what event?

6. Explain why "tongues" in Acts 2:4 should be understood to be spoken and understood languages.

7. List each country, region, people group mentioned in 2:9-11.

8. Complete the following statement: "Luke shows the coming of the Spirit in both _____ and _____ to direct the lives of these twelve men, upon whose shoulders the _____ of an _____ rested."

9. Which Apostles preached the sermon recorded in Acts 2?

10. Which Old Testament prophet predicted that "God would pour out my spirit upon all flesh"?

11. What does the term "day of the Lord" (as normally used in the New Testament epistles) refer to?

12. What happens to whoever "calls on the name of the Lord"?

13. Complete the following statement: “Three aspects of any miracle, viewed from what it took to do it (_____), the response it caused in the viewer (_____), and that it (_____) pointed to something beyond itself.”

14. What does the term “Hades” (Hebrew “sheol”) really describe?

15. Does Acts 2:27 teach that Jesus went into hell? What does this verse really teach/indicate?

possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

V. 37 - **cut to the heart** - The verb means to sting or to cut or to pierce. It conveys the idea that Peter’s words stunned them, not only because what he said was recognized as being true, but also because of the enormity of the truths presented.

to Peter and the rest - Though Peter had preached, and answers their question, the other eleven may also have been speaking. The twelve were recognized as those who would know the answers, on the basis of what had been seen and heard, and so they were asked. This is but another indication that only the twelve were recipients of Joel’s prophecy, and properly the subjects being described in 2:1ff.

what shall we do - Not a rhetorical question, but one for information. They had accepted as true what Peter had said. They now believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, and that they were guilty of sin in respect to His crucifixion.

V. 38 - **repent** - The Greek word means: change your mind (and thus your life). It is a prominent N.T. theme, involved in the initial response to the gospel facts, and in subsequent Christian life. One never gets through repenting, since (like Paul in Phil. 3:13-14) one must always “press forward” in better living, higher goals, following in Jesus’ footsteps.

It is a basic premise behind the N.T. epistles that those to whom they were written will conform to the stipulations therein. Hence, repentance is presumed on the part of the recipients. Stated differently, to have the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is going to demand constant

LESSON THREE (2:37-47)

Receiving God’s Word Acts 2:37-47

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” 38 And Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him.” 40 And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers.

43 And fear came upon every soul; and wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they sold their

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mind-changing, seen in life-changing. Nothing else will suffice.

The doctrine of repentance is much more forward looking than being concerned with the past. The Christian must live in the future, not the past. We do people a disservice with our “faith”, repentance, etc.,” if we leave an impression that repentance is only necessary to becoming a Christian, rather than essential to remaining a Christian.

be baptized - The second of the two commands, the results being stated next. This is the first outward action commanded, and actually the effect of faith and repentance. We are active in believing and changing our mind, and express our acceptance of Jesus as our Savior, in a way that all can see, by our obedience to the command to be immersed. By these three: faith, repentance, immersion, we are in Christ, Galatians 3:27. (See comments on 8:36 please).

forgiveness of sins - A promise to be received by faith. We cannot prove that such has been done. We accept the fact that our sins have been forgiven because of our faith in God’s character. We do what Jesus commands, and believe that God will keep His promise(s). John’s immersion was for the forgiveness of sins, but like the sacrifices of the Old covenant, depended upon the blood of Jesus (Cf. Mark 1:4), Hebrews 9:15-17.

gift of the Holy Spirit - There is so much controversy over this point (as well as the preceding ones!). The argument over the nature of the Holy Spirit, the relationship of the Holy Spirit to one’s conversion, then the subsequent effects upon that (converted) person, whether the gift is the Holy Spirit Himself, or a gift from Him - all these are at issue here. We think it is best to take the text as meaning the person of the Holy Spirit, as presented in Romans 8:9-11. So then, the person of Jesus gave his life for all our sins, the person of the Holy Spirit is given as a guarantee of our eternal inheritance, II Cor. 5:5.

V. 39 - **the promise** - Some consider this to be the same promise as in 1:4; some think it refers to the prophecy of Joel, especially that in v. 21, but not excluding the other parts of the prophecy relating to items individuals were to receive. Some also hold that the “promise” was only to the Jews, not to Gentiles, and Acts 2:38 should not be cited by anyone as applicable to this present age, considering that the “everyone” means only Jews, and that Gentiles were/are to be treated differently.

We think the “promise” means Jesus and all that he means, and is for everyone, anytime, anywhere. The rest of the N.T. never indicates anything else, or any other message. If God had intended to have another Gospel, etc., he surely did not indicate it anywhere.

It is also pertinent to remark that Peter (and the other apostles) surely said more than they understood. The term “you and ...your children, and ...all that are far off” was not thought to include Gentiles, only Jews. Hence, the experience in Peter’s life in Acts 10 was necessary to make him (and the rest of the Jews) understand that everyone was meant, not Jews only. As Peter stated, “I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him,” Acts 10:34-35. Paul, the Jew, was specifically told that he would be sent “far away to the Gentiles,” Acts 22:21. Inspiration did not extend to understanding of the revelation which the apostles received. It was with them as it was with the men of old, I Peter 1:10-12. They were as we are: God’s revelation is one thing; our understanding of God’s revelation another thing. We do well to keep this in mind as we study, that we are attempting to understand God’s revelation. All men are equal in this respect. It is not that God’s revelation cannot be understood (and obeyed), because it can be. The point is, however, that we are humans who are trying to know what is divine. The task is great and often life’s experiences are needed to understand some things in God’s Word. Others may have perceived better than we, and so what others say about God’s revelation

might need to be considered. All need to study and keep the mind open while studying.

Looking ahead to v. 42, because of the importance of the verse, an extended study is given. The reader should remember that probably the essentials of church life are stated. Even though many of the things written in the epistles may not have been known by those first Christians, they were still Christians, no more and no less. We do well to remember that when we get into discussions with others about what is essential to the Christian life, what characteristics must one have, names worn, etc.

V.40 - **save yourselves** - This command is passive: "be saved." However, it amounts to this: those listening were to avail themselves of the salvation offered by obeying the immediately preceding commands given. We would understand these instructions from the apostles as being the first fulfillment of Matthew 16:18-19; John 20:23; etc., in that the apostles were the human instruments God used to reveal his new covenant for all people, Jews and Gentiles. The apostles' word was then law in the sense that it was what God had decreed.

crooked - The opposite of straight. Philippians 2:15 has the same idea. Many different terms are used to describe people of that day: evil, adulterous, perverse; all various ways to describe sinners. The exhortation was, then, to save themselves from the state of being classed as sinners to being classed with the "saved."

V. 41 - **those who received** - Note here Hebrews 4:2, and the children of Israel of whom it speaks. Consider also the significance of the idea: "those who received." It is stated as if they had choice, rather than "had been chosen" or "were made to do so," etc.

The apostles made up the initial body to which the 3,000 were added consequent upon their immersion "into Christ" as Galatians 3:27 states. We are persuaded that no one is saved (= being in Christ) apart from believing in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God, changing one's mind to conform

to that fact, issuing in immersion of the person in water.

V. 42 - **devoted** - The Greek term is in a present participle form, indicating a habit of life, what was normally done or practiced, although the verb itself has that sort of idea too (it can be seen in the following contexts: Mark 3:9; Acts 1:14; 2:46; 6:4; 8:13; 10:7; Rom. 12:12; 13:6; Eph. 6:18 and Col. 4:2), indicating a perseverance in something, characterized by perseverance, loyalty, constancy, etc.

apostles' teaching - The apostles continued what "Jesus began...to teach," Acts 1:1 and by the authority he had given to them, Matt. 28: 19,20.

We can see that others taught or had a teaching in the New Testament, (I Cor. 14:6, 26; Col. 3:16; II Tim. 2:2; 4:2; Heb. 5:12, etc.) but it is also quite plain that the apostles' teaching was considered normative and authoritative, not only by themselves, but by the early Christians. (Hence, others such as the 120 were not considered by Luke in his history of the church as important enough to even mention in this respect.)

We need to think about this concept from the perspective of what the apostles taught. These first Christians adhered to the doctrine of the apostles, so that what is meant by our text is that they kept listening and wanting to be taught so that they might practice correctly. The sum total of the apostles' doctrine included many things not listed in v. 42. The epistles represent their doctrine, as well as the next three items in v. 42, namely, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer.

The aim and intent of any study needs to be that of understanding exactly what the apostles taught, so that we might obey it. Any claim to be a New Testament Christian necessitates such procedure. Such attempt has the distinct plus of appealing to the Bible as an objective standard. We must disclaim any other than the Bible as an authoritative guide, while believing what Jesus himself taught or through his chosen apostles as our sole guide.

However, the ideal is not so easy to accomplish as to say. Many people accuse others of having unwritten creeds plus the written one.

Consider two things as illustrations: inferences, and systems of thought or doctrine. Inferences are, by nature, not stated. Any statement would have one inference, or more. We have to be careful about how firmly we insist on inferences. If others cannot honestly see the inference we see, we should not insist they do so before we accept them. (An example might be the kind of bread to be used in the Lord's Supper, or the use of musical instruments.) If we do so, we make human wisdom and reasoning the test of brotherhood. We have no right to do that. Faith must be based upon God's revelation, not man's inferences from it.

The second point is this: deciding what is considered the doctrine of the apostles, and, upon that decision, how it is applied. The inspiration of the N.T. can be asserted with good reason. However, no one can claim inspiration for our understanding of said books, nor the particular way one visualizes their relationships. For instance, we struggle with the concept of law versus grace, and decide that grace is the system that saves us. But we still tend, for various reasons, to make the grace system a law system. There are so many areas where God has not spoken that we sometimes feel uncomfortable. We want to have a "thus saith the Lord" for any and all practices. Hence, we may be prone to see an inference where there is none, or not that which we wish to see. (Illustration: fruit of vine prohibits orange juice.) Moreover, we argue for liberty in opinions, and justly so. But liberty must be just that, not another law system, whether written or unwritten. If God had only 1) clearly revealed what of the teaching of the apostles was for "Christians only," or 2) what system to use to put things together, how much easier it would have been! Alas! we say: "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where they are silent, we are silent." It is just as true, and maybe more needed, to say, "Where the Scriptures speak, we are silent; where the Scriptures are silent, only there may we speak."

But if so, may we respect the source, and consider it as human, not divine.

fellowship - It is all too common to consider fellowship as that which we do at meals, or at a party, etc., and not also (and more correctly) what we have in Christ. We need to stress the second, that the first may be more meaningful.

Any first discussion of this subject, however, even if the above is granted immediately brings up the issue: who is in Christ, or, God is father of what person? Though it is true that everyone who is in Christ is also in fellowship with everyone else, we individually decide those whom we consider to be in Christ. By this action, we thus choose with whom we have fellowship.

One of the questions that may be asked about our text specifically is this: if fellowship is "automatic", why did Luke state that they "continued" in it, much as they continued in the other things? It seems that continuing in teaching, etc., would automatically maintain the fellowship. Hence, the term may have been used merely to state what was true, rather than to indicate something the Christians did.

Christians share in the grace of God, and in the lives we live by His grace and His Spirit being in us. God commands us all to take care of one another in love, which is everyday fellowship.

A study of the words in the N.T. related to fellowship yields an idea of commonness, hence of mutual relationships, then the results from the relationship. The opposite concept would be attention to that which is one's own, or concerns on an individual level rather than a collective level.

The definition of fellowship is having things in common, being partners or sharing interests and efforts toward a common goal, in some way or degree belonging to one another. Christian fellowship is the partnership of duties, interests and of destiny which is peculiar to the church of God, which is the brotherhood of those who are in the

family of God by new birth in Christ. See Acts 2:42; Gal. 2:9; Phil. 1:5; 2:1; I Cor. 1:9.

We see some practical outworkings of the recognition of commonness in Acts 4:32-37. This was not an example of a planned economy, nor of a legal requirement, but rather brotherly love expressed. Jesus and his disciples had a common treasury, but Judas was greedy/covetous, the opposite of the right attitude. Jesus taught that we must deny self, and make the way of the cross our desire. In so doing, we participate with him, and have fellowship with others of like mind.

A Christian is not to share in things of the world, but separate self from those, that he/she may share in all things of God. Hence, the “holy” and the “common” are yet facts of life of the Christian, though the terms have changed somewhat from O.T. usage.

For the Christian, the concept of fellowship will be sometimes expressed by the Greek preposition that means “with.” See here Rom. 6:4, 6; 8:17; Phil. 3:10; Col. 2:12, 13; Philemon v. 1,2, where the ideas of fellowship are expressed.

breaking of bread - Many things the apostles taught are interesting, but none are more so than our subject, nor none more controversial. Many positive things can be said which would include the following:

- 1) Jesus instructed it
- 2) To be done by Christians in remembrance of Him
- 3) Until He comes again
- 4) It is to commemorate his death (i.e., his body, given for us; his blood, shed for remission of sins).
- 5) It has been practiced as an integral part of Christian worship even from the beginning (steadfast continuance at the start).
- 6) It is identified as “breaking of bread” and “Lord’s Supper.”
- 7) It should correctly be observed, lest we condemn ourselves.
- 8) Jesus used simple symbols, bread and fruit of vine, to begin it. (The same symbols have been

continually used, showing the general consensus of understanding within the Church. Doubtless, simple and common things were used to help us get our minds off of them, and on Him to whom they pointed).

9) Each was to partake of it, individually, yet as a collective body. That it is a memorial, a proclamation, a fellowship and a covenant seems clear.

There are some things not so clear, however, and require consideration, since many are divided over one or more of the following:

- 1) How often is “often”?
- 2) How does the Lord’s supper relate to worship (not to worship services, but to worship)?
- 3) What about the elements? Must they be identical to, or similar to, those used by Jesus?
- 4) Is the “breaking of bread” in our text actually equal to the Lord’s supper?
- 5) How necessary is it for the individual Christian to participate?
- 6) How does one correctly observe it?
- 7) If one correctly observes the Supper, what benefits accrue if any?
- 8) Who may officiate at the table?
- 9) Who may participate?

Christians have never been united on these matters, maybe because the Scriptures are not clear or for other reasons. No discussion of these points can be done without a reflection of one’s theology. Stated another way, one’s religious background will determine one’s answers on individual religious matters. Any answer, therefore, simply must be taken with these things in mind. Additionally, as mentioned above, we must take care that God’s system of grace is not transformed into a system of law. Because of the limitations of space, only the first item will be discussed, but similar discussions are possible on the other items.

The texts that seem to bear most heavily on the frequency of observance are Acts 2:42; 20:7; and I Cor. 11.

Some would also include the type in the Old Covenant, the bread of the presence (“shewbread”), arguing that as it was to be changed and eaten each week, so must this antitype the Lord’s Supper. It seems to be true from 2:46 that the early Christians observed the Supper daily - why not? Acts 20:7 simply presents the practice of one congregation at Troas. We don’t know if all congregations did so or not, or if the Apostle Paul approved or not (silence proves little). The evidence is that one congregation did so - that is all we have. We may suppose that they were instructed by an apostle (perhaps Paul) but that is not explicitly said. There is little argument about the practice - the argument is: does one conclude that all did because some did? I Cor. 11 does not state how “often” is often. If one attempts to cite early church history, a reasonably good case can be presented for a weekly observance. What about type and antitype? The Hebrew epistle does not say how much the “copy” and the “copied” were to resemble each other. Any student of types knows that, except Scripture precisely states what is typified, anything can be (and has been) argued. In our case, one might well ask about having at communion time twelve unleavened loaves, or a type with no liquid attached to it being a type of something with a liquid as major factor. There are significant differences between the two things, and no Scripture states just exactly what the type foreshadowed. It is then a matter of opinion on most things.

If God’s Word has said: do this weekly, on Sunday, using only grape juice and unleavened pieces of baked dough, we might have something more substantial than we do. It does not so say. We are then in the position of arguing the most of our position from inference. Let us be careful how we draw our lines.

prayer - This is a concept that is like the last three. All were and are but facets of the doctrine the apostles taught. Prayer is taught in the O.T. and a privilege for every Christian. We are not told how God hears any and all prayers, or answers them, or a dozen other things we would like to

know. We are told to pray, believing, always. Those things are clear and all God saw fit to reveal to us.

V. 43 - **fear came** - The state of mind described as fear probably varied from person to person, since it may run the gamut from a state of terror to that of great respect. The last is the healthy and desirable frame of mind in reference to God, the first, what should not be true. God wants everyone to honor him as God, but view him as our loving gracious Father.

many wonders and signs - This will be a recurring idea in Acts, since God worked often and mightily through the apostles.

V. 44 - This verse, and v. 45, illustrate a part of the fellowship in which the first Christians continued. See the same idea in II Cor. 8 and 9.

V. 45 - This will happen again as seen in chapter 4. No one was commanded to do so, or even encouraged to do so. Possessions were shared as the need or desire arose, quite in contrast to a forced compliance, as by a ruler or state.

V. 46 - **attending the temple** - The temple area was the common area for the church to meet, since it was easily accessible, and provided both shelter and a rich mine for evangelism.

breaking bread - More than likely the Lord’s Supper. There would be little point in remarking about what went on everywhere by everybody, Christian or not. The last part of our verse and the opening phrases of v. 47 probably were written to show in what attitude of mind the early Christians lived.

V. 47 - **God added** - This text again highlighted the way that God was connected with the Church, that it might be more clearly perceived by all. The text stated this fact: God, not man, adds to the Church, because the church is divine, not human in origin. Many other scriptures bear on the same general point, and are listed with comment.

1. Jeremiah 31:31-34, quoted in Heb. 8:8-13. The text in Jeremiah comes from the midst of a revelation by the prophet, which concerned God's future plans for Israel. He promised to restore them to their land, and bring good times back to them. One of the blessings of restoration was the promise about a new kind of covenant relationship between God and his people. Jeremiah's text as quoted in Heb. 8 is in the middle of a discussion about the old and new covenants revealing that Christians were the intended recipients of the new relationship God had promised by Jeremiah. Hence, the privilege of covenant relationship as enjoyed by Christians was a direct result of God, who brought the new covenant into existence. As Paul said in I Cor. 2:9: the covenant was not of man - it was of God, a mystery hidden for the ages (Rom. 16:25-27) but revealed in the last days through the apostles. Cf. Eph. 3:3-6.

2. I Chron. 17:7-14, in Luke 1:30-33. The text in I Chron. is from a revelation to Nathan by God, as God unfolded his future plans. Among the things promised were:

a) a "name" for David to be fulfilled in his offspring (note that the Messiah was to be the "Son of David," and the many times Jesus accepted that expression; and that opening verse of Matthew pinpoints the relationship God had promised.)

b) that God would bring about a new place for his people Israel (tie in with Daniel 2:44-45, and Hebrews 12:18-28)

c) a house and throne for David that would never end. The text in Luke 1 directly states that Mary's son was the fulfillment of that promise.

3. Ephesians 1:3-14, 22-23 is replete with the idea that God had always intended for Christ to come, that redemption might be provided for everyone, and that Jesus was the head of the Church. Colossians 1:15-20 has the same basic ideas.

4. Ephesians 2:19-22 underscores the new relationship of those whom God has saved by grace through faith, since they are fellow citizens (note the fellowship) and parts of the holy temple of God. The text of I Peter 2:9-10 is pertinent to this text.

5. Ephesians 4:11-16 again helps us to see the active planning of God for the Church, and includes the basic provisions for all its members, said provisions to bring each one to maturity in Jesus, which is God's ordained design.

6. Matthew 16:13-19 covers the ground from Jesus' own understanding, in that the knowledge of his divinity, upon which fact the Church was to be built, was of God, not of man (i.e., God originated the plan for the Church). The text also reveals Jesus' place in the establishment of the Church, and that death (representing any or all enemies) would not end the existence of the Church. Romans 16:25-27 ties in at this point.

7. I Cor. 3:10-17 emphasizes, among other things, the place of the apostles in revealing the character of the Church, which was to be built upon Christ; and that the Church is a holy temple of God, under his protective care.

8. I Tim. 3:14-16 brings in the idea of "household" as being one way to view the ekklesia (church/assembly) of the living God. This text also brings before us several important ideas about Jesus (in whom we dwell/live, and who dwells/lives in us, John 15:5-16). Hebrews 3:1-6 can be used in this regard (i.e., God built the "house").

9. Titus 2:11-14 can profitably be used to show the ownership of those in the Church. The text in I Peter 2:9-10 makes the membership belong to God, thus showing the unity of God and Christ in regard to the Church. (John 17:20ff. shows this also.)

10. Hebrews 9:11-28 has much to offer along these lines of thought. For instance, that God instituted a new will/covenant at the death of Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant. The eternal nature of the sacrifice of Christ as it related to sin's forgiveness is shown, at the end of the age (of the Old Covenant age and beginning of the New Covenant age).

11. I Peter 1:3-12 nicely reveals what things God has done for those who are living stones in the Church, through whom God promised those things, and what he does continuously for those about whom he planned. (The remaining verses of the chapter are likewise valuable, emphasizing the eternally-destined sacrifice of Jesus for sin.)

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12. Revelation 19:1-9 text reveals the ultimate end of the Church as God has planned it. It will help us live better because we, as part of that Church, await our hope which is founded in Christ Jesus. Note the text of I John 3:1-3 here.

Many other scriptures might be given, but these present clearly the fact that God planned to send Jesus in the fullness of time, to die for the sins of the whole world, and to establish the Church which is to continue until the second coming, at which time the present earth will be destroyed and a new heaven and earth begin, II Peter 3; Revelation 21-22.

QUESTIONS

23. What two things did Peter tell people to do? What results did they get?

24. Do you do what the early Christians did?

25. Why did Luke tell us that God added people to the church? Do you know any Scriptures that tell about men adding to the church?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 3

1. What does the verb for “cut to the heart” mean, and what idea does it convey (Acts 2:37)?

2. What two things were commanded of the seekers for salvation on Pentecost (Acts 2:38)?

3. What does the word “repent” mean?

4. How do we express our acceptance of Jesus in a way that all can see?

5. What two things are promised to those who repent and are baptized (Acts 2:38)?

6. Complete the following statement: “By these three: _____, _____, _____ we are in Christ (Galatians 3:27).”

7. Why is the person of the Holy Spirit given to those who repent and are baptized?

8. What is significant about the words “those who received” in Acts 2:41? What does it indicate?

9. How many repentant believers were baptized on Pentecost?

10. What does the word “devoted” mean and indicate (Acts 2:42)?

11. What is the “Apostle’s teaching”?

12. Provide a definition of the word “fellowship” (Acts 2:42).

13. What is “the breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42)?

14. List nine positive things regarding the “breaking of bread”.

15. What texts in the New Testament seem to bear most heavily on the frequency of observing the “breaking of bread”?
16. What privilege is shared by all Christians (Acts 2:42)?
17. The textbook author suggests that we “study the book from the perspective: Here is _____ that we can use to establish our faith more firmly”.
18. According to Mark 10:45, why did Jesus come to earth?
19. Who adds to the Church: God or man? Explain your answer.

whom they laid daily at that gate of the temple which is called Beautiful to ask alms of those who entered the temple. 3 Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. 4 And Peter directed his gaze at him, with John, and said, “Look at us.” 5 And he fixed his attention upon them, expecting to receive something from them. 6 But Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” 7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. 8 And leaping up he stood and walked and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 and recognized him as the one who sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what happened to him.

V. 1 - **the ninth hour** - morning, about 9:00 a.m. if Roman time, afternoon, about 3:00 p.m. if Jewish time. See 4:3. Apparently many of the Christian Jews kept the customs of their culture (perhaps even some regulations, as in ch. 21) through habit, if not through duty. As is evident elsewhere, many had trouble discerning clearly where the two covenants parted company (including the apostles, as ch. 10 shows).

We note in passing that no hour of prayer was commanded in the law. However, the early Church seemingly had this custom. However, some of the Christians may have gone to the temple for the purpose of evangelism, as well as to pray.

Ch. 2:43 had mentioned wonders and signs being done by the apostles. Luke brings one of these into the spotlight for our attention.

V. 2 - **Beautiful gate** - It may have been the Nicanor gate on the east side, facing the Kidron valley, as many think. If so, Peter and John were coming into Jerusalem and the temple from outside the city wall.

**AT THIS TIME, PLEASE
REFER TO PAGE 93 FOR A
SPECIAL STUDY ON
BAPTISM!!**

LESSON FOUR
(3:1 - 4:31)

At the Gate Beautiful, 3:1-10

3 *Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. 2 And a man lame from birth was being carried,*

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alms - The Greek word is a derivative of the word for mercy. See Acts 9:36; where Dorcas did such, and 10:2 with Cornelius. Jesus talked about this subject in Matthew 6:2-4.

V. 5 - Peter had looked intently upon the man, and the man responded to Peter's command by fixing his attention upon the two men.

V. 6 - **what I have** - For the man, what Peter had was far more significant than money. What was true about the lame man we know not, but it is somewhat sobering to think that most people in the world's history would have been more interested in material things than spiritual things because they did not know better. Even for Christians there is a constant tendency to be so wrapped up in the temporal that the eternal is overlooked.

in the name - The common idiom for the Jewish people by which was meant the person represented by the name (see Acts 1:15), and the power/authority of said person. Luke 9:49; 10:17; Acts 4:7; have this idea. Jesus had worked miracles in his own name's authority; but the apostles did not do anything in their name. Some thought the name of Jesus could be used to work miracles, but it did not work, Acts 19:13ff.

V. 7 - **he took him by the right hand** - Peter gave a physical impetus to the command in v. 6 to walk. The lame man may have had no reason to obey Peter (he may not have known about Peter like we know of Peter).

V. 8 - **walking, leaping** - Clearly healed, especially since he had never walked, being lame from birth. This is a typical healing by the apostles, quite unlike the pseudo-attempts of our day. The man was immediately (as in Matt. 21:19; Luke 1:64; Acts 13:11) and completely cured. It would be hard to imagine the man's feelings, wouldn't it?

praising God - Whether he remembered or considered what Peter had said to him is unknown. He just praised God. It may be of interest that

Luke's Gospel has more about praise and glorification in it than any other Gospel.

V. 10 - **they were filled** - Those who saw the man and recognized him perceived immediately a great miracle had occurred (4:16): the man had received something more important than alms!

wonder - This was the reaction of the synagogue crowd in Luke 4:31-37 when Jesus healed a demonized man and of Peter in Luke 5 at the catch of fishes.

amazement - When Jesus raised from the dead the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:35-43), the onlookers reacted this way.

QUESTIONS

26. Does the text specifically say why the two apostles were going to the temple?
27. What did Jesus teach about giving of alms?
28. Do you think that the apostles did not want to give things of a material nature, or had to substitute, or what?
29. For what reason did Luke describe the man's actions after the miracle?
30. Do you suppose that the apostles were offended when the man praised God rather than Jesus or them?

On Solomon's Porch, 3:11-26

11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's, astounded. 12 And when Peter saw it he addressed the people, "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. 14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. 16 And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

17 "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. 19 Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, 20, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. 22 Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. 23 And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' 24 And all the prophets who have spoken; from Samuel and those who came afterwards, also proclaimed these days. 25 You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' 26 God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness."

V. 11 - **while he clung** - The man was unwilling to let the apostles go, probably because he was appreciative of their kindness.

Solomon's porch/portico - Along the temple courtyard's east side accessible to all, Jew or Gentile. It was a large area, covered over and provided an excellent location for meetings of the church.

V. 12 - **Peter addressed** - Their amazement was obvious, as was their question about how the miracle was performed.

our own power or piety - This was a disclaimer of any personal possession of power by the apostles. Here is a good point to view the text of Hebrews 2:4; and to recognize the direct part God played in the working of miracles through the lives of the apostles. It is also worthy of note that the miracle did what miracles of God were basically intended to do: get attention so that something more important than the miracle could be given them, and given with the clear knowledge that God was the giver of it.

V. 13 - **The God** - A direct connection of their deity with the deity of the new covenant was an important correlation to make. It was exceedingly difficult for the Jews to get that basic idea. Check the argument in Rom. 3:27-31.

his servant Jesus - The Greek term translated servant is that for child or boy, Luke 2:43. However, see its usage in Luke 1:54, 69; Acts 4:25; then Matthew 8:6, 8, 13.

Note how much Peter develops the nature of the Messiah: holy, righteous, greater than Moses, fulfillment of Abrahamic covenant; all of which were important concepts to tie together.

he had decided - The Greek term is the term for judge, as in Matthew 7:1. Pilate, having considered the prisoner, and the people who had brought him concluded it was only for envy that

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they had brought charges against Jesus, and decided to release Jesus. The point is then quite clear: the Jews were guilty of Jesus' death.

V. 14 - **you denied** - Note how Peter indicts both nation and rulers for murders. The demoniacs referred to Jesus as the "holy one of God" in Mark 1:24. Ananias referred to Jesus as the "just one" in Acts 22:14; but the Jews said: We will not accept this man Jesus as our Messiah, so kill him.

V. 15 - Consider the antithesis: the author or life being killed! The word translated "author" appears in Hebrews 2:10 and 12:2; also in reference to Jesus. Of course, Bible students know that Jesus was with God in the beginning when life was first given; that Jesus has life in himself, John 5:26; that no one could actually take Jesus' life from him except he would allow it, John 10:18; that in Jesus all "hold together" or consist, Colossians 1:17, and that he upholds the universe by his "word of power," Hebrews 1:3. Yet notice that it was God who raised Jesus. The point needed to be made to the Jews that their own personal God had caused Jesus' resurrection, and so was inextricably involved with the doctrine based upon that resurrection.

we are witnesses - As Jesus commanded in Luke 24:48 and Acts 1:8. The Greek word is commonly transliterated as martyr. The term meant a witness, one who testifies, but came to include dying for one's faith.

V. 16 - The source of the miracle was not the lame man's faith, but the apostle's faith in Jesus, who was primarily the power behind the miracle. Consider what this implied about Jesus' character: he could do what mortal men could not do.

perfect health - A complete renewal, in their presence. It was evidently miracles like this that convinced the apostles of the deity of Jesus, and that also helped people see that God was with them in their work.

V. 17 - **you acted...as did your rulers: in ignorance!** - Again the guilt is laid at the feet of the Israelites. It wasn't that they had not had opportunity to know; contrariwise, they had every chance to know of Jesus, and consider his claims. As Jesus said in John 15:22, they had no defense for their sin.

V. 18 - **God foretold** - Jesus often pointed this fact out, though it was not believed (as in Matt. 16:21ff.) that he was destined to be crucified. Of course, to the Jews, this was an enigma and paradox: so great a problem that they often pondered it (as did the disciples) for understanding. The inability and unwillingness to resolve the matter made it a matter of sin (stumbling) to them, Romans 9:33. It was not until after Jesus had explained to the two men on the Emmaus road from their scriptures about the true nature of the Messiah, that of suffering and crucifixion, that they put the pieces all together. Once the fact was accepted that the Messiah was destined to die for the sins of man, things fell into place. As Paul the converted Jew said in II Cor. 3:12-17, when one turned to Jesus, one saw clearly.

all the prophets - This very plain fact could only have escaped the notice of the Jews because they were unwilling to accept it. See Rom. 3:21. (Don't miss the value of citing fulfilled prophecies - Jesus and the apostles made extensive use of this great apologetic point.)

V. 19 - **repent** - change your mind, renew it, and be then transformed in life.

It is somewhat of a pity that the Greek term got stuck with the English word "repentance" which often has been colored with the Roman Catholic idea of penitence (i.e., "doing penance" as in works, etc.). It is not being sorry and attempting to undo what has been done, or even being sorry (i.e. grieving, mourning, etc.). It is, in fact, simply and only a change of mind, that may/may not be produced by sorrow. Moreover, it has to do with changing one's future (ref. Luke 3:8-14) rather than the past (the past is history and can't be retraced),

and therefore looks forward much more than backward. The future may well be, and should be, in contrast to the past; but it is the future with which repentance is concerned - all the future. The repentant mind is to be a constant for the Christian. It should be noted that (godly) sorrow, II Cor. 7, is not repentance, however good the sorrow might otherwise be. The command in the N.T. is not "be sorrowful" but rather "change your mind." Consider the same idea in Rom. 12:1-2.

Repentance is the means by which we receive the grace of God for our sins, and by which we maintain that relationship. We must see that it is necessary to do more than just get earthly relationships right. We must get right with God.

turn - Their conduct was to become new, following or resulting from their change of mind. The past life of sin was essentially guilty of murder. Such sin must be forgiven, and redemption brought about.

blotted out - Note Colossians 2:14. The verb means to erase, or smear, or rub off. The purpose for which the Messiah came was this: to bring salvation from sin, to blot out completely the old life (even murder!) and bring about a completely new being, restored to a right relationship with God, heavenward bound!

time of refreshing - This phrase is descriptive of the new life in Christ, the new age of redemption in and through Christ, which all could find by accepting Jesus as Savior, Messiah, and Lord.

V. 20 - **he may send the Christ (Messiah)** - i.e., that Jesus (Christ) may come and dwell with them, as in John 14:23; etc. This is equal to, a corollary to, seasons of refreshing, v. 19, the express time in which they were then living. They needed to join up. Jesus was to come from the presence (= face) of the Lord (God). Consider then that Jesus is also identified as "Lord" and "God".

V. 21 - Jesus was in heaven, to remain there until his second coming. There is little, if anything, in the O.T., that we know, that directly talks of Jesus second coming. The verse is better understood as referring to the establishment of the church, etc., prophesied by the O.T. spokesmen. We must consider, in addition to the blessings now available for every Christian, that there is yet a salvation to be revealed, I Peter 1:4-5, for every Christian.

V. 22 - **you shall listen to him** - Peter now points out the biggest reason why the people needed to act: because of the nature of Jesus, of whom their own Moses had spoken. Of course, if Moses had prophesied such a time to come then he had also necessarily prophesied about the end of his law, and the necessity to honor the word of the one succeeding him, even Jesus, the prophet that God had raised up, replacing Moses.

V. 23 - The consequences of failure to repent are here spelled out.

every soul - The whole man/person, as in Acts 1:14.

shall be destroyed - Note this same idea in Exodus 30:33; 31:14; Numbers 15:31. The basic Greek word is in I Cor. 5:5; I Thess. 5:3; II Thess. 1:9; I Tim. 6:9. It bespeaks a total loss of everything rightfully belonging to every person, and a punishment in hell received that could have been avoided, since God did not intend that any should go to hell.

V. 24 - **these days** - The days of repentance to God and faith in Jesus (Acts 20:21), the times of refreshing. How often the message had been given to them! However, God himself described the nation as both wicked and contrary, Rom. 10:21.

V. 25 - **sons of the prophets** - Followers of what the prophets had prophesied, and sharers in the promises to Abraham, which were the blessings of God; further described in v. 26 as God's provision

to turn everyone from wickedness unto righteousness.

V. 26 - The blessings of God were theirs if they turned from their sinful ways. Peter had commanded them to repent, because of their sins, which would bring forgiveness and further blessing. Jesus came to save his people from their sins, Matt. 1:21, but he could only do so if they were willing to receive him. John wrote in 1:11 that the nation of the Messiah had not, as a nation, received him. Jesus wept over Jerusalem because he had often extended an invitation to them but they were unwilling, Luke 19:41-44.

QUESTIONS

31. How did the apostles utilize the miracle?
32. Who was given credit by Peter for the power to work the miracle?
33. Of what sort of “life” was Jesus the author?
34. How many people were ignorant? Did ignorance release them from being charged with murder?
35. If the Jews were not guilty (as some say), why the command to change their mind and have their sins blotted out?
36. How many years had God been telling Israel about the events then happening?
37. What was the reason that God sent Jesus to the Jews?

In the Prison, 4:1-4

4 *And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they arrested them and put them in custody until the morrow, for it was already evening. 4 But many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand.*

V. 1 - **as they were speaking** - Apparently Peter and John were interrupted. The preaching following the miracle, brought about the conversion of at least 2,000 almost as many as in chapter 2.

Sadducees - This group was a “mixed bag.” They held to the literal word of God (especially the Pentateuch), rejecting all the Jewish rabbinical literature, which the Pharisees held. However, they also disbelieved in life after death, and other matters as seen in chapter 23. This is an interesting turn of events from the Gospels, where the Pharisees and scribes were especially prominent. However, most of the priests were Sadducees, and much involved in the affairs of the temple, and the political life of the nation.

V. 2- **teaching...preaching...resurrection** - Of course, the message not only caused some to be converted, but some contradicted as in John 11 (where Caiaphas and company were concerned about the influence of Jesus among the people). We should pay attention to this fact: the apostles never got in trouble for preaching immortality nor for speaking about a so-called “spiritual” resurrection; but rather for proclaiming the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the tomb.

V. 3 - Note here that Jewish regulations of jurisprudence were kept, in that no trial was to be held at night. This is the reason for the “official” trial of Jesus, as recorded in Luke 23, after the unofficial trial before Annas had been held prior to daybreak.

already evening -The men had gone to the temple at the ninth hour (3:1). Since it seems unlikely that the events following the miracle would last all day, it is more likely that the time was about 3:00 p.m., and evening would soon occur.

V. 4 - **of men** - The Jewish custom was to number only the men in any census, since the man was, in God's order, considered the head of the household. This primary order was not changed in the New Testament revelation of God, as I Cor. 11 clearly shows. This is not to say that women were unimportant, just affirming what God plainly revealed to the church for its members.

QUESTIONS

38. Into what gate and at what hour did the two apostles go to the temple?
39. What explicit point did the apostles make about Jesus?
40. Was the temple area large enough to accommodate a large number of people? At least how many?

Before the Sanhedrin, 4:5-22

5 On the morrow their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem, 6 with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high priestly family. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, 9 if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, 10 be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him

this man is standing before you well. 11 This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered; and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. 14 But seeing the man that had been healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. 15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred with one another, 16 saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is manifest to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any one in this name." 18 So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." 21 And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people; for all men praised God for what had happened. 22 For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

V. 5 - **rulers, elders, scribes** - Some suggest that the Jewish Sanhedrin was composed of 22 scribes, 24 priests/rulers, 24 elders. In Jewish literature, and in N.T. usage, this group was variously called: the elders, the senate/council, great law-court, great court, and court of the seventy. Its actual origin is unknown, but seems probably to have arisen after the return from Babylon. The Greek word for "elders" is the same term as was applied to the men who were chosen to lead local congregations, as in Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2; etc.

V. 6 - **Annas** - He was actually high priest from the Jewish point of view, but Caiaphas, his

son-in-law, was the officially appointed high priest by the Romans. Annas had been deposed from the position (which he was to hold for life by Jewish law), but through sons and relatives who were appointed high priest, still was the power behind the position.

V. 7 - Their questioning may have been an attempt to follow Deuteronomy 13:1ff.

power...name - These terms were about synonymous, and referred to the source of the apostles ability.

V. 8 - **filled with the Holy Spirit** - Several different people are said in the N.T. to have been filled with the Holy Spirit such as John the Immerser, Elizabeth, Zechariah, Jesus, the apostles, Peter, Stephen, Paul, Barnabas, the disciple in Antioch of Pisidia. It was a major factor in the selection of the seven in Acts 6. Evidently, from this list, the “filling” did not result in the same effects always.

Jesus had promised guidance to the apostles for such situation: Matthew 10:17ff, and his promise to them was kept.

V. 9 - **examined** - The Greek word is that used for questioning or interrogation, as in a law court. Note 12:19; 24:8; 25:26; 28:18 for other uses of the word.

good deed - Not a bad work, but a deed done by a benefactor. Peter’s implication: Why are we being tried for a good deed?

a cripple - The Greek term is descriptive of one weak/sickly, and is often used figuratively.

V. 10 - The actual intended use of the miracle by God was to provide an audience to which the apostles could proclaim facts about Jesus. This miracle, or any miracle, is meaningless apart from a revelation as to its basic purpose. All miracles had some purpose (even if unknown to us), since they were not performed indiscriminately.

Peter and the rest will pray for (continued) boldness, v. 29, but it was plain to his auditors that he and John were bold (already).

by the name -The very person, Jesus of Nazareth, whom they thought had been crucified, now arises to haunt them.

you crucified...God raised - Peter was unequivocal, allowing the chips to fall where they may. The die was cast!

this man is...well - Complete and well. As the council observed, v. 16, the facts were all too clear.

V. 11 - **This stone...rejected** - Jesus had quoted this text from Psalms 118:22 some weeks earlier in speaking to Jews in the temple. See Matthew 21:33-46; Rom. 9:33. The same old problem was yet present: the divine/human personage named Jesus, and the inability of the Jews to accept him as such.

V. 12 - **salvation** - As the man had been “saved” in the physical realm through Jesus’ power, so it was necessarily in the spiritual realm: only in Jesus could wholeness be found. Of course, the Jews expected salvation by the Messiah (Christ), so he was saying nothing but what Moses and the prophets said (as Paul in Acts 23:6; 26:22-23). The difficulty lay in just what salvation included. It is always important to recognize just how exclusive Christianity claims to be, and this verse states it plainly.

V. 13 - **they saw** - Actually, the tables are turned, and the council is on trial.

boldness - Originally, the word meant freedom of speech, then freedom to act, confidence to act, etc. Peter used it in Acts 2:29, and Paul asked for prayer that he might speak in such a way, Ephesians 6:19. Other places of interest are John 16:29; Acts 28:31; II Cor. 3:12; Eph. 3:12; Phil.

1:20; Colossians 2:15; I Tim. 3:13 Hebrews 3:6; 4:16; 10:19; I John 2:28; 3:21; 5:14.

uneducated - No rabbinical training was meant, no education at the feet of the Jewish teachers, etc.

common- The Greek word means something not in office, not skilled in some matter (here, in religious matters), so a commoner.

with Jesus - No halo or shining face was meant, but rather two men who were part of a movement they had earlier sought to destroy. Hence they took note of this evidence from the lips of Peter, given in response to their question in v. 7. Their preaching and defense was done upon the basis that they committed their lives to the service of Jesus as their Lord.

V. 14 - The physical evidence of the one-time cripple made the case open and shut, since the people had obviously accepted the apostles and what they stood for (v. 21), because it was undeniable (v. 16), which led many of those who were willing to honestly consider the evidence to become Christians.

V. 15 - **they conferred** - The matter was of great importance in many ways, and needed careful thought. However, the Lord brought all their planning to naught, as chapter 5, for instance, shows.

V. 16 - **notable sign** - From our perspective in time, we wonder how they could have missed so greatly. However, in Jewish history, many had worked miracles but had not been received. Moreover, their whole way of life was at stake, and that was not easy to give up. They had been at this point in John 11 over the resurrection of Lazarus, and may also have been those who, seeing Jesus' miracles accused him of being in league with the devil, Matt. 12:22-45. They were quite unable to deny it and have any effect on the people who had seen it. So, the only thing left was to silence the apostles.

V. 17 - **it may spread** - The Greek term means to distribute, or scatter among.

let us warn - Threaten, intimidate, so that they will be silent. See v. 18, where they are emphatic and specific.

V. 18 - **charged them** - Ordered them to quit doing what they were doing, speaking and teaching about Jesus. The issue was made clear: stop at once! We should notice that the issue really was not preaching, per se, working miracles, per se, but doing these things in the name of and for the sake of Jesus. If the apostles had preached Judaism, etc., no problem would have arisen.

V. 20 - In consideration of the well-known (and oft-quoted) reply by the apostles, it is interesting to meditate upon I Peter 2:13ff. We never find Jesus disobeying the laws, or Paul doing so. Conversely, both taught obedience to the government and those in authority, as Jesus in what belonged Caesar, or Paul in Rom. 13. One's understanding of what constitutes acceptable obedience to God is a very individual matter. How we may justify our right to disobey man's laws that God through inspiration commanded us to keep is unclear, and impossible to decide for anyone but one's self. Stated differently, we will urge obedience to the laws of the land, and punishment for offenders; but as soon as a law is made that seems to oppose God's laws, we cite this text and justify our disobedience. It may be right to do so, but the matter is most difficult to settle.

It should be noted here that Peter and John's response is put in a sort of question form: "What would you men do? Here is all we (i.e., Peter and John) can do, be it judged correct or incorrect."

V. 21 - **further threatened** - The same root term as in v. 17. The apostles' response did not move the men at all. It may have its effect later, however, as some of the Jewish leaders became converted.

to punish - The word in Greek is of interest, because it relates to the concept some hold of annihilation. Here is evidently meant some form of punishment, and did not mean a cessation of existence. Hence, those who teach that to destroy means to bring to extinction incorrectly hold that this word (and related terms) means only and always annihilation. The usage in I John 4:18 argues clearly against such doctrine, as does the text in II Peter 2:9. The Scripture simply does not teach the doctrine at all, though it does teach punishment for non-believers after judgment.

praising God - Apparently the council saw that their case was lost, since the people were holding the contrary view. Such was the case of their leaders and John, then Jesus and now the apostles of Jesus: the multitudes (often) heard gladly, and responded in great numbers to God's messengers. No wonder the rulers were upset.

V. 22 - As with the man in John 5, the woman in Luke 13:10ff, and the man in John 9, the miracle was of such nature that it could not rightly be denied. So, one either accepted it, or irrationally opposed it.

QUESTIONS

41. Who came to arrest the apostles? Why these and not the Romans?
42. What "word" did the 2,000 believe?
43. Was it right to inquire of the apostles how the miracle was done?
44. Did Peter "give" more than was expected?

45. How did the Sanhedrin find out the origin of the apostles?

46. How do you decide when to disobey the authority of the land in order to obey the authority of God?

In the Upper Room, 4:23 - 5:11

23 When they were released they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, 25 who by the mouth of our father David, thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? 26 The kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed' 27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place. 29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, 30 while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant, Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.

V. 23 - The chief priests would include Annas and Caiaphas (perhaps John and Alexander). The elders probably includes all the rest of those gathered in the meeting.

V. 24 - **Sovereign Lord** - NIV and RSV. The Greek word is the word transliterated as “despot” and occurs in the following texts: Luke 2:29; I Tim. 6:1,2; II Tim. 2:21; Titus 2:9; I Peter 2:18 II Peter 2:1; Jude v. 4; Rev. 6:10. They used “slave” as a contrasting term in v. 29. Note carefully their understanding of God as creator. Paul thought likewise in ch. 17:22ff.

The same mindedness (they lifted their voices together) of their prayer reflects the fellowship they shared. The Greek term used occurs ten times in Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57; 8:6; 12:20; 15:25; 18:12; 19:29; once in Romans 15:6. It indicates a commonness of mind. To some extent, our word amen should mean that the (uttered) prayer we heard by someone also expressed our sentiments, and we express our agreement by saying “amen.”

V. 25 - **by the mouth...by the Holy Spirit** - This is just one of various ways that the method of inspiration is “spelled out” in the N.T. It is important to note that what the Holy Spirit said, through the mouth of a human, David, is also what God said. What was said in Psalms 2 was predictive, and to be understood as fulfilled by the treatment accorded Jesus in his trials and crucifixion, even though it seems to us to be more general in nature. This was the same point in the comments on Acts 2:17-20: the prophecy was fulfilled, even if we do not perceive exactly how it was fulfilled.

The intriguing point: how do the facts, which include what is in verses 27, 28 relate to their prayer and need?

imagine - The Greek term has the idea of meditation, thinking, porposing.

vain - Meaning empty or foolish; useless, thoughtless. Examples of it would be in Luke 1:53; I Cor. 15:10, 14; Gal. 2:2; Eph. 5:6; Phil. 2:16; Col. 2:8; I Thess. 3:5; James 2:20.

V. 26 - As the prayer indicates, the thought of those who were praying was this: God had predicted the sufferings of the Messiah (which was indicative of his greatness). Since they were serving in behalf of the Messiah, would God also protect and/or give them words of boldness to speak about the Messiah? They reasoned that if God’s will was accomplished in the life of Jesus, despite what men might do, they only needed help of God to prevail over men.

This particular Psalm is quoted often in the N.T., always with reference to Jesus, the Messiah. See 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5.

V. 27 - Herod’s part in Jesus’ trial is mentioned by Luke. Here is an interesting example of their understanding of the fulfillment of the prophecy from the Psalmist.

holy servant - Matthew used the term in 17:18; John used it in John 4:51; Peter in Acts 3:26.

anoint - This term is to be understood figuratively, in the sense that God set Jesus apart for a particular task, even as priests, prophets and kings were set apart for their special tasks. The noun form is translated Christ (= Messiah).

V. 28 - **predestined** - The Greek term means planned or prophesied to take place. The same basic idea is presented in Acts 2:23; 10:42; I Peter 1:2, 10-12, 20; 2:4-6. Paul mentions the same idea in Eph. 1:3ff. God had foreknown the future and could plan to send Jesus on that basis, while allowing men to make their own choices in regard to Jesus, and bear their guilt for any wrong choices.

V. 29 - **their threats** - The apostles often present God as aware of their lives and the problems therein, whether great or small. We may

not be apostles, but God is nevertheless interested in us as individuals.

with boldness - The Greek term originally meant freedom to speak, then of speech. It was not the privilege of a slave to so speak, but Christian slaves were not necessarily like other slaves: freedom was a hallmark of Christianity. The Hebrew writer urges all Christians to be bold in going to God, 4:14ff.

thy word - A characteristic description by Luke and Paul of the Gospel message. Note v. 31; 6:7; 8:4, 14, 25; 10:36, 44; 11:1; etc. It also was applied to Jesus in John 1:1.

V. 30 - Note that they did not pray to be relieved of their problems necessarily, but to be able to handle it adequately. Their prayer, excluding the various extras was this: God, grant us boldness (the opportunities are many, men's threats are real, and we need divine help).

From an O.T. perspective, the hand or arm of God (God and his power) was often evident, as in Exodus 3:20; 7:5; Deuteronomy 2:15; Ruth 1:13; or the arm of the Lord, as in Exodus 6:6; II Kings 17:36; Job 40:9; Psalms 77:15.

signs and wonders - As the record reveals, God answered their prayer. People glorified God (as in v. 21), and became followers of the way, 5:12-13.

V. 31 - **when they had prayed** - At the conclusion of this united prayer request, God visibly answered. The place was shaken (the Greek term describes a powerful occurrence, as in Matt. 11:7; Acts 16:26; Heb. 12:26), and they spoke the word with boldness.

QUESTIONS

47. How many ways did the apostles and company use to describe their deity (God)?

48. What was the gist of their prayer?

49. What does this text tell us about the subject of inspiration?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 4

1. What does the lesson teach about the "Beautiful Gate"?

2. The Greek word "alms" is a derivative of the word for _____.

3. In our pursuit of temporal and material things, what two other kinds of things are often overlooked?

4. What was Peter's response to the lame man's request for alms?

5. What are the miracles of God basically intended to do?

6. Discuss how Peter developed the nature of the Messiah in Acts 3:11-26.

7. The Greek word for witnesses is commonly translated as _____. Discuss what this term meant.

8. Complete the following statement from your textbook: "The source of the miracle was not in the

_____ faith, but the _____ faith in Jesus.”

9. Did Jesus and the Apostles make extensive use of citing fulfilled prophecies to validate their teaching? Explain.

10. Define the word “repent”.

11. Contrast the Biblical definition of the Greek term “repent” with the common understanding of the English word “repentance”.

12. What does the term “blotted out” mean, and discuss how this is related to the Messiah’s purpose in coming to earth.

13. Thought question: Why should we listen to Jesus?

14. What are the consequences of failure to repent (Acts 3:23)?

15. What did Moses say would happen to those who refused to repent or to listen to or hear Jesus?

16. How many believed Peter’s message (Acts 4:4)?

17. Discuss the common beliefs of the Sadducees.

18. Some suggest that the Jewish Sanhedrin was composed of _____ scribes, _____ priests/rulers, and _____ elders.

19. Discuss what is known about Annas and his son-in-law.

20. List the people, in the New Testament, who are said to have been filled with the Holy Spirit.

21. What is the Greek word for “examined” used to describe?

22. What does the Greek word for “a cripple” describe?

23. Contrast what the Jews did to Jesus with what God did to Jesus (Acts 4:10).

24. Where can Peter’s words of Acts 4:11 be found in the Old Testament?

25. Thought Question: Why is salvation to be found only in Jesus Christ? (Acts 4:12).

26. Provide a Biblical definition of the following words: “boldness”, “uneducated”, and “common”.

36 TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON ACTS (VOL I)

27. What does the Greek term for “it may spread” mean?

28. What did the Sanhedrin command Peter and John not to do?

29. How did Peter respond to the above charge?

30. Discuss the meaning and implications of the Greek word for “to punish”.

31. What do the words of David in Acts 4:25 teach about inspiration?

32. The Greek word for “imagine” conveys what type of meaning?

33. Define the word “vain” as it is used in Acts 4:25.

34. How should the term “anoint” be understood in reference to Jesus?

35. Explain what the Greek word for “predestined” means and explain how it applies to Jesus and our response to Him.

36. For what three things did the early church pray (4:29-30)?

37. What three things happened when the apostles prayed (4:31)?

LESSON FIVE

(4:32 - 5:11)

Fellowship in the Church

32 Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. 36 Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, 37 sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

5 *But a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, 2 and with his wife's knowledge he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? 4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." 5 When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. 6 The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.*

7 After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." 9 But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Hark, the feet of those that have buried your

husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” 10 Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things.

V. 32 - The disciples continued to share in many things as mentioned above, not just material things. The material sharing was just one way they had things in common.

As chapter 5 will show, a forced sharing was in direct antithesis to the concept they had of sharing. Their sharing was free-will in nature, and done because the need was evident.

The sharing was strictly voluntary on the part of everyone (as is seen in II Cor. 8-9), and private ownership of property continued. It was not a joint ownership of land, or production, but only a common sharing with others as motivated or needed. To have made any sharing compulsory would have been in direct contrast to the principle in Christianity.

common - The term is in antithesis to one's own. It was the term used by Peter in Acts 10 in reference to what he had shared or not shared with Gentiles. Here, the Christians in Jerusalem held things common among themselves.

V. 33 - **great power** - The Greek term was often used to describe a miracle, as in 2:22; or of the nature of the gospel, Romans 1:16. Of course, their power was being utilized to do what the council had forbidden them to do (v. 17-18): give testimony (Greek word is for martyr) to the gospel.

great grace - The word grace often appears in the N.T., and in some very interesting ways, as in 6:8; Luke 2:52; II Cor. 9:14; Titus 2:11; II Peter 3:18; etc. God evidently blessed them mightily to have a heart of generous goodness.

V. 34 - These verses present an interesting item for consideration, in that (as mentioned above),

none were required to act as they were doing. Moreover, years later, a famine in Judea will put them all in the state of want, for which need Paul took up an offering among the Gentiles (II Cor. 8-9). God apparently did not always keep them economically rich, nor even provide basic needs in life, necessarily. Sometimes he allowed the faithful to endure many things for their faith, even to death in some cases.

V. 36 - **Joseph** - Barnabas, which meant “a son of encouragement or exhortation.” Here we see one of the uses of the term “son” which could mean one of a group, or a likeness to someone else, a son in physical nature.

a Levite - Actually, the Levitical portion of inheritance was initially not material things, but God (see Numbers 18:20; Deuteronomy 10:9). Yet by inheritance or by purchase they could own land. The examples of Jeremiah in the Old Testament, and Josephus in the N.T. times are examples of this fact. Apparently some of the early Christians were not poor, but rather possessors of material goods, though most were not, I Cor. 1. Many of the Old Testament faithful were rich, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Solomon, etc.

5:1 - Since the ownership of the land remained with the individual, and not the Church, the initiative to sell or not to sell also remained with the individual. The reader should disregard the chapter divisions, and read 4:32 - 5:11 as a integral unit.

As for this incident, we note that 1) the early Christians were subject to the same temptations as we are; 2) Luke did not hesitate to record both the good deed of Barnabas and the contrasting deed of Ananias and Sapphira (we see a real Church, not an ideal one); 3) God sees and hears (and sometimes shows his displeasure for sin immediately rather than later or instead of showing mercy); and 4) any good thing will have its counterfeit.

V. 2 - Achan's sin was somewhat like that of Ananias: each had a love for money or material goods, subsumed under covetousness, which was a

root of all kinds of evil. The apostles were the leaders in the Jerusalem congregation, elders not yet having been chosen.

V. 3 - why has Satan...? - As with Judas, who also loved money, Satan filled the mind with a desire that was not resisted, but welcomed.

to lie - So much is taught in the N.T. about a basic honesty that ought to be characteristic of the Christian, that we need but mention the point John makes: no lie is of the truth, I John 2:21. To become like God, we must hate lying and love truth, for God never lies (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). Christians are not to lie to one another; Col. 3:9; remembering that one can exchange the truth of God for a lie, Romans 1:25.

to the Holy Spirit - Identified as a person to whom one can lie, and also possessing the quality of deity, v. 4.

V. 4 - your disposal - The Greek word behind "disposal" is often translated power (as in John 1:12 or Matt. 28:18) or authority. It carries the basic idea of freedom to act, thus the right to act. Ananias and Sapphira had the right to do with their possessions as they wished. They should not have lied about the matter, however.

you have lied - Probably to be understood that Ananias had lied to men (at least in the presence of men, and speaking to such), but as well to God. Note how Joseph views himself in Genesis 39:9. The fact is that all sin is ultimately against God, whose forgiveness we must receive. Sin may also involve others, but it certainly involves God. This fact must be kept in our minds at all times: we are always responsible to God even though our lives are normally involved with men.

V. 5 - When Ananias heard - The Greek term indicates that perhaps while Peter was still speaking, he fell down and died.

died - The Greek term is seen only here, in v. 10 and 12:23. It means something akin to the life

went out. The term is from soul or life and out of or from.

V. 6 - the young men - Contrasting these with the older men in the congregation. It seems a bit difficult to believe that both Ananias and Sapphira died simply from the shock at being discovered and informed about their guilt. Many were made guilty at Pentecost, even cut to the quick but no physical death resulted. It is more likely that the people saw here what was also seen in Nadab and Abihu, etc. Peter's remark in v. 9 seems to indicate the idea that God killed them for their sin, an eye-opening incident for everyone, which resulted in fear, v. 11, honor, v. 13, believers, v. 14, etc.

V. 7 - Were the people so far in fear that they did not tell Sapphira about the matter? Perhaps it was but coincidental that she did not hear, or maybe they were instructed to remain silent.

V. 8 - Yes - She was as committed to the lie and hypocrisy as Ananias.

V. 9 - Note, in addition to the ascription of personality and deity to the Holy Spirit in v. 2-4, Peter speaks as if the Holy Spirit can be tested/tempted. The point Jesus mentioned in Matt. 4:7, quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16 gives the issue: God was/is not to be tested, in the bad sense of the term.

agreed together - The basic Greek term is used in II Cor. 6:15, accord, or agreement.

V. 11 - The paradoxes in the Scripture are always interesting. We so often quote I John 4:18 about perfect love and fear that we forget the many scriptures enjoining us to fear God...or else! See Exodus 20:20; Deut. 31:12-13; Rom. 3:18; II Cor. 7:1; Phil. 2:12; Heb. 4:1; I Peter 2:17; Jude v. 23; etc. We should become afraid for ourselves when we cease fearing God (compare Rom. 3:18).

QUESTIONS

50. Why were Barnabas and Ananias contrasted?

5. Who was Achan, and what sin did he commit (Joshua chapter 7)?

51. How is the Holy Spirit characterized?

6. Who were Ananias and Sapphira? What did they do, what happened to them, and why did this happen to them?

52. Is any and all sin involved with God as the one with whom we have to do? (Ref. Heb. 4:12-13). (This question has been omitted from the study.)

7. Discuss the Greek word behind the term “disposal”.

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 5

1. Thought question: Did the early church practice communism (forced sharing)? Explain your answer.

8. What is unique about the Greek word for “died” in Acts 5:5?

9. Who were Nadab and Abihu (refer to textbook page 39, verse 6 and Leviticus 10:1-3). What can we learn from Nadab/Abihu and Ananias/Sapphira?

10. Can the Holy Spirit be tempted? Explain your answer.

2. What was the Greek term “great power” often used to describe?

3. Discuss how the word “grace” is used in Acts 6:8; Luke 2:52; II Cor. 9:14; Titus 2:11; and II Peter 3:18.

11. Explain the author’s comment, “We should become afraid for ourselves when we cease fearing God”.

4. Who was Joseph (Acts 5), by what other name was he known, and what did his name mean?

LESSON SIX

(5:12-42)

On Solomon’s Porch, 5:12-16

12 Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. 13 None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high honor. 14 And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women, 15 so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. 16 The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

V. 12 - Notice the emphasis that is placed upon the apostles, yet consider that we know very little about most of them and their work. Most of what we do know about early church history concerns only two of the apostles, Peter (with John) and Paul. We may assume that God used the others in the same general ways as he did Peter and Paul.

The early Church, without any buildings large enough to house them all, used God's house of prayer (Matt. 21:13), set aside for the use of his people, as their meeting place. It surely was appropriate, since God had planned to produce the church through the Jewish nation. Note again the oneness of the believers.

V. 13 - A verse well-known for its problem: who are the "rest" who would not join themselves to "them?"

The "rest" have been identified as 1) other believers who feared the apostles, 2) non-believers, including "the people," or 3) non-believers, other than the people, such as rulers, scribes, etc. There seems to be no easy solution, even though the general import is clear. We prefer #1.

join - The Greek term has the idea of a close union, as of marriage, Matt. 19:5; or work for, Luke 15:15; or associate with, Acts 17:34.

V. 14 - In connection with 2:47, the ones being saved were added by God to the church. Now we have believers added to the Lord, which is the

same thing, since the church equals the body of the Lord, Eph. 1:21-23. Note that "women" are mentioned. Christianity is surely God's greatest gift to women as a race, bringing her a status unlike any other system in the world. Today's women's lib doesn't compare in any respect with what God has for the Christian woman.

V. 15 - As is evident, the apostles had the same general power to heal as Jesus, and did so, as God gave them power (ch. 3), Heb. 2:4. Whether any were healed by Peter's shadow is not stated. Later, Paul's abilities were extended beyond his physical presence, Acts 19:11ff.

sick - The Greek word means sick or weak as in Matthew 8:17; Romans 14:1; etc.

V. 16 - **the sick** - To this description Luke added "those afflicted" (K.J. "vexed"). This last group is described by a word meaning to trouble or to disturb. The root word is found in Luke 6:18, where, in a similar situation, Jesus was healing people who were "vexed" with unclean spirits. Luke used the term "unclean spirit" to describe a demon, Luke 4:33, 35.

QUESTIONS

53. Who did Luke say did the "signs and wonders"?

54. Where was the evangelism of the early church taking place?

55. How many people did the apostles attempt to heal but failed to heal?

In the Prison, 5:17-20

17 But the high priest rose up and all who were with him, that is the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy 18 they arrested the

apostles and put them in the common prison. 19 But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, 20 “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.”

V. 17 - This text may well indicate that the high priest (Caiaphas) and his party, the Sadducees, had enough power within the Sanhedrin to effect the arrest of the apostles, quite apart from the Pharisees (who may also have agreed to the move, though not mentioned by Luke).

party - Translates the Greek term which is often transliterated into English by heresy. See its occurrences in Acts 15:5; 24:5, 14; 26:5; 28:22; I Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5:20; Titus 3:10; II Peter 2:1. In its basic form, it simply meant to choose something or someone or between two things. The noun form as in our text indicates the result of a choice. The term is not necessarily, in itself, bad, though sometimes it got that way.

jealousy - Is not necessarily bad itself, since the O.T. taught that God was a jealous God over Israel. See also Rom. 10:2; 13:13; II Cor. 12:20; Philippians 3:6. It obviously is a problem emotion, and difficult to handle for anyone. It often results in evil being done.

V. 18 - The activities of the whole number of the apostles brought about this action. They had all prayed to speak the word boldly and had evidently done so. The results were much too much for the Jewish religious leaders to be able to bear.

V. 19 - As in chapter 12, God intervenes and brings them freedom so that they may continue practicing that for which they were imprisoned. Angels played an important part in the Bible, and evidently were an important part of God's team to help mankind. See Hebrews 1:14.

V. 20 - **Go** - The same verb form is found in Matthew 10:6. **Stand** - The second command, in a participle form, which like an infinitive, could be used as an imperative. **Speak** - the third command,

to be obeyed when they had obeyed the first two commands. The Sanhedrin had forbidden this very thing - speaking (i.e., preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus). **in the temple** - A public place. One cannot help but marvel at this miracle, but the record does not inform us about it, except in the most brief way. The important thing was the message and its proclamation: **all the words of life** - the message which they had been forbidden to speak, but which alone had life.

QUESTIONS

56. What do you know about the sect of the Sadducees?
57. Did the high priest have the right to have the apostles arrested?
58. At what time of the day did the apostles start teaching? Where?

On Solomon's Porch, 5:21a

21 And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and taught.

V. 21 - The men were released at night, and began their obedience as soon as possible. Perhaps this was customary, to utilize the cooler times of day. Too, early morning sacrifices were offered, along with prayer times - hence, many people would be around the area.

Before the Sanhedrin, 5:21b-41

Now the high priest came and those who were with him and called together the council and all the senate of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, and they returned and reported, 23 “We found the prison

door securely locked and the sentries standing by the doors, but when we opened it we found no one inside.” 24 Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were much perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. 25 And some one came and told them, “The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” 26 Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but without violence, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”

33 When they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them. 34 But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, held in honor by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a while. 35 And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you do with these men. 36 For before these days Theudas arose, giving himself out to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred joined him; but he was slain and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. 38 So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!”

40 So they took his advice and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 Then they left the presence of the

council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

V. 21 - **council and...senate** - The Jewish Sanhedrin plus elders (apparently) of the people. An important matter was before them!

officers - The word for a servant, or helper, one who assists. It could mean a guard as in Matt. 5:25; Mark 14:54, 65; John 7:32, 45ff.; 18:18; or an attendant, as in Luke 4:20; or one who serves another, as in Luke 1:2; John 18:36; Acts 13:5; 26:16; I Cor. 4:1.

V. 23 - The text does not admit of any interpretation except that of a miracle. Moreover, God replaced everything so that the apostles’ absence would not be noticed until such time as they would be sent for.

V. 24 - The council had every cause to wonder what was happening - but they finally ignored all the evidence and evil triumphed again in their lives. Their actions only put into greater relief the actions of the apostles. The mustard seed (of the church) was growing and would soon, despite intense opposition, become a large tree!

V. 25 - The word had gotten around quickly about the apostles being in the temple, and many were not in sympathy with them.

V. 26 - The people were much divided over the apostles and their message, but enough were favorable to make the soldiers fearful when the arrests were made. This was also true with both John and Jesus: each had followers, despite the general opposition from the hierarchy. As Mark 12:37 puts in, “The common people heard him (Jesus) gladly.” This was also true in a great measure for the apostles.

V. 28 - Caiaphas summed up well the basic facts. The apostles had been enjoined to cease, but rather had continued to proclaim their message which included an indictment of the Jewish leaders for murder (mentioned again in v. 30). The priest

and leaders had taken the blood of Christ upon them, Matt. 27:25. However, the message preached was, even for murderers, redemption of their sin, and a new life in Christ. Notice that the apostles were “teaching” the message, as well as preaching it.

V. 29 - **to obey** - From a verb “to persuade” which turns into persuaded and thus obedient. See Acts 27:21; Titus 3:1.

As one attempts to obey God’s will in conjunction with man’s will, the time may well arise when, whether actually so or not, said wills are seemingly in conflict. The only choice a Christian can make on such occasions is to obey God, trusting that God will honor his faith and forgive any misunderstanding. The apostles thought the faith and forgiveness issue was clear, and answered accordingly. That is all anyone can do.

V. 30 - **The God of our fathers** - The apostles and others never for a moment let themselves or others think that what they were preaching was anything but what their God had always planned. Their appeal was to the Old Testament, which everyone accepted as from God. We may also find good usage of the O.T. that will strengthen our case for Jesus of Nazareth being the Messiah of God.

V. 31 - **at his right hand** - As in 2:34. This was the position of power. **Leader** - Sometimes translated **prince**, **author**, or **pioneer** as in Hebrews 2:10; 12:2. **Savior** - The problem that continually plagued the Jews was their concept of their Messiah and what sort of savior the Messiah was to be.

repentance...forgiveness - Jesus had commanded the apostles in Luke 24. The basic command to both Jews and Greeks involved a change of mind, which would change the future way of life, and at the same time bring forgiveness of sin for the past life, as the change of mind was effected through obedience to Christ. It was a great gift from God to have the privilege of changing our minds about sin. See Acts 11:18.

V. 32 - The Holy Spirit was not a well-known concept to the Jewish people, if the O.T. be our guide. Perhaps some concepts were not recorded or the idea may have been taught but not recorded for our information. Hence, what the Sanhedrin understood by Peter’s remark about the Holy Spirit is not clear. It is clear that the Holy Spirit is only given to those obeying God. No text tells us what to do to obey better than Acts 2:38. See also John 14:23.

V. 33 - **enraged** - The Greek term has the idea cut or sawn in two, both here and 7:54, the only times it occurs. The apostles’ response verily tore the listeners apart. The effects of the apostles’ words were so great that the council members were minded to take more lives rather than being minded to change their minds. Paul found the same situation in ch. 23, as well as in Acts 13:45-47; 18:6ff.

V. 35 - **do** - The form of the Greek term indicates a way of doing.

Gamaliel’s advice has been viewed differently. Some take it as a “cop-out” in that evidence available was ignored, and his response was negative. Some see it as the best possible position to take considering the make-up of the council. We remember a famous student of Gamaliel, Saul of Tarsus, who finally was convinced of the evidence about Jesus. He may have been present in these proceedings.

V. 36-37 - Gamaliel reasoned that both Theudas and Judas were not of God, and they came to nothing without any opposition necessary. He thus reasons that if God had been backing these two men, they would have rather prospered. He suggested the same course of action would be prudent in the case before them.

Perhaps of interest is the fact that Gamaliel was a grandson of Hillel, and later became president of the Sanhedrin.

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The enrollment he mentioned is the same sort of event as in Luke 2, and occurred every 14 years.

V. 37 - **were scattered** - The prodigal son did this with his money, Luke 15:13. Jesus used this term when he quoted Zechariah 13:7 in Mark 14:27. God's children were scattered, John 11:52, and Jesus' death would unite them, John 10:16.

V. 38 - keep away, divorce yourselves from them is Gamaliel's advice, because if it is only of men, the work will not stand.

V. 39 - He continued to reason that if it were of God, not men, no possibility existed of vanquishing it. It seems to me that he reasoned rightly, and gave good advice to the council.

opposing God - The Greek term means God fighters no less!

V. 40 - The council was persuaded (i.e., to obey) and allowed the apostles to leave after having beaten (the term occurs in such texts as Luke 22:63; Acts 22:19 and I Cor. 9:26; II Cor. 11:20) them. They were never to speak again in or for Jesus.

V. 41 - The men thought the cause for which they were beaten was worthy of the beating. Some have over the year accused the apostles of lying about the empty tomb and a resurrected Jesus. It seems rather dumb to even state such a thing. Men will suffer and die for what they believe is the truth, whether it be so or not. No man or group of men in their right minds would suffer so or die for what they knew was false. The apostles' reaction had been reflected many times before (as in Heb. 10:32 - 11:40) in the O.T. times, and afterward, as Christians throughout the ages have likewise endured, and for the same reason, unshakable faith in God.

The Spread of the Word, 5:42

42 And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

V. 42 - Feeling honored by being dishonored, the apostles continued as obedient witnesses for Jesus, both in public and private. Paul did likewise, Acts 21.

We honor, even so far removed in time, their faith and zeal. They were totally committed to the ministry of Jesus. As we consider the statement of Jesus in 1:8, it seems evident that the apostles did not think their present distress was reason to leave Jerusalem for Judea, etc. The church would soon be scattered, however, by persecution and would take the message everywhere, even if the apostles remained.

QUESTIONS

56. When we consider how wrong the Jewish leaders were, even in the face of much evidence, we only need to read such texts as John 7:49 ("This crowd, who knows not the law, are accursed") to understand the leaders better. Were the Jewish leaders biased, ignorant, or what?

57. In what ways were the apostles bringing the blood of Jesus upon the heads of the Jewish leaders?

58. What had God done with Jesus?

59. Were (at least) two witnesses required by Jewish law to establish anything?

60. Why did Gamaliel give the advice he did?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 6

1. What is significant about the inclusion of “women” (5:14)?
 2. Do you believe people were healed when Peter’s shadow fell on them? Explain your answer.

3. Is jealousy always bad? Explain your answer.

4. What role did an angel play in the apostles’ release from prison, and what three commands did the angel give them?

5. What charge did the High Priest give the apostles, and what was Peter’s bold reply?

6. Explain the Greek term for “enraged” and discuss how it describes the reaction of the council members.

7. Who was Gamaliel, and what advice did he give to the Sanhedrin?

8. Who were Judas and Theudas, and what had they done in the past?

9. What does the Greek term “opposing God” mean?

10. Complete the following verse, “And every day in the _____ and at _____ they did not cease _____ and _____ as the _____.”

LESSON SEVEN
(6:1-12)

On Solomon’s Porch, 6:1-6

6 *Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” 5 And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them.*

V. 1 - Whether intentional or otherwise, racial problems begin to appear among the disciples. Probably those widows who were Christian were excluded from the temple support (if such there was) and had only the help of their Christian friends. Perhaps the Grecian widows were more needy than the others, or lived in a hard-to-reach spot, etc. The text doesn’t say that the

widows murmured, only that some were murmuring about the neglect of them.

(daily) distribution - Translates the Greek term regularly used for ministry deaconship, or service. The church had concern for those in need, and was attempting to alleviate the problems as best they could; but humans, few or many, may lack wisdom and planning sufficient for the needs of all.

V. 2 - It is not right - The 12 saw their specific task as being too demanding to permit this work/service (same Greek word as mentioned above in v. 1 and in v. 3, *ministry* of the word). They did not object to serving/ministering, per se. The service was worthy, and needed, but others who were not charged with the tasks of the apostleship could serve in said areas as well as they.

V. 3 - pick out - the verb means to select, or be concerned with, look after, an active participation, etc. It is the same root as is transliterated "Episcopal" and/or translated as in 20:28 (guardian) or I Tim. 3:1 (bishop). The disciples were to do the selecting, not the apostles.

good repute - From a word which means of a good witness. Certainly the task was important, the men above reproach were needed. We would do well to learn from this!

we may appoint - The apostles laid down the qualifications for these men, and then were to set to work the men chosen. The Greek term is seen in Matt. 24:45, 47; Luke 12:14; Acts 7:10, 27; 17:15; Titus 1:5; Hebrews 5:1; James 4:4; and carries the idea of put in a place of service. (Paul gave Titus the charge to appoint elders in Crete, not to select them but to assign them to work.) There is no reason to suppose the men could only do the task for which they were chosen, or that they necessarily served beyond the duration of the existing need.

V. 4 - The apostles proposed that they would continue steadfastly and specifically in prayer and ministering of the word. For those interested, the Greek term is used in this verse to refer to the

Gospel message, etc., and in verse 5 in reference to what the apostles instructed the people to do. The Greek term had a wide usage. Note now v. 7.

V. 5 - It may be of interest that all seven names are non-Jewish, whether the men were so or not. We hear of Philip, Acts 8 and 21. Certainly, if Stephen and Philip are any examples, the seven later did more than minister at the work for which they were specifically chosen.

V. 6 - The laying on of hands was a common practice in the early Church (Acts 8:17; 13:3; 19:6; I Tim. 4:14; 5:22; II Tim. 1:6; Hebrews 6:2) as well as Jewish life, Leviticus 3:2; 16:21; Numbers 27:18; Deut. 34:9. It evidently was a meaningful custom to them, and signified assignment of responsibility or imparting of power.

QUESTIONS

61. The Hellenists were Jews whose language was Greek; probably so because of their parentage (many Jews were in other lands than Palestine). Would this be a reason for the neglect (i.e., inability to communicate)?

62. Had the apostles been given a specific place to fill (i.e., a deaconship of their own) for God?

63. The apostles, directed of God (we assume) laid down the rules for the occasion, while the congregation, using these guidelines, did the actual selection. Is this a good example for church policy today?

64. Could men today be chosen as “deacons” for a specific task, and when the task was completed, cease being “deacons”?

The Increase of the Word of God, 6:7,8

7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

V. 7 - **The Word of God increased** - The Greek text indicates continually. The same idea is emphasized about the priests; there were continual conversions. Many Jews were doubtless like Simeon and Joseph of Arimathea, Luke 23:50-53; John 19:38-40 with dispositions to believe the compelling evidences.

were obedient - Greek word imperfect tense: kept becoming obedient. **the faith** - as used in Acts 14:22; Galatians 1:23; Jude v. 3. An objective system to be accepted as true and reliable.

V. 8 - In the midst of all the apostles and the work they were doing, Stephen is magnified. We actually know more of his work, and that of Philip, than of almost all the apostles. He kept doing the miraculous things, evidently while doing the specific tasks for which he had been chosen and appointed.

At the Synagogue of the Freedmen, 6:9-12

9 Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, arose and disputed with Stephen. 10 But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly instigated men, who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” 12 And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon

him and seized him and brought him before the council.

V. 9 - **Libertines/Freedmen** - Former Jewish slaves of Rome, or (apparently) descendants of such; now free men. Saul of Tarsus may well have had his first direct confrontation with a Christian in this exchange with Stephen.

The Greek word translated “disputed” means to question or to exchange questions, sometimes with rancor or evil intent in the questioning. See Mark 1:27; 8:11; 9:14, 16; 12:28; Luke 22:23.

V. 10 - God, we believe, enabled Stephen to answer effectively all their questions, so that they were never able to have any advantage over him. Paul later was like this in Acts 17. Naturally, having lost face in public, the Jews, rather than admit defeat, stooped to worldly ways.

V. 11 - Because truth was too evident in Stephen’s answers, the men resorted (as did the Jewish leaders with Jesus) to underhanded tactics. (A good lesson for us: face the truth squarely, and if proved wrong, accept it and repent. It is also pertinent that we not be like those Jewish men: equate our understanding of God’s Word as being equal to it; thus holding that any disagreement with us is tantamount to disagreement with God. It might not be so! We, as Christians, should be willing to accept truth wherever we find it, knowing that God’s truth is not undermined by any other truth. Of course, the charge of blasphemy, if true, was serious. The truth was, however, they were the ones who were blaspheming Moses and God. Ref. 3:22.

QUESTIONS

65. Stephen was said to be “full of grace.” What did that expression mean?

66. From what sections of the world did (some of) the Libertines come?

67. Why would they “secretly” conspire against Stephen? Would this indicate good motives?

68. Was Stephen actually preaching about the destruction of the temple, or was the temple’s demise to be one of the effects of Christianity?

8. What does the Greek word translated “disputed” mean?

9. Complete the textbook writer’s statement: “A good lesson for us: face the _____ and if _____, _____ and _____.”

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 7

1. Briefly describe the problem recorded in Acts 6:1-6.

2. Why couldn’t the Apostles personally minister to the Hellenist widows?

3. What were the three requirements for those to be appointed as servants of the church?

4. What does the Greek verb for “pick out” mean?

5. What is interesting about the names of the seven men selected in Acts 6:5?

6. Discuss the meaning and significance of “laying on of hands”.

7. Who were the Libertines and Freedmen?

LESSON EIGHT

(6:13 - 7:60)

Stephen Before the Sanhedrin, 6:13-7:57

13 And set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us.” 15 And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

7 And the high priest said, “Is this so?” 2 And Stephen said: “Brethren and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, 3 and said to him, ‘Depart from your land and from your kindred and go into the land which I will show you.’ 4 Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living; 5 yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length, but promised to give it to him in possession and to his posterity after him, though he had no child. 6 And God spoke to this effect, that his posterity would be aliens in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and ill-treat them four hundred years. 7 ‘But I will judge the nation

which they serve,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.' 8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.

9 "And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him, 10 and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him governor over Egypt and over all his household. 11 Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. 12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent forth our fathers the first time, 13 And at the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. 14 And Joseph sent and called to him Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five souls; 15 and Jacob went down into Egypt. And he died, himself and our fathers, 16 and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

17 "But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt 18 till there arose over Egypt another king who had not known Joseph. 19 He dealt craftily with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, that they might not be kept alive. 20 At this time Moses was born, and was beautiful before God. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house; 21 and then he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. 22 And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.

23 "When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. 24 And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking the Egyptian. 25 He supposed that his brethren understood that God was giving them deliverance by his hand, but they did not understand. 26 And on the following day he

appeared to them as they were quarreling and would have reconciled them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you wrong each other?' 27 But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? 28 Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' At this retort Moses fled, and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

30 "Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. 31 When Moses saw it he wondered at the sight; and as he drew near to look, the voice of the Lord came, 32 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. 33 And the Lord said to him, Take off the shoes from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. 34 I have surely seen the ill-treatment of my people that are in Egypt and heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.'

35 "This Moses whom they refused, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' God sent as both a ruler and deliverer by the hand of the angel that appeared to him in the bush. 36 He led them out, having performed wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. 37 This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up.' 38 This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living oracles to give to us. 39 Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, 40 saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' 41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and rejoiced in the works of their hands. 42 But God turned and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets:

'Did you offer to me slain beasts and sacrifices, forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? 43 And you took up the

tent of Moloch, and the star of the god Rephan, the figures which you made to worship: and I will remove you beyond Babylon.'

44 *"Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, even as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. 45 Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations which God thrust out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, 46 who found favor in the sight of God and asked leave to find a habitation for the God of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who built a house for him. 48 Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands; as the prophet says,*

49 'Heaven is my throne, and earth my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? 50 Did not my hands make all these things?'

51 *"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, 53 you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."*

54 *Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him. 55 But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 56 and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him.*

As we begin this discussion of this section, we must consider the charges against Stephen, 6:13-14, and the meaning of these charges, as the Jews understood them, and as Stephen understood them. Each group saw the charges as they understood the O.T. Scriptures. Stephen's apology in ch. 7 (the word then meant "defense of," not "excuse for") was designed to show how the O.T. record,

understood rightly, would exonerate him, and correct the matter against him. (Chapter 7 is a perfect example of the point made in 6:10 that Stephen's arguments were not answerable.) Stephen had perceived the true nature of the O.T. law (and all its related things): it was all type and shadow, predicting the true and the real. It was to be realized and completed in Jesus and that which Jesus established; the Church. As the speech showed, God was not limited to one holy place, because many places were holy: Egypt, Arabia; and his promises were not exclusively limited to or involved with Jewish people and culture. Something international and cross-cultural in scope was indicated (note Rom. 3:27-31). Hence, an unbiased look at their history, not colored by national pride and racial bigotry, would show that God's field was the world, that the children of promise rather than children of flesh were reckoned as seed, Rom. 9:6-8.

Any candid perusal of Jewish history would show that, by and large, "A wicked and adulterous nation" was all too descriptive of the people of that history. As Moses said of the people of his generation, "You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you" (Deut. 9:24). Paul, quoting Isaiah 65:2, depicted God stretching forth his hand "all day long" to a "disobedient and rebellious people" (Rom. 10:21). As Stephen pointed out to the council members, the patriarchs were jealous and wicked; their descendants refused Moses; the prophets were ill-treated (note Matt. 21:33-45 here), and *the prophet* like unto Moses, Jesus of Nazareth, they themselves had rejected and crucified; all of which painted the picture of a people decidedly against the Holy Spirit.

This speech is one of the great bits of history recorded for our admonition and learning. It helps us to clarify in our minds the real differences between Judaism and Christianity. Here are the struggles of the early church (as seen in Acts 10-11; 15; 22-23; 28; and in Galatians to realize the vast difference in the two institutions); and the majestic lessons in the Hebrew epistle. All are backdrops of what Stephen proclaimed in the face of those who would take his life for His proclamation. May we

see as perceptively as Stephen the true nature of that which we have espoused, and be ever diligent that we do not confuse God's truth with our understanding of it, but rather make every attempt to remove ourselves from among those "ever learning and never coming to a knowledge of the truth." May we hold fast to that which is eternal, and be found in Christ, in whom "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

V. 13 - Stephen evidently saw clearly the nature of Christianity, and presented the same truth as Jesus in Matthew 5:17, etc.

false witness - The charges these men brought were perversion, for Stephen's witness was not really as they made it out to be. Jesus was accused of the same things at his trial.

never ceases - Stephen never rested in his presentation of Christianity as the ultimate and intended effect of the whole Jewish system. For those opposed, who thought the Jewish system was to continue, his work was quite clearly of a blasphemous nature, since he opposed what they thought was true.

V. 14 - As Jesus said in John 4, the time had come when men would worship God in many places, not just Jerusalem. Christianity was going to be new wine in new wineskins! While remarking as we did in v. 13, the acceptance of Christianity as the fulfillment of Judaism would bring about the end of the temple and the law. In this sense, the accusations against Stephen were true.

V. 15 - What is meant by the description of Stephen's face may well be this: it was an obvious testimony from God to him (as also with Moses and the shining face he had when coming from the presence of God). Whatever may have been God's intention, it had no visible effect on the council, at least at that moment.

7:1 - The high priest asks: guilty or not guilty? He evidently ignored the appearance of Stephen's face, or did not realize the implications thereof.

V. 2 - **God of glory** - Often a characterization of God in the O.T. God used many things to represent his presence (like the Shekinah, Exodus 13:21-22; the burning bush, Exodus 3:1-6; the Ark, Numbers 10:35-36), helping faith become sight.

in Mesopotamia (land between the rivers)
- The lesson: God had faithful people apart from Palestine, yea, even before there was a Palestine in the sense they knew it. Moreover, even at that time, God had a plan: to honor those who had faith.

in Haran - Genesis 12 picks up the story in Haran, but as seen in Genesis 15:7 and Nehemiah 9:7, God brought Abraham out of Ur of Chaldees, from among idol worshippers, Joshua 24:2.

V. 3 - That Abraham followed God by faith is the lesson they were to get, a faith that trusted God, even to the forsaking of the understood for the not understood (that is, he trusted God enough to give up what was then his to go where God wanted to take him).

V. 4 - Haran, the name of Abraham's older brother, and also the name of the city in which Abraham lived before going on to Palestine. Though Terah was not faithful to God as was his son and the call was not to him, yet he went with his son - probably because of the close family ties.

V. 5 - Point: Abraham never realized the promise of God about possession of land, since he died a sojourner (Heb. 11:8-10), only possessing what he purchased: a burial place (Gen. 23:9-17). Hence, the promise was realized only in faith. The issue was about temporal versus eternal things, not just a piece of earth and a building somewhere. One of the problems of the Jews was their attachment to material things and places, and failure to look for a city whose builder and maker was God.

V. 6 - Further indication that God's people lived by faith, not by sight: they were but sojourners in a strange land. **400 years** - Stephen quotes

Genesis 15:13. Exodus 12:40-41 shows the exact total was 430 years.

V. 7 - Only after hundreds of years did God choose a holy place. He had had a holy place long before such, a most important point and He finally led them to a land he had set aside for them.

V. 8 - As this verse shows, outward signs were only given after hundreds of years. As Romans 2:25-29; 4:1-23 show, God's faithful were such, quite apart from things that the Jews greatly emphasized. No outward sign, or combination of them, could suffice if faith was not present.

Isaac - The first of many promises God kept to Abraham, because he was faithful to God.

V. 9 - The character of the twelve patriarchs is stated. (It was because of jealousy that Jesus was killed). Foolish pride (i.e., jealousy) will cause Stephen's death, just as it brought the brothers to sell Joseph.

V. 10 - Point: God was not to be thwarted by the jealousy of some unbelieving men because he had greater things in store.

Pharaoh - The word was a title like president and was applied to many different rulers of Egypt. Sometimes the Bible referred to the pharaoh as king.

V. 11 - God had prepared Egypt for the famine by his revelations to Joseph, and his blessing upon the land itself. Canaan (i.e., Palestine) had not been so blessed.

V. 12-16 - The beginnings of the Jewish nation, but in a foreign land and soon in bondage. Joseph and Jacob, and the patriarchs will die in a strange land, not possessing one part of the land of promise. Only Jacob and Joseph would be buried in Palestine; Jacob in a tomb purchased by Abraham at Hebron (Gen. 23:1-20; 50:4-14), and Joseph in a parcel of land bought by Jacob at Shechem (Joshua 24:32).

This compression of the two in Acts 7:16 could be caused by an accidental omission of a line or two of Acts in a very early copy.

V. 17 - Now, and only now, is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham mentioned as near to being kept, though he had been with them all the time. One of the things that Stephen is showing is the way God keeps His word.

God had granted - The Greek word is normally translated "confess." God's promise was assured to Abraham.

V. 18 - We do not really know who the Pharaoh was who started the oppression. About 1700 B.C., the Hyksos peoples invaded Egypt, and ruled awhile, though finally were overthrown. The XVIII dynasty kings (about 1550 B.C.) continued the oppression, if they did not begin it. The XIX dynasty had several kings with the name Rameses, one of whom (maybe Rameses II) built cities. About 1486 B.C., Thutmose III took over the land, and probably was the Pharaoh when Moses left Egypt. The step-mother, and also mother-in-law of Thutmose, Hatshepsut, queen of Egypt prior to Thutmose, is probably the one who found a baby in the Nile, put there to be found, and there because the parents of Aaron, Miriam and Moses (Amram and Jochebed) had disobeyed the Pharaoh's orders (Ex. ch. 1).

We can not help but marvel at the influence Joseph had, evidently for a long time after his death.

When Moses returned to Egypt after 40 years, at the age of 80, it was probably Amenhotep II; the time of the Exodus (the going out) was 1445 B.C.

Moses was instructed - The Greek term is of wide meaning, involving all the things that go into rearing a child. It includes teaching, Acts 22:3, caring, discipline (Heb. 12:5, etc.), and even scourging, Luke 23:22.

V. 23 - The mother of Moses had instructed him well in respect to his heritage!

V. 24 - **being wronged** - The Greek term is to do wrong to, to treat unjustly, injure, as in v. 26; Matt. 20:13; Acts 25:11; Gal. 4:12; Col. 3:25; Rev. 22:11.

V. 25 - **he supposed** - As with Joseph earlier, and the prophets later, Moses assumed that God's people would recognize God's deliverer, but not so (see John 1:11). It is evident that Jochebed taught her son who he was, and who he was not.

deliverance - The Greek word is generally translated as salvation since the term was applied to any kind of rescue, restoration, etc.

V. 26 - **would have reconciled** - The Greek says: would have changed them unto peace (i.e., a whole relationship). Moses made the point that they were brethren, and asked for what purpose they were fighting each other.

V. 27 - One, at least, of the Israelites did not accept Moses' leadership, and rather forcefully rejected him, in action and word (v. 28), which let Moses know that his attempt to deliver his people by killing an Egyptian was known, but not appreciated.

V. 29 - Read Hebrews 11:23-28 here, which points up the faith of Moses vs. the unbelief of this people, plus the fact that God was with him though he was rejected by Israel.

an exile - The same Greek term as in v. 6 (about Abraham's seed), Eph. 2:19, and I Peter 2:11, concerning Christians, whose citizenship is in heaven, Phil. 3:20-21. Note also that Moses lived in a strange land, married a strange woman, worked for a strange man, and had two sons, but all were blessings from God. V. 30 will continue this idea of God at work and blessing people who were outside the holy land but faithful to God.

V. 30 - **a holy place** - A burning bush, a thing and place not made with the hands of men. Sometimes it seems as if the expression "angel of the Lord" equaled the Lord, Exodus 3:1-6. Angels played an important part in God's dealing with his people, as in Genesis 19:1; Numbers 22:22; II Sam. 24:16; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 1:14; 12:22.

V. 32 - Note in passing, God said: I am (not was), which Jesus pointed out in Luke 20:37-38 meant not only that God always "is" (some 600 years elapsed between Abraham and Moses), but also that the dead live after death (a point for the Sadducees listening to Stephen).

V. 33 - **The Lord said** - Moses was instructed to remove his shoes; evidently the priests did not wear shoes in the temple either, since no instructions were given about footwear.

V. 34 - God was always aware of the afflictions upon his people, but in his wisdom, he did not always respond. Faith in God was a requisite then, and now, since he doesn't always answer when we call.

I will send - The noun form is transliterated "apostle." God had "seen" and "heard" and at the right time had decided to act.

V. 35 - **Moses...refused** - The same point was made in Acts 3:14 about Jesus. Note that God chose what Israel refused, a repeated refrain throughout this history.

deliverer - The word carries the idea of redeemer, as was Jesus. See Luke 1:68; 2:38; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 9:12.

V. 36 - God used Moses in a mighty way, despite the protests and unbelief of Israel. Numbers, the history of a people gone bad, records for our learning the general disposition of the Israelites. Some of them were faithful in some ways, but most were fickle.

V. 37 - The prediction and the fulfillment are seen in Acts 3:22-26, where Peter elaborated

the same basic theme. Implied is the fact that as Moses was treated by God's people, so was Jesus; though both were sent by God.

V. 38 - **congregation** - Translates the term rendered church or assembly. As with the first church, the church which Jesus leads is a pilgrim one, a people of God, holy to him, wherever they are, destined to be purified with him in the age to come.

living oracles - The Greek means living sayings, especially used of messages from God. See Romans 3:2; Hebrews 4:12; I Peter 1:23.

V. 39 - Moses was God's spokesman, Exodus 33:11; Gal. 3:19, and to disobey Moses was to disobey God. See Numbers 12:1ff. It was correct to equate Moses (i.e., the words of Moses with the words of God) as in 6:11. So it was with the words of the apostles to the church. They are equal in force to God's words.

V. 40 - Note: They completely ignored God's part in their redemption from Egypt, blaming Moses for it all. Their unbelief was never manifested more clearly, a point Stephen wanted to make. The Psalmist in ch. 115:3-8 and ch. 135:15-18 went to some lengths to describe the stupidity of people who worshipped their own handiwork. See also Habakkuk 2:18-20; Rom. 1:18ff.

V. 41 - Read here Exodus 32:1ff. The people of Israel ended up drinking water upon which Moses had thrown the ground-up bits of golden calf - a belly-full of idolatry! The account shows that Aaron was carried away with the crowd.

V. 42 - **host of heaven** - Apparently God let them reap the wages of their sin. Certainly the Israelites worshipped idols after they entered the land of promise. See Deut. 17:3; II Kings 17:16; 21:3; II Chron. 33:3, 5; Jeremiah 8:2; 19:13; etc. The quote is from Amos 5:25-27.

book of the prophets - This is the typical usage of O.T. prophecy, in that the quote is from a

prophet who lived long after the wilderness wanderings, but whose words were applicable to the subject at hand.

V. 44 - All the preceding was true, yet God still was willing to forgive and continue the revelation through Moses to them. So, a tent of testimony/witness was made, the type of that which was to come, Heb. 9:1ff. It is true to say that there is considerable disagreement about the type-antitype among brethren yet today. Of course, the Jews had missed the point badly in their day.

V. 45 - **Joshua** - In Greek, the word is the same as that for Jesus. Joshua was only able to do what he did as God directed him. The land of promise, after some 700 years, was finally inhabited by the children of Israel, descendants of Abraham by the son of promise, Isaac. As pointed out earlier, not all of the Israelites were reckoned as children of Promise, but only those who lived by faith (see Gal. 3:25-29). Their fleshly lineage counted for nothing unless they had faith.

David - It was not until David's time that the land promised by God to Abraham (see Gen. 15:18-20 and Numbers 34:1-15, where the details are) was conquered and controlled. But see Joshua 1:4-6 and the fulfillment cited by Joshua in 23:14. Finally, read the specific statement in I Kings 3:8, that Solomon ruled the land God had promised to Abraham. Note also in I Kings 3:9 that the people were so numerous that Solomon describes them as uncontrollable. All this is to help us see that God made a specific promise to Abraham and God fulfilled that promise, just as he did the other promises he made to Abraham.

V. 46 - A place to dwell was not too important to God, as David thought, or as the council might have thought. V. 48 makes this exact point.

V. 47 - Solomon was chosen because of David's past life, I Chron. 28:3.

V. 48 - Point: God can't be contained in brick and mortar houses (nor by the thinking of men, either, it is implied). Remember that one of the charges against Stephen was about the holy place, 6:13. The quote is Isaiah 66:1ff.

V. 49 - The continuing theme: God can't be limited, and is not limited to one little place - He is God of the universe, and his dominion is over the universe. The ideas of Jesus in John 4 are relevant here: God had always sought those to worship him, wherever they were, who would do so according to his will, and especially in the age that began with Pentecost and the church.

V. 50 - The Bible, over and over, presents God as the sole creator of the universe. Only men who disbelieve could miss the point.

V. 51 - Israel's history was marred with just such descriptive terms, as in Exodus 33:3,5; 34:9, Deut. 9:6; 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; 6:10. Now read Rom. 2:25-29.

Stephen's declaration about the Holy Spirit brings out what was really true in the O.T. times, though not very openly seen, and that is the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people even before N.T. times. The text in Genesis 6:3 is a good example. To be so described by Stephen would indicate that they were really not God's people as they thought themselves to be.

V. 52 - They had likewise been so accused by Jesus in Matthew 23:33-37; Luke 11:47; and Peter in Acts 3. See Romans 10:2-4. Though they gloried in the law, they did not keep it, as Paul mentions in Rom. 2:17-24. The important keeping of the law would have been to accept him to whom it pointed, Gal. 3:24ff.

V. 53 - There is no specific mention in Exodus of angels, but that does not mean that none were involved in the giving of the law.

V. 54 - As in 5:33, they were "cut in two" by Stephen's remarks. It was a terrifying

accusation by Stephen, and created a violent reaction in the men of the council.

V. 55 - Christ is depicted as being at God's right hand, the position of power, both sitting and standing. Scripture nowhere explains where heaven is; but rather just teaches that there is such a place, that God is there, that Jesus is there, etc. God didn't try to answer all the questions we might ask about things such as heaven. He wants us to trust in Christ and leave the matters we can not understand up to him.

gazed - The Greek word means to look intently, to fix one's eyes upon, as in Luke 4:20; Acts 13:9; II Cor. 3:7, 13.

V. 57 - A hard-hearted response, certainly. One wonders if Joseph or Nicodemus or Gamaliel were there. Stephen was right!

QUESTIONS

69. In what sense do you think Stephen spoke against the law and the temple? Could one preach the Gospel and not do that?

70. What does the apology (= defense) of Stephen attempt to do?

71. What characterized Abraham as opposed to those in his day? (Read Romans 4:1-22.)

72. Why bring up Joseph?

73. How did Moses fit into the discussion?

74. Stephen discussed the tabernacle and God's relationship to it. Why?

75. Would the description in Romans 10:21 be applicable to the Jewish leaders, as Stephen saw them?

Outside the City Wall, 7: 58-60

58 Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

V. 58 - **young man** - The term was commonly applied to young men between the approximate ages of 24-40. The witnesses would probably be those who falsely testified against Stephen, and were to take the lead in such action, Leviticus 24:14; Deut. 17:7.

V. 59 - Here is the prayer directed at Jesus as Lord, though this is not a normal thing that is taught in the N.T. Of course, being stoned to death is not normal either. We are expected to address our prayers to God, and recognize that Jesus is the mediator between us and God, especially in respect to our sins.

V. 60 - At least Stephen died with the right attitude of forgiveness, as should every Christian, Rom. 12:19-21. Stephen certainly followed in Jesus' footsteps at his death, both in his prayer for himself and request in behalf of others.

fell asleep - The term is equal to death as in John 11:11-14; I Cor. 11:30; 15:18; but is also used in the sense we use it, as asleep at night, etc. Jesus was asleep, Matt. 8:24; Peter also, Acts 12:6.

QUESTIONS

76. Was Stephen's appraisal of his auditors verified?

77. Where was Jesus in Stephen's vision of heaven? Do other scriptures verify the same fact about Jesus?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS ON LESSON 8

1. How does Stephen's speech help clarify the difference between Judaism and Christianity?

2. Describe the face of Stephen in Acts 6:15 and its significance.

3. How long were the Israelites enslaved and ill-treated?

4. Was “Pharoah” the name of a person or a title? Explain.

5. What is the name of the lady who probably found baby Moses in the Nile River?

6. Discuss the meaning of the Greek term “instructed” in 7:18?

7. Explain the Greek word “deliverance”.

8. Discuss the importance of “I Am” in Acts 7:32.

9. What two words mean the same thing as the word “congregation”?

10. Explain the Greek term “living oracles”.

11. In Greek, “Joshua” is the same as what other name?

12. Discuss the council’s reaction following Stephen’s speech?

13. What two things did Stephen see as he looked into heaven?

14. The term “young man” was commonly applied to men between the ages of _____ to _____.

15. The witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of what young man?

16. Complete this statement: “At least Stephen died with the _____ of _____, as should _____.”

LESSON NINE

(8:1-40)

The Church in Judea and Samaria, 8:1 - 12: 25

The Dispersion, 8:1-4

8 *And Saul was consenting to his death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul laid waste the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.*

4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

V. 1 - **Saul was consenting** - The Greek term implies complete approval by Saul. One of the

interesting facets of Saul is this: his schooling was under Gamaliel, who was a part of the “liberal” wing of the Pharisees, Hillel being its most illustrious rabbi. Yet such liberalism could not tolerate any disagreement over the fundamental tenets of their religion.

scattered - The term is seen in 11:19; also in John 7:35; James 1:1; I Peter 1:1. They were scattered like seed from a sower.

except the apostles - Luke may mean that the apostles did not leave, even though persecuted.

V. 2 - **great lamentation** - Mourning (beating the breast and weeping) was customary among Jewish people, but this may have taken on different meaning since devout men were involved in it. Simeon (Luke 2) and Ananias (Acts 22) and men in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5) were described by the term “devout.”

V. 3 - **laid waste** - The Greek term was used to describe what armies did to the countries that they invaded, or what an angry king might do, such as having others scourged, etc., or what disease might do to someone having it. Christians were forced into prison by Saul. The persecution went on and on, evidently.

V. 4 - Saints were scattered as seed was scattered by someone broadcasting it; and they evangelized as they went, spreading the good news everywhere.

QUESTIONS

78. Saul was so sure that what he was doing was correct, and that he was obedient to God. Do you think that others might be like him?

79. Do you think the apostles failed to perceive that Jesus meant them in Acts 1:8?

80. Do you think that only men preached (though both men and women were scattered abroad)?

The Work of Philip, 8:5-13

5 Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. 6 And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did. 7 For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was much joy in that city. 9 But there was a man named Simon who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the nation of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. 10 They all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is that power of God which is called Great.” 11 And they gave heed to him, because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. 12 But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

V. 5 - Philip, one of the seven in Acts 6, was apparently forced to move also, and went to Samaria, where he still was abiding years later, Acts 21. He too kept proclaiming the message of Christ. Part of his success is recorded for us.

V. 6 - The Samaritans continued to hear and heed what Philip was proclaiming to them, as is evidenced by the belief of many, v. 12, and the healing of some, v. 7. Jesus had preached previously at Sychar (John 4), and those who responded said at that time that Jesus was the Savior of the world.

V. 7 - The Gospel writers show that demon-possession was not necessarily equal to disease, though sometimes those demonized were also afflicted with disease. What was certainly recognized was the fact of demons, that people were possessed by them, and that demons could be cast out by powers stronger than they were (Matt. 12 is an example). Philip evidently continued in the activity begun by Jesus and the twelve.

V. 8 - **city** - The text indicates that Philip was in the capital city of Samaria, called Samaria. The city was first established by Omri in the 8th century B.C., and named Samaria. It was built on a hill, located on the main route from points north to Jerusalem, some 42 miles south of it. The place is still the worship center for the Samaritan Jews of today.

V. 9 - Simon was a common name, but he seemed uncommon to many, because of his activities. He is described as one who used magic with which he amazed people. The term from which "magic" comes means to practice sorcery or magic, etc. A term related to it is in Matthew 2, describing the wise men.

V. 10 - Simon was like Elymas in Acts 13. From the account in Acts 19, many were either practitioners or followers of such people as these two men. Simon had a national following according to Luke. His conversion doubtless was a major victory for the Gospel message.

V. 11 - That people can be deceived is patently obvious from history and experience. What is not plain is that which Simon did for the Samaritans, other than the "miracles" he did. Perhaps he had no message - just miracles.

V. 12 - Philip's preaching was about the kingdom of God (the church) in its relationship to Jesus as its king and Savior. This being believed by those listening, immersion was forthcoming as a natural response to their faith. Simon recognized that he could not do what Philip was doing, and so

accepted the Gospel message, being immersed in obedience to Jesus' command, Matthew 28:19.

Simon believed - The Greek text uses the same term to describe his conversion as it does for all others. There is no reason to disbelieve Luke's statement on the matter. Some have decided that because his life was not letter-perfect after conversion that he did not believe, contrary to Luke's statement. If conversion to Christ means that one never sins again, then Simon was not converted. If, however, one can sin even though a Christian, then Simon was like everybody else in this way. He had some growing up to do after his conversion.

he was amazed - The shoe was on the other foot!

QUESTIONS

81. Who had preached in the area of Samaria before Philip?
82. Many were healed by Philip. Did they automatically become believers when they were healed?
83. To what did the Samaritans give heed, v. 11?
84. Did Simon become a Christian?

The Work of Peter and John, 8:14-25

14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, 15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; 16 for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. 18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me also this power, that any one on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy

Spirit.” 20 But Peter said to him, “Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” 24 And Simon answered, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.”

25 Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the Gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

V. 14 - This verse is interesting in the connection with the relative greatness of the apostles. It has been pointed out that Peter and John were sent by the apostles, indicating that he was not first among equals as some hold. The point is well made.

V. 15 - This verse raises the issue of the Holy Spirit in relationship to the apostles, and to believers and in several ways. Some argue that the Holy Spirit as an indwelling factor was given by several different ways, as here, Acts 2, 19, etc. Others argue that differing manifestations of the Holy Spirit were (are) given, with every believer receiving the indwelling presence, while anything special comes by God’s intervention and only through the apostles’ hands, etc. The issue is settled according to the understanding of various passages, some choosing one text, others another. Doubtless, people will always differ.

V. 16 - This verse seems to assert that the Samaritans had duplicated the Jews actions in Acts 2, and had accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord, being then immersed, and receiving the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit in identical fashion. If so, then Peter and John were sent to pray for a special manifestation of the Holy Spirit upon them, even as Philip had manifested. This position is considered most likely.

V. 17 - One of the issues here is this: if the apostles could “give” special things to others by the power resident in themselves, why the prayers in v. 15? Their ability to impart such gifts may have been only possible as God permitted. Additionally, if that which the apostles were giving was all that the believers would receive (having received nothing earlier), then it is obvious that one can be Christian apart from any relationship to the Holy Spirit. Since this seems untrue, we hold as stated above in v. 16.

As nearly as we know from the N.T., the apostles were the only ones who could pass on special gifts through their imposition of hands. Such texts as this one seem to confirm that idea.

V. 19 - Simon obviously did not adequately comprehend the nature of the gift itself, or of the apostles to Christianity, or of Christianity itself. Perhaps we, if we knew him better, would have thought that his requests were rather natural for him, even if Christian. As stated above on v. 16,17, the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit, such as the apostles had, is what Simon saw and wanted for himself.

V. 20 - Peter’s response was rather clear and immediate. However, v. 22 is just as clear. There was time and opportunity to change from such thinking (i.e., repentance could be forthcoming) and he should do it.

V. 21 - The issue here: 1) Could Simon have actually had “part and lot” in the matter about which he inquired? or 2) If his heart (mind) was right with God, would it have precluded any such offer? Stated another way; “Simon, if you understood the nature of Christianity and the unique position of the apostles to it, you would not be asking for what you are” was the gist of Peter’s statement.

V. 22 - The expression of Peter, in proper order, is this: (Simon) “If the thought of your heart is to be forgiven, repent and ask God for

forgiveness.” Peter gave the command(s) first, the conditional clause (the “if” clause) last.

If we consider that Simon’s request was non-Christian, we might do well to consider what prayer requests we have made, or what deeds we have done of such nature even though being Christian. Stated differently, some of the things Christians ask for and attempt to do are like those of Simon. He, like every Christian, had some maturing to do. (Cf. James 4:4)

V. 23 - Simon’s state in v. 20 was described as taking him to destruction. Now it is more explicitly revealed as being in bondage and bitterness. Whether Peter meant that he was no longer Christian, or just “un-Christian” in this respect is a moot question.

V. 25- The apostles, having completed the task for which they were sent, started back to Jerusalem (from which many had been driven by persecution), and utilized the opportunities presented to evangelize along the way. They undoubtedly had never imagined that they would have any dealings with Samaritans. Yet it is true that they would do this and yet not suppose that Gentiles were also in God’s plan - so Acts 10 is necessary for them.

QUESTIONS

85. What do you make of the apostles sending Peter and John?

86. Do you take the Acts 2 text as normative for every Christian anytime? If so, how do you understand v. 15-17?

87. Peter described Simon in several ways - did he describe a person who never had been a believer, or a person who had believed and then quit believing, or a person who was a believer but imperfect in understanding?

88. Was Simon in error to ask Peter to pray for him? (Have you ever asked anyone to pray for you?)

The Later Work of Philip, 8:26-40

26 But an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert road. 27 And he rose and went. And behold, an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a minister of Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasure, had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.” 30 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” 31 And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of Scripture he read was this:

“As a sheep led to the slaughter or a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth.

33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken up from the earth.”

34 And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about some one else?” 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus. 36 And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?” 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went

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down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip was found at Azotus, and passing on he preached the Gospel to all the towns till he came to Caesarea.

V. 26 - This text presents an interesting facet of God's dealing with Philip - an angel was used to direct Philip, but so was the Holy Spirit. Both are presented as actual personalities, distinct, and with abilities.

The road mentioned is perhaps the one leading to Gaza through Bethlehem and Hebron.

the south - The Greek term normally means "midday" as in Acts 22:6; so also in the LXX, except in Daniel 8:4,9, where the direction south is meant.

This is a desert road - Some think the reference is to the city of Gaza rather than the road leading there. The city of the O.T. had been destroyed in 93 B.C., and rebuilt some 2 1/2 miles south and near the sea. We must remember that "desert" in the Bible included places where no one lived, as well as what we call desert today.

V. 27 - Philip was not allowed to remain in Samaria for long, although he did much good work there. He apparently remained in Caesarea a long time (v. 40), since he is there in Acts 21:8, many years after this time.

Ethiopia was the general area south of Egypt known to us today as the general area of the Sudan. Most of the early history concerned Egypt, from which Ethiopia broke away about 1000 B.C. Sometimes the area was known as Nubia.

Eunuchs were common in the royal courts of the day. They could become proselytes to the Jewish religion. Doubtless in keeping with Luke's purpose, this account served as an illustration of how the Gospel spread to far-off regions of the

world. (Candace was probably a title, like king or pharaoh.)

to worship - The fact that a person of such political stature and so far away came to Jerusalem shows the influence of the Jewish religion. It seems probable that some Jewish feast had been the occasion of his visit to the "city of peace."

V. 28 - **chariot** - Few people would be able to afford such a means of locomotion; hence, he was a person of importance. We will see later that Paul would be a bearer of good news to kings and those in high places, Acts 9:15.

was reading - Aloud, which was a common practice in those days. Another point of interest: few would be able to afford a scroll of a Bible book. (As a bit of information, one of the Bible books found in the Dead Sea area dating c. 100 B.C., was a scroll of Isaiah. It is, with but small differences, exactly like the Hebrew text from which we get our O.T.)

V. 29 - "The Spirit" - See other instances of the work of the Spirit in the lives of people, such as 10:19; 13:2; etc. The angel had directed Philip to the area, now the Holy Spirit does the directing.

V. 30 - Philip's question in Greek indicates some doubt as to what, if anything, the treasurer understood about the text he was reading.

V. 31 - The man, by his response to Philip, indicates much doubt concerning his potential comprehension of the text. Hence, he sought Philip to come up and help him.

guides - See Matthew 15:14; Luke 6:39; John 16:13; then Matthew 23:16, 24; Acts 1:16; Rom. 2:19.

V. 32 - This quotation is from the Greek (LXX) version of the O.T., and differs from the Hebrew, though not in general sense.

The Hebrew reads as follows:

53:7b He was being brought as a lamb to slaughter; silent as a sheep before its shearer, he was not opening his mouth.

53:8a Oppressed he was taken from justice, and who of his generation was considering that he was being cut off from the land of the living?

This section is from a context that views the Messiah from various perspectives. This particular section pictured him somewhat as to be pitied because of the tragic things that were to happen to him.

V. 34 - The question of the treasurer is still pertinent today. It is answered in various ways as meaning Jesus, or Israel, etc.

V. 35 - The identification of this text with Jesus is certainly the emphasis of the N.T., as is apparent in the answer Philip gave. He spoke of Jesus and how a person was to procure the salvation offered through Jesus.

V. 36 - Certainly the man asked the proper question, rather than 1,001 other questions possible (which is often the case). If the Gospel of Jesus is preached correctly, and people believe it, they should ask the same question as the treasurer. They should then be immersed, even as he was, if the Bible plan is followed.

These added remarks need to be made. Insisting that baptism is by immersion only is simply following the original meaning of the Greek term which still means the same thing today. Any deviation is not biblical, nor is it necessary. A second point: insisting that immersion is the consummating act that brings one into Christ does not denigrate initial faith or initial repentance, nor does it teach that one believes in water regeneration. The people who believe in water regeneration are people like the Roman Catholics, who baptize (sprinkle) a baby at birth to make sure, if the baby dies at that time, that said baby will go to heaven rather than elsewhere. Most people who throw up the term "water regeneration" do so through ignorance of the matter, or because they have labeled immersion as a work. The Scripture

does not do so. If anything could be labeled "work" it would be faith, since Jesus so spoke in John 6:28-29. Now, this writer does not think that Jesus meant that faith is a work (Rom. 4:16 affirms it is not) in the sense that term is commonly used (i.e., as something done to merit salvation), but it is simply and only what is to be done to receive the salvation God gave by grace, which salvation (grace) no one merits. In the same way, to argue that changing one's mind (repentance) and immersion are necessary to appropriate God's free gift of Christ is not arguing any more for these than it is for faith. All three are God's ordained responses to obtain what he gives in Christ, freely, to all. This writer believes that it is impossible to be saved by anything one does, in the sense that we, by "doing" (i.e. working) can earn/deserve it. We simply do what God requires to receive what he freely gives. See Rom. 4:1-5 where Paul expresses our "belief" in this matter. If God had not provided redemption through Christ, anything or all things we could do would not avail. We believe that our willingness to accept Jesus as the Messiah, to change our minds (= repent) and to be immersed into Christ (Rom. 6:3-6; Gal. 3:27) are the human responses through which God grants salvation in Christ. So then we believe we are saved only and solely through God's grace, apart from anything we do. In this sense, salvation is of God and not of man. Our willed response to God's grace by His stipulated acts of obedience (faith, repentance, immersion) is simply receiving Christ for our sole and whole salvation. Anything else other than this position makes Christianity a law system by which we merit (earn) our salvation. The problem with any law system is this: we cannot keep it, and thus become sinners. The wages we get (= earn) is death, Rom. 6:23. We choose rather to trust in Christ through the faith system, by which we can stand justified, uncondemned, and at peace with God, Rom. 5:1; 8:1.

V. 37 - This verse is one of the few in Acts with textual problems. There is little internal evidence in the book itself for it - though many early commentators show that they knew about the problem. There is little or no reason why it would

be left out by anyone copying the book - so it is doubtful if we should quote it as Scripture. However, the point of doctrine is the same: the one considering immersion must first have faith in Jesus, or the act of immersion is foolish. We judge that someone wrote in the margin of some copy of Acts what the early practice of the church was, and someone else incorporated the marginal reading in the text itself.

V. 38 - This verse teaches rather clearly the “mode” of baptism - which, of course, no one in N.T. times had difficulty with. Only those of later years have problems with immersion; some insisting, rather ludicrously, that one can immerse by sprinkling or pouring.

V. 39 - Just how Philip was “caught up” is not said - only that the two men were separated at that point in time, one beginning a new life, the other laboring in another place.

V. 40 - Azotus was known in the O.T. as Ashdod, one of the five Philistine cities. It was about 20 miles north of Gaza, halfway between Gaza and Joppa, along the seacoast. Caesarea was about 30 miles north of Joppa, and an important city, since it served as the main port of entry of Judea, as well as being the city where the Roman officials normally stayed while in Judea.

QUESTIONS

89. Have you considered how many different ways the Holy Spirit is presented as a personality?

90. Was the Jewish religion widespread?

91. Do those of us who possess the books of the new covenant have an advantage in interpretation of the books of the old covenant? Why?

92. Why would the treasurer ask about immersion and not about faith or repentance?

93. Do the N.T. authors ever argue that baptism is immersion or that Christians ought to be immersed?

94. After the treasurer was immersed and had started on his way, of what church do you think he was a member?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 9

1. Saul received his schooling under what teacher?

2. Explain the term “great lamentation”.

3. What is the meaning of the Greek term “laid waste”?

4. Expound on the statement: “They went everywhere preaching the Word”.

5. Briefly discuss the history and location of the city of Samaria.

6. Describe Simon and the magic he performed.

7. What was the central theme of Philip’s preaching?

8. What two things did the Samaritans do in response to the preaching of Philip?
9. Did Simon become a sincere believer in Christ? What two things did he do in response to Philip's preaching?
10. Was Peter the "chief apostle" or head of the apostles? Explain your answer.
11. Were Peter and John sent to pray for a special manifestation of the Holy Spirit to come upon the Samaritans? Explain.
12. Were the Apostles the only ones who could pass on special gifts through their imposition of hands? Explain.
13. True or False: "God used an angel and the Holy Spirit to direct Philip."
14. Discuss the history and location on the city of Gaza.
15. Explain the location and history of Ethiopia.
16. True or False: "Candace" was probably a title, like king or pharaoh."
17. Give several reasons to support the conclusion that the Ethiopian Eunuch was a man of importance.
18. What did the Ethiopian Eunuch ask after Philip told him the good news of Jesus?
19. What is the original meaning of the Greek word that is usually translated "baptism"?
20. Is Christian baptism (immersion) an act of faith or a work of merit? Explain your answer.
21. Is Salvation a matter of works or grace?
22. Does the Bible teach Baptismal (water) regeneration? Explain.

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23. Complete the textbook author’s statement:
“insisting that _____ is the
consummating act that brings one _____
_____ does not denigrate _____
_____ or _____
_____, nor does it teach that one
believes in _____.”

24. Complete the textbook author’s statement:
“We believe that our willingness to _____
_____ as the _____, to change our
_____ (_____) and to be
_____ into _____
(Romans 6:3-6; Galatians 3:27) are the _____
_____ through which God grants
_____ in _____.
So then we believe we are saved only and solely
through _____,
apart from _____.”

25. How does Acts 8:38 further teach that the mode
of baptism is immersion?

26. What are the three human responses God
demands of those who would receive salvation?

27. Explain the history and location of Azotus.

LESSON TEN
(9:1-31)

**The Conversion and Early Labors of
Saul,
9:1-30
At Jerusalem, 9:1,2**

9 *But Saul, still breathing threats and
murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the
high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the
synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any
belonging to the Way, men or women, he might
bring them bound to Jerusalem.*

V. 1 - As Acts 26:11 shows, Saul was
exceeding mad against the Christians. It is worth
contemplating this man, zealous for the things of
God, who was quite ungodly in his attitude,
violating command #6 (one of the “top ten!”) about
murder. It needs to be impressed upon our own
consciousness that we may often do things ungodly
(i.e., un-Christian) because of our ignorance of what
God really wants of us.

but Saul - resuming the story from Acts 8:3.

still - His whole life was, at that time,
characterized by threatening and murder. Jacob had
said of Benjamin, that he would be a ravaging wolf.
One of Benjamin’s sons was surely that.

V. 2 - **Damascus** - An ancient city, on the
main route that led from Africa to the Orient,
prominent in world history. Some 150 miles north-
east of Jerusalem, it was well-known in Abraham’s
day (Gen. 14:15; 15:2). It played an important part
in later times (as with Elisha and Naaman, who
thought the Abana and the Pharpar, rivers of
Damascus, better than all those in Israel). Rezin of
Damascus joined with Pekah of Israel to war
against Judah. Under the Roman rule, Damascus

became the center of the Nabatean (Arab) kingdom in 85 B.C. When Saul went there, Aretas IV ruled.

the Way - This concept of one's life vocation is common to many religions. The O.T. has this idea, as in Psalm 1:6, Isaiah 40:3. Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22 have it also.

men or women - This helps us to see that Christianity was widespread and inclusive of both sexes.

On the Road to Damascus, 9:3-8a

3 Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. 4 And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; 6 but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing;

V. 3 - a light from heaven - This singular event in Saul's life is, without a doubt, one that revolutionized, not only his life, but the whole world forever. Yet the simple but profound truth is this: Saul had to know the facts about Jesus, accept those facts, through his obedience, in order to become Christian. While his conversion may be unique in some aspects, it is but par for the course in its basic framework. This is also mentioned in I Cor. 15:8; Gal. 1:16ff.

V. 4 - The account seems to say that Saul saw the light (as did those with him, who likewise heard the sound of a voice), but only Saul heard the Lord speak so as to understand. However, 9:27 shows that Saul saw Jesus, as well as heard his voice. The question posed to Saul shows the relationship of Jesus to the Church, his body, to which Saul was doing harm inasmuch as he was persecuting people who made up the body.

V. 5 - Saul's question may well indicate that he knew God had appeared, though the question does show that he didn't perceive how he was a persecutor of the Lord.

V. 6 - We will do well to point out the human agency in Saul's conversion, as well as the instructions for the future activities of Saul. God does his work through people. Actually, Saul's conversion began here but was not completed until Ananias helped him obey God's explicit commands. Another factor to consider: Saul's being chosen by God was made manifest at this time (26:15-18) and that aspect of his life was announced by Ananias, 22:14-15, and also in Jerusalem, 22:21.

V. 7 - The men did hear the sound and see the light, but did not understand what was said or who was speaking.

QUESTIONS

95. Damascus was in what country?

96. How did Saul persecute Jesus?

97. What was Saul told by Jesus?

98. What was the purpose of the appearance of Jesus to Saul?

In Damascus, 9:8b-22

so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 And the Lord said to him, "Rise, and go to the street called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying, 12 and he has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon thy name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; 16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized, 19 and took food and was strengthened.

For several days he was with the disciples at Damascus. 20 And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus saying, "He is the Son of God." 21 And all who heard him were amazed, and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called on this name? And he has come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests." 22 but Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

V. 9 - Some think Saul fasted, while others believe that the lack of eating, etc., was merely from the shock and state of affairs. He did pray, v. 11. He had been told that further instructions would be forthcoming, but not from whom or at what time. As far as anyone knew, Saul was still Saul,

unconverted. However, as v. 12 shows, God was dealing with him.

V. 10 - Whether Ananias was from Jerusalem, or became a disciple in Damascus (or elsewhere) we know not.

vision - The same term as in 11:5.

V. 11 - The "straight" street ran east-west, and still is used today.

rise and go - The Greek construction is like that in Luke 19:5 (make haste and come down) or in Matthew 28:19 (Go...) in that a participle is used (rise) and an imperative (go) in a way that makes both to be commands. **Tarsus** - The capital city of Cilicia, and a free city (all born therein were Roman citizens). It had a university which included a medical department and a prominent department of philosophy. The Stoic philosophy was taught in various places by at least six different teachers from Tarsus.

V. 12 - Saul, though not doing some other things, was having a vision from God, indicating what he might forthwith expect.

V. 13 - Note Ananias described Christians as "saints."

V. 14 - **authority** - The Greek word means the freedom to act, thus the right to act. It is in Matt. 28:18; John 1:12; etc. It seems to be evident that the Sanhedrin could act as the account indicates, and that Rome would back them up; even outside the geographical area of Palestine.

call upon your name - The connotation is that of giving allegiance to, under authority of, etc. See the same ideas in v. 15, 16.

Perhaps Ananias is a good example for us: how often Christians fail to see God's plan, and refuse his direction, pitting our wisdom against his wisdom. Samuel was like this in I Sam. 16:1-2.

V. 15 - Saul's own comments on his selection by God can be seen in Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15. His special assignment was to Gentiles, though all people were included, Rom. 1:14-15.

V. 16 - Saul would soon feel the sufferings which Jesus promised, as a part of the body which others would persecute (as he did) in all good conscience. As he would write in Rom. 8:17-18, to suffer with Christ would result in reigning with Christ; and that sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared to the glory yet to be revealed. Part of the suffering came because he, as a Jew, would have nothing to do with Gentiles, Acts 22:21ff. Doubtless, many prejudices he had from his own background and training had to go.

V. 17 - Ananias stated two reasons for his visit: Saul's sight and the filling of the Holy Spirit. Since nothing more is explained, we can suppose that he received the same gifts as the other apostles. The remainder of his life seems to indicate that he could do what other apostles could do.

Note that Ananias and Saul apply the word "Lord" to Jesus, indicating their understanding of who Jesus was in relationship to God and to them.

V. 18 - The substance falling from Saul's eyes is described by Luke as being like flakes/scales. It may be supposed that the reason why Saul was sightless was these (so-called) scales. Comparison with Acts 22 will show that Saul received his sight and the filling of the Holy Spirit from Ananias, but yet had to be immersed to receive from the Lord remission of sins. This makes an instructive case study. Saul had seen Jesus, fasted and prayed after having spoken to Jesus, and yet was still in his sins (22:16).

V. 20 - This verse shows that Saul immediately preached a new message, a good example of a converted life.

V. 21 - **made havoc** - Saul thus describes himself in Galatians 1:13,23. The verb means "to lay waste" or "to destroy."

V. 22 - Jesus promised power (1:8) for his chosen witnesses, and Saul was a recipient of it along with the twelve. With it, he attempted to prove, by placing O.T. prophecies alongside Jesus' life, that Jesus was the Messiah. Of course, it was only proof to those who would accept it as such. To those who would not do so, a plot was begun against Saul's life, much as against Stephen in Acts 6.

confounded - Greek has the idea of confusing, bewildering or stirring up, as in 2:6; 19:32; 21:27, 31. The paradox of Saul's conversion at first amazed the hearers, but amazement soon wore off, and a different reaction set in, to follow Saul wherever he went.

QUESTIONS

99. Was Saul in a saved or lost condition during the three days of v. 9?

100. What was Saul doing in this three day interval?

101. Have you ever refused to obey God's direct commands? Why?

102. Have you read Acts 22 and 26 to get the total picture of this incident in Saul's life?

103. What did Ananias tell Saul?

104. Did Saul have any choice at all in doing that for which God had selected him? (Cf. Acts 26:19)

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105. Did Saul preach that a person named Jesus of Nazareth actually existed? Or what did he preach about him?

106. How do you think Saul, before his conversion, could have been so sure of himself in regard to his relationship to God and yet so wrong?

n Arabia, 9:23a

23 When many days had passed,

V. 23 - Some put the incident of Galatians 1:15 here, as our outline shows.

Back in Damascus, 9:23b-25

the Jews plotted to kill him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night, to kill him; 25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down over the wall, lowering him in a basket.

V. 23b - The continued proclamation by Saul in the city finally provoked Jewish opposition of such nature that his Christian friends intervened in his behalf, sending him away for his physical safety.

V. 24 - The Jews never gave up on attempting to get Saul, the turncoat, as is evidenced by the rest of Acts, and in the epistles. Many Jews (besides Saul of Tarsus) were zealous for the ways of Israel, and thought they ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth (26:9), even as he once did.

V. 25 - This escapade in Saul's life was prominent in his memory, II Cor. 11:30-33, perhaps

because it was not his way of doing things. He tended to run toward the crowd and trouble, not away from it. The Greek term for basket was the same term used to describe the baskets in the feeding of the 4,000, Matthew 15:37.

In Jerusalem, 9:26-29

26 And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, 29 preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists; but they were seeking to kill him.

V. 26 - Why Saul thought that Jerusalem would be any more safe than Damascus is of interest - it soon proved to be also unsafe. Perhaps he was constrained to return to his former center of activity to preach what he once denounced.

When Saul arrived, Luke says he attempted to *join* the disciples there. The Greek word has the idea of uniting, fellowship, or binding together, as in marriage.

Galatians 1:18ff. may fit here (though Paul may have another visit in mind than what Luke records). If so, then only Peter and James were seen by him.

V. 27 - **Barnabas** - How he knew about Saul's conversion is unknown. That he accepted him and helped other disciples to do so is evident, regardless of how he came to his information. Note that he was aware that Saul spoke *boldly* in Damascus, as now he did in Jerusalem.

V. 29 - As is fairly clear, Saul was a Greek-speaking Jew, as was Stephen. Hence, he naturally gravitated to the synagogues of the Hellenists, as did Stephen in Acts 6, speaking and questioning/discussing/arguing/disputing (see this

word in Mark 1:27; 8;11; 9:14; Acts 6:9; I Cor. 1;20) with them. He may well have been part of this group prior to conversion. They, probably because of inability to argue Saul down, resorted to the same general action as took place in Acts 6, by deciding to lay hands upon Saul to murder him. We note that Saul's witness in Damascus was very strong because of all the evidence he could present to his auditors that was personal in nature. In Jerusalem, the case was much the same; both in regard to his witness and the opposition to it.

At Caesarea, 9:30a

30 And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea,

V. 30a - Luke's record has Saul's brethren sending him to Tarsus. Saul recounted in Acts 22:17ff. that he was directed by God to leave the city, even though he protested. Caesarea was the seaport for Judea.

In Tarsus, 9:30b

and sent him off to Tarsus.

V. 30b - Saul will remain at Tarsus until Barnabas goes to get him in Acts 11:25.

The Work of Peter, The Establishment of the Church in Antioch, The Early Labors of Barnabas and Saul 9:31 - 12:25

The Work of Peter, 9:31 - 11:18, At Jerusalem

31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied.

V. 31 - It is interesting that though the Christians were in various places throughout the area, yet the word "church" is singular. Paul will refer to the "churches of Christ in Judea" (Gal. 1:22), thus showing that one may appropriately use either designation.

was built up - the Greek term means "being built up" (i.e., edified, etc.), a term often used by Paul in his epistles. No agent is stated for the "building up" process. Perhaps the fact that they were able to maintain a state of peace, being free from outward turmoil, harassment, etc. brought about such growth. The Greek word meaning "build up" occurs in such passages as Acts 20:32; Rom. 15:20; I Cor. 8:1; 10:23; Gal. 2:18; Eph. 4:12, 16; I Thess. 5:11.

it was multiplied - Perhaps a reason for the growth of the Church (other than the effect of being built up) in edification and numbers was the fact that "fear the Lord" and "encouragement by the Holy Spirit" were apparent among the Church members. Here is a good example for us to follow.

QUESTIONS

107. Have you read II Cor. 11 for Saul's (Paul) account of his escape?

108. Does the Bible tell us how Barnabas knew about the events in Saul's conversion?

109. Who were the Hellenists?

110. Why did Saul leave Jerusalem according to our text? The text of Acts 22:17ff? Can these two records be harmonized?

111. Do we know for sure how long Saul stayed in Tarsus or what he did there?

112. Can the word “church” be either singular or plural in meaning, though the form remains unchanged? How do you know?

113. Do you walk in the “fear of the Lord” and the “comfort of the Holy Spirit” as did the early Christians?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 10

1. Which of the Ten Commandments did Saul violate in his persecution of Christians?

2. Discuss the location and history of Damascus.

3. Why was Saul going to Damascus and what happened to him on his way?

4. Was Saul aware that he was a persecutor of the Lord? Explain.

5. Where did Saul’s conversion begin and where was it completed?

6. Why didn’t Saul eat or drink for three days after arriving in Damascus?

7. Provide a brief history of the city Tarsus.

8. Explain the words “call upon your name”.

9. What is the result of suffering with Christ (Acts 9:16)?

10. What were the two reasons for Ananias visiting Saul?

11. Complete the textbook writer’s statement:
“Saul had _____, _____ and _____ after having _____ to _____, _____ and yet was still in his _____.”

12. For what purpose was Saul instructed to be baptized (22:16)?

13. At what point and time in his life did Saul receive the forgiveness of sins?

14. What does the term “make havoc” mean?

15. How could Saul prove that “Jesus was the Christ” (9:22)?

16. What can be learned about Saul’s activities by comparing Acts 9:23 and Galatians 1:15?

17. What is significant about the Greek word for “basket” in Acts 9:25?
18. What does the Greek word “join” mean (Acts 9:26)?
19. Why would Saul gravitate to the synagogues to speak about Christ?
20. Explain several factors that contributed to the growth of the early church (Acts 9:31).

influence in N.T. times, and more so after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD. 70. It was between Jerusalem and the coast city of Joppa. Luke’s narrative diverts our attention from Paul to Peter and yet relates each apostle to the same point: the inclusion of the Gentiles into the Church on equal terms with the Jews.

V. 33 - Luke normally describes physical problems somewhat more in detail than others, perhaps indicating his (supposed) medical background.

V. 34 - Peter, at times, reflects the true Christian attitude: only in Jesus does he do anything. Aeneas is instantly healed.

V. 35 - The effect of doing things in Jesus’ name: people are given reason to trust in Christ. In Lydda and throughout the Plain of Sharon (some 30 miles long) this was the case. Of course, Philip had previously preached in this general area, 8:40.

In Joppa, 9:36-43

36 Now there was at Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which means Dorcas or Gazelle. She was full of good works and acts of charity. 37 In those days she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him entreating him, “Please come to us without delay.” 39 So Peter rose and went with them. And when he had come, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping, and showing coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them. 40 But Peter put them all outside and knelt down and prayed; then turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, rise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. 41 And he gave her his hand and lifted her up. Then calling the saints and widows he presented her alive. 42 And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. 43 And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

LESSON ELEVEN

(9:32 - 10:48)

In Lydda, 9:32-35

32 Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints that lived at Lydda. 33 There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years and was paralyzed. 34 And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.” And immediately he rose. 35 And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him and they turned to the Lord.

V. 32 - **Lydda** - This city, the O.T. Lod (I Chron. 8:12; Ezra 2:33) was in the center of Jewish

V. 36 - Joppa was the seaport most used by people in Jerusalem. It was on the southern edge of the Plain of Sharon, with Caesarea on the northern edge. It is modern Jaffa.

Tabitha is Aramic (Hebrew) and Dorcas is Greek. Her life was characterized by concern for others in certain ways (even as ours can and should be). She, like Jesus, did good (note Gal. 6:7-10).

V. 37 - Burial customs varied, but generally the person was prepared and interred on the same day as the death.

V. 38 - Note how wide spread the Church was and how well-known the power of the apostle (though the text doesn't say why they called for Peter). Lydda was about 9-10 miles southeast of Joppa.

V. 39 - Luke paints a vivid picture of the many whose lives had been touched by Dorcas. She made all kinds of clothing, both outer and inner garments, which was the customary designation for clothing in that time. Wonder how people will react when we die and what they will remember about us? Will our (good) works follow us (Rev. 14:13)?

V. 40 - Peter's reaction was much like that of Jesus when Jairus' daughter was healed (Matt. 9; Mark 5; Luke 8). The healing was just as complete as all others. In the O.T., Elijah prayed before raising the son of the widow of Zarephath; and Elisha for the Shunammite's son (I Kings 17; II Kings 4).

V. 42 - Same cause - same effect as before. The miracle was a means to evangelization and preaching of the Word. Notice the designation of the word "saint" to the brethren in Joppa.

V. 43 - One interesting thing is that Peter would live with a person who engaged in such business as dealing with things dead.

many days - the same as describes Paul's stay in Damascus, V. 23; and in 8:11; 27:7.

In Caesarea, 10:1-48

10 *At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, 2 a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God. 3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius." 4 And he stared at him in terror, and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. 5 And now send men to Joppa, and bring one Simon who is called Peter; 6 he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside." 7 When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those that waited on him, 8 and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.*

9 The next day, as they were on their journey and coming near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. 10 And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance 11 and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." 15 And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." 16 This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

17 Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men that were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate 18 and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. 19 And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. 20 Rise and go down, and accompany them

without hesitation; for I have sent them.” 21 And Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?” 22 And they said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house, and to hear what you have to say.” 23 So he called them in to be his guests.

The next day he rose and went off with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. 24 And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his kinsmen and close friends. 25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him. 26 But Peter lifted him up saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.” 27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered; 28 and he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit any one of another nation; but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”

30 And Cornelius said, “Four days ago, about this hour, I was keeping the ninth hour of prayer in my house; and behold, a man stood before me in bright apparel, 31 saying, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32 Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the seaside.’ 33 So I sent to you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here present in the sight of God, to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

34 And Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36 You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), 37 the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were

oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39 And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; 40 but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; 41 not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. 43 To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

44 While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. 45 And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on even the Gentiles. 46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 47 “Can any one forbid water baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

V. 1 - Caesarea is near the north end of the Plain of Sharon, some thirty miles north of Joppa, and some 23 miles south of Mt. Carmel. Caesarea was named by Herod the Great in honor of Augustus Caesar. Herod had an extensive rebuilding program in Caesarea. It was a popular city for Romans, most of the procurators making it their official home.

Cornelius was apparently doing most of the things that would make him acceptable to a Jew, yet was clearly regarded as outside the Jewish circle of acceptance, which, of course, sets the stage for the reaction of Peter, then of those brethren with him, the Jewish church at large as well as the Gentile world. Coupled with Paul’s call and commission to go to the Gentiles, this incident helps us see how universal in nature the church is.

V. 3 - Luke’s account seems to say that the supernatural vision of an angel was just that, and

not the actual presence of an angel. However, v. 34 clarifies this verse with the statement of Cornelius. God answered his prayers through a human agent, Peter.

V. 4 - Cornelius may or may not have said, “lord”. He may have thought (and said) “Sir.” The Greek term could be used either way.

memorial - the Greek term was used in reference to the oblation/offering of frankincense that the Hebrews offered to God. Jesus used it to describe Mary’s offering of ointment (Matt. 26:13; Mark 14:9). The word for “alms” can be seen in Matt. 6:2; Acts 3:2.

V. 6 - Peter was still in Joppa after many days as a guest of Simon. Some of his Jewish training about unclean things (Lev. 11; Num. 19) was seemingly being ignored. However, his reaction to the Lord’s command brings out the fact that he still felt that he was still under those restrictions.

V. 8 - **related** - The basic Greek word has the idea of explain, or exegete. Cornelius surely felt complete confidence in what he had experienced; and acted as any other good soldier would with an order.

V. 9 - Housetops were ordinarily flat, and were thus utilized for many things of family life, such as sleeping, etc. Note here Deut. 22:8.

V. 10 - Peter must have intended only to pray a little while, since it was noon, and the meal was being prepared. It was an appropriate time for such a vision.

a trance - The Greek term is not the word used for vision in v. 3. However, the same word in v. 3 is used in v. 17 to describe the experience. Paul had a like experience in 22:17. The verb form is often translated as “amazed” in the Gospels. See also Acts 3:10.

V. 12 - The sheet obviously contained food not kosher for Jews. See here Matt. 15:1ff; Mark 7:1ff; I Tim. 4:1-5. But Peter (and all Jews had to unlearn what was ingrained and as natural as breathing. Fish are not represented, although some were unclean (like catfish).

V. 14 - Peter is a good example to consider: one’s knowledge may exceed one’s will to do. A person may be emotionally unable to do what is perfectly permissible, etc. Luke records that when Jesus appeared to the people in the upper room, they “disbelieved for joy,” Luke 24:41.

V. 15 - The command was plain: quit calling unclean what God has declared clean.

V. 17 - Peter really was perplexed, which indicated that one’s awareness of facts and/or commands may not be equal to understanding of said facts.

V. 19 - Peter was really considering what the vision meant. The Holy Spirit had to command him not to doubt or question what was about to happen, and to make it plain that the whole affair had been arranged by God.

V. 20 - Another construction of a Greek participle (arise) with an imperative (go down) with the participle taking on an imperative meaning, as in Matthew 28:19.

V. 22 - Note that Peter is to have “words to say” to Cornelius. Hence, what Jesus promised to Peter (and the apostles) about the direction of the Holy Spirit when they spoke will be true in v. 34ff. We also need to be aware that Cornelius, like Saul of Tarsus, was in many ways very godlike, but yet quite lost in sin. Furthermore, each man heard God’s plan through a human agent. Not even an “experience” would or could make him saved.

V. 24 - The fourth day Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius, who was expecting him.

V. 25 - While Jesus accepted worship from people (Matt. 8:2; Luke 5:8), Peter knew better than to do so. Most Jews, however, would have reveled in the action of Cornelius, considering that it was but their just due.

V. 28 - The point Peter had to learn was that it was not unlawful now for a Jew to fellowship with a Gentile. God had wiped away the distinctions inherent within the O.T. law system. Moreover, as his speech will reveal, the common denominator of faith will make of the "two one flesh," Ephesians 2:14-18. The same lesson is taught many places in the N.T., such as Rom. 3:27-31; Gal. 3:26-29 etc. The fact is, that God had always honored faith, in whomsoever it was, as is indicated by Jesus in Luke 4:16ff. See also Matthew 15:21-28. By grace through faith was always true, and was now being presented in its intended application.

V. 29 - Peter has come a long way in his knowledge. He will have trouble always being consistent in application (Gal. 2), however, since he was like we are at times. It is only fair to say, though, that Jesus' ministry was basically to the Jews only. His disciples would rather easily interpret his commands about evangelization of the whole world in this light. God now moves in a clear and convincing way to help Peter (and others) see clearly the scope of the great commission.

V. 33 - Cornelius stands ready to receive whatever Peter will say, because he is thus minded. He was like so many others who longed for a word from God, as is evident by the great numbers who turned to the Lord.

V. 34 - The truth that Peter discovered had always been so - God never acted unjustly (i.e., respected) anyone over others. Even the choosing of the Jewish race was for a purpose: through it, God would bring the Messiah into the world. However, that didn't preclude the fact that the Jews could, through lack of obedience of faith, become as a non-Jew, and vice-versa (see Rom. 2:25-29). Paul used the same word in Rom. 2:11 (also Eph.

6:9; Col. 3:25) that Peter uses to describe the essential character of God: He is not a respecter of any person. Romans 11:32 declares that God declared all to be sinners, so that He might have mercy upon all. What the Jews needed to learn was what Peter was learning: that they, although blessed in many ways (Rom. 9:1-5), did not have any special place in God's eyes in regard to salvation.

V. 35 - Note: the person acceptable to God is characterized by two things, 1) maintains a proper relationship with God (i.e., fear) which effectually allows him to be unafraid of God, and 2) habitually does righteousness (note righteousness comes from God, but it can also be done). The simple fact is: a Gentile does not need to become a Jew to become a Christian and a Jew is not helped at all by his Jewishness.

V. 36- Peter related that it had always been God's plan to save men, any men, who would trust in Christ; the Lord of everyone (not just Jews). The message preached was of peace (i.e., "whole" relationship with God) by means of Jesus' sacrifice (a reconciled relationship to God of those who were enemies of God). Don't overlook this most important word: peace (shalom). Be alert to the fact that the recorded messages of Jesus do not mention this word, but the intended result of the preaching He did was to restore what was missing: peace (with God). Read Luke 19:41-44. It is good to meditate upon the character of a God who loved, not hated, his creation so much that he sent his only son to die for that creation!

V. 37 - The public proclamation of the word was marked from John's ministry, who was the forerunner of Jesus.

V. 38 - Peter affirmed that God anointed Jesus in two special ways: with power and the Holy Spirit. Of course, the name Christ means "anointed," but this seems to indicate special things from God.

It is of interest that Peter stated that Jesus healed those oppressed by Satan, even though we

are not told specifically that everyone Jesus healed was in need of healing because Satan was oppressing them. It seems doubtful if Peter meant that those whom Jesus did not heal but who needed healing were not oppressed by the devil. The most probable point is this: Jesus' ministry gave evidence not only of the total import (he did good, not bad - see Mark 3:4), but also that God was evidently working in his ministry.

V. 39 - Witnesses to the aforementioned facts were the apostles. This is an important point in relationship to the 120 who, some say, were equally blessed at Pentecost with the apostles.

V. 40 - The contrast: Jews vs. God. Indeed, the Jews were Jesus' own people (John 1:11), but not in respect to God's eternal plan for redemption. As stated above in v. 34, 35, God had no "favorites" in regard to who could be saved, for faith made all men equal (i.e. anyone who believed could be redeemed). Faith produces a certain type or character that makes said person pleasing to God. In this matter, God rewards/respects not persons per se, but the character of persons.

V. 41 - To make the historical facts more credible, Peter gives testimony of his personal knowledge about the resurrected Jesus: he was not a ghost or hallucination. The accounts in Luke 24 and John 21 are corroborated by Peter (the disciples ate and drank in company with Jesus). They were the best prepared to give witness to Jesus' resurrection, since they knew him too well to be easily deceived by an impostor.

V. 42 - As shown in 2:23, God had specifically confirmed that Jesus was the Christ by various means, with enough evidence to convince the honest inquirer. Another important facet of Jesus: He was designated to be the judge. Hence, one needs to make peace before the judge is faced.

V. 43 - The emphasis is like Romans 3:22; and John 20:30-31. Note that the Greek carries the idea of a life of faith, habitually, constantly, the normal state of affairs.

Perhaps the ironical note is that the Jews had, as a group, missed the prophets' message about Jesus. Peter will reiterate this very point in I Peter 1:10-12, and mentioned it to those in the temple in ch. 3:18ff., and stated the same idea in 4:11-12, especially in regard to forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name only.

V. 44 - The Samaritans, another group rejected by the Jews, received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8), which helped show that God had accepted them. God used Peter and John there to show his approval.

Apparently the descent of the Holy Spirit interrupted Peter's speech. The obvious reason, as Peter showed in chapter 11, was to make clear to all, Jews and Gentiles alike, that the principle stated in v. 34, 35 was true. We need to realize the ages-old bigotry of each race, and to what lengths God went to break down the wall of partition. Peter, after the command to not call unclean what God had cleansed, saw the application of that principle in respect to the Gentile household of Cornelius, and now saw God verify the fact.

V. 46 - God had taken special pains to aid the apostles at Pentecost to preach the truth, and the Holy Spirit was the means whereby that was done. Now for the sake of multitudes who did not know the truth about the plan of redemption (i.e., that it was for the whole world), God again used the Holy Spirit to announce in all its splendor: salvation is for Gentiles also.

The languages in which the people were speaking were obviously understood by Peter and his Jewish brethren, or they could not have known that God was being exalted and magnified (the Greek means to make large or make long - so to magnify, exalt, praise, etc.).

V. 47 - The question seems almost superfluous, but in light of the reaction in chapter 11, it was quite appropriate. The fact was clear to those present: Gentiles had received the gift of God,

the Holy Spirit, just like the Jews. Hence, all were equal in the way of salvation.

V. 48 - The clear fact: the Gentiles had faith in Jesus, plus the evident acceptance of God - so, the next imperative was immersion, even as was so with Saul of Tarsus (though Christ had appeared to him personally!). We anticipate the discussion in 11:15 by remarking that the apostles at Pentecost and Cornelius' household were the only two groups ever said to be immersed in the Holy Spirit, in each case for a specific purpose, and in each case not for the remission of sins. Forgiveness of sins is obtained by faith in Christ (v. 43), not any other way. It is the message of Christ preached, believed and obeyed that procures salvation.

QUESTIONS

114. Is Cornelius an example of a good man who was lost and needed to be saved?

115. Do the statements of Romans 10:17; I Cor. 1:18; 15:1-4 corroborate what the angel told Cornelius in ch. 11:14?

116. What was the common point of reference in the call and commission of Paul and the experience of Peter with Cornelius?

117. How could Peter have been a Christian but yet thought that Jewish dietary laws were still binding?

118. Is Cornelius' character somewhat like that of other centurions mentioned in the N.T.? (cf. Matt. 8; Luke 23; Acts 27.)

119. In what way(s) is God a respecter of persons? In what way(s) is he not a respecter of persons?

120. Who is able to receive forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name according to Peter?

121. To whom did God choose Jesus to appear as a resurrected Savior, according to Peter?

122. Is Jesus both a Savior and a judge, according to Peter?

123. Where in the N.T. are we told that having an experience indicates a person has salvation? Do all people have to hear, believe, and obey, or are some exempt from such?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 11

1. Provide the history and location of Lydda.

2. Describe what took place in Lydda (Acts 9:32-35).

3. Provide the history and location of Joppa.

4. Discuss the names and meanings of "Tabitha" and "Dorcas".

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5. Identify Dorcas--who she was, what she did, and what happened to her.

6. Describe the moral and religious life of Cornelius before his conversion.

7. Discuss the history and location of Caesarea.

8. Explain the meaning of the Greek term "memorial".

9. Describe Peter's vision and what it meant.

10. Complete the textbook author's statement: "The point Peter had to learn was that it

_____ for a Jew to _____ with a Gentile."

11. In contrast to the attitudes of many people, Peter said that "God _____" (Acts 10:34)".

12. What are two requirements for a person to be acceptable to God (Acts 10:35)?

13. Name two special ways in which God anointed Jesus.

14. In summarizing Jesus' ministry, Peter said that Jesus went about "_____ " Acts 10:38.

15. How does Acts 10:39 further teach that only the Apostles were specially blessed on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2)?

16. Contrast what the Jews did to Jesus and what God did for Him (Acts 10:39-40).

17. Complete the textbook author's statement:

"Another important facet of Jesus: He was _____ to be the _____. Hence, one needs to make _____ before the _____ is _____."

18. What did God wish to communicate to people by pouring out the Holy Spirit on the household of Cornelius?

19. Describe the "speaking in tongues" by Cornelius and his household. Were the "tongues" known languages?

Explain.

20. Who are the only two groups in the New Testament said to be immersed or baptized in the Holy Spirit?

21. What did Peter command those who had received the Holy Spirit to do?

22. Complete the textbook author's statement: "It is the message of Christ _____, _____, and _____ that procures salvation."

Lesson Twelve

(11:1-30)

In Jerusalem, 11:1-18

11 *Now the apostles and the brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, 3 saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" 4 But Peter began and explained to them in order: 5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something descending, like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came down to me. 6 Looking at it closely I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. 7 And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' 8 But I said, 'No, Lord: for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' 9 But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.' 10 This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. 11 At that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. 12 And the Spirit told me to go with them making no distinction. These six brethren also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. 13 And he told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon called Peter; 14 he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' 15 As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with*

water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" 18 When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life."

V. 1 - It would not take very long for the news about Cornelius to travel to Jerusalem - so Peter was soon back in Jerusalem to give a reason for his departure from Jewish norms. The Jerusalem church was still zealous for Jewish customs many years later, Acts 21:20ff.

V. 2 - The group is not identified, anymore than those of Acts 15 or elsewhere. Indeed, in the light of this episode, Peter had not perceived the real truth about Christianity.

An added thought: it is evident that Peter was not considered infallible in his actions or understanding. In passing, we should consider that Luke records this incident twice, showing how much this new revelation meant to them and to us.

V. 3 - The objection implied in their question concerned Peter's eating with Gentiles - whether they included all of what Peter did under that particular point is guesswork. However, Peter's answer may indicate how he understood their question. As Ch. 15 indicates, he understood that the truth he saw did away with any O.T. law being binding for Christians.

V. 5 - The Greek text shows that Peter was in a "trance" and saw a "vision". This shows what was also clear from Ch. 10: The experience of Cornelius and that of Peter were essentially the same in nature.

V. 12 - Peter was clearly commanded to make "no distinction" between Jews and Gentiles, and had six witnesses to back up his story. The word for "distinction" can be seen in 15:9; Romans 4:20; I Cor. 14:29; James 1:6; Jude v.22. It could be translated, "nothing doubting".

V. 14 - Cornelius had said (v.10:33) that he wanted to hear whatever God had commanded Peter. In Peter's retelling, what he "had been commanded" was in words. Thus the nature of the Gospel message: faith comes only by and through a revelation in words. Faith does not come apart from a messenger of some type (spoken or written), and acceptance of that message. Hence, Christianity is a message of fact(s), addressed to the rational mind, to be received through trust in the essential reliability of the facts in that message. Some of the facts are of a historical nature - others are grounded in the nature of God as being true. Therefore, though the historical facts have ample evidence for acceptance, the believer must always rely upon God to be true to his word - so one always lives by faith, not sight.

It may be observed in passing that the basic nature of Peter's message, i.e., that a person must hear and will to trust, precludes an infant's being saved until such time as said infant can hear, understand, decide to obey.

V. 15 - The question to be resolved here: what does Peter mean by "just as" in his explanation? The Greek term means similar to, like, etc. It is further identified in v. 16 as "baptism" such as promised by Jesus to the apostles, and in v. 17 as "the same gift" as given to those "who believed in the Lord Jesus."

Now, what do we have? The issue is again that of the Gentiles being acceptable to God as joint-recipients of the gospel. The Holy Spirit was clearly the indicator that God was at work, that what was happening was divine, not human. Peter then argues that God's gift to both Gentiles and Jews makes of the two one, thus eliminating any prior differences, and also makes Christianity distinct from Judaism.

V. 17 - Peter had simply recited the facts of the matter, not even bothering to argue what they meant, since the meaning was clear to anyone who

honestly considered said facts. As with Peter, who wanted to withstand God?

V. 18 - With such a presentation, the Jerusalemites could do nothing other than be quiet about the matter, and praise God for what was done. It is a good example for us to follow: if God has spoken, we must believe that his wisdom is best, and rejoice in it.

repentance unto life - This is the crucial point to remember: many things are important to salvation, but none equal the privilege of changing one's mind and obeying God's commandments which lead to life.

QUESTIONS

124. Do you wonder why the apostles in Jerusalem didn't defend Peter for his actions?

125. Did Peter argue the case or just recite the event?

126. Why was this event so important that Luke would give it to us twice?

127. What did the Spirit tell Peter in v. 12?

128. Why did God grant the Gentiles repentance unto life rather than faith unto life?

The Establishment of the Church in Antioch, 11:19-21

19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none except Jews. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number that believed turned to the Lord.

V. 19 - This verse refers back to 8:4. Luke has recounted part of the events following 8:4 in the life of Saul and Peter. Now the story of others is briefly given. Think what a history book could have been written if each history had been written down, and each incident doubtless was interesting in its own right. Hence, that which Luke (and other Bible authors) does record should be of utmost interest and importance.

V. 20 - Luke may indicate that others were beginning to catch a clearer understanding of the nature of the gospel message, though with no such cultural implications as in Peter's case. Note to whom the word was not spoken: Gentiles. It will take a long time for the "truth" to be perceived.

It is interesting, though how much it may mean is debatable, that the preaching done was about Jesus being "Lord" not "Christ". Some argue that "Christ/Messiah" was not relevant to Greeks, but only to Jews. However, the epistles all use the term "Christ" and most were written to Gentiles. It seems best to take "Lord Jesus" as being simply a term equal to Jesus Christ.

V. 21 - It may well be that some of those who were Jews in Antioch felt that preaching to Gentiles was fine, but only by total submission to the law (as in Acts 15) was salvation possible. Maybe others would accept Gentiles as Christians, but maintain a stand off policy insofar as social fellowship, was concerned. At any rate, some Hellenists (as in Acts 6) were turning (cf. 3:19; also

note 11:18 -repentance is a change of mind, a "turning") to God/the Lord.

The Early Labors of Barnabas and Saul, 11:22 - 12:25

In Jerusalem, 11:22

22 News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

V. 22 - The choice of Joseph (Barnabas) was quite appropriate - he was not a Jerusalem Jew and thus might well have more empathy for Hellenistic converts than others might. Note also v. 24. For a land without any of the modern means of communication, news traveled fast, didn't it?

At Antioch, 11:23, 24

23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad; and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose; 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a large company was added to the Lord.

V. 23 - The work of Barnabas was to encourage the believers to keep abiding in Christ, and this he kept doing. Is it not interesting that God's grace can be seen? Note that grace also teaches (Tit. 2:11) and is given (Eph. 3:8) and can be grown in (II Peter 3:18). There is a play on words in this verse, as the Greek root for "grace" and "was glad" is the same.

steadfast purpose - Christianity is not only a beginning in Jesus, it is also a continuing in Jesus. It is quite possible - indeed, truthful and necessary - to be "once saved, always saved" - though not in the sense these words are normally used.

At Tarsus, 11:25, 26a

25 So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul; 26 and when he had found him, he brought

him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church, and taught a large company of people;

V. 25 - Remember that Saul was probably a Jew who spoke Greek, and thus would be helpful in the work among Greek-speaking people. Of course, Barnabas knew that Saul's mission was to the Gentiles. With the work enlarging in Antioch, he was a natural for the task of helping the Hellenists as well as Jews who yet had trouble with the law versus Christianity.

V. 26 - The name "Christian" is a very common formation like many other Latin words that were formed in that era, although the word itself is Greek. It is not strange that a distinct term should come into being to designate those who were not Jews, and not Gentiles (in the religious sense). Since so many had become believers in Antioch (which was a large and important city in that time), it seems only natural that the name should come into being. The word "Christian" only occurs twice more (26:28 and I Peter 4:16) in the N.T., although it was common in other religious literature of the days following the first century. It is pertinent to remark that Saul "taught" for a year. He did not always "evangelize" in the narrow sense that word is often used.

In Antioch, 11:26b-30

and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians.

27 Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over the world; and this took place in the days of Claudius. 29 And the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea; 30 and they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

V.27 - Prophets were quite evident in the early Church, as is seen in Ephesians 4:11, etc. Their function is not clearly spelled out, though from this text, Acts 21:11; etc., it can be seen that they stood in the same general category as those before them: revealers of God's message to people. It is somewhat a travesty on the word to use it today to apply to preachers.

V. 28 - **The days of Claudius** - Approximately A.D. 44-48. Claudius ruled as emperor of Rome from A.D. 41-54.

V. 29 - The Greek text might be translated: "as anyone was well off (or able to do so), such people determined to minister (be a servant/deacon) to the brethren in Jerusalem."

V. 30 - The offering was sent to Jerusalem, and the elders of the church in Jerusalem are specifically identified as those who received it. The church had progressed in growth to the point that men within it were qualified to be elders. Hence, as is taught elsewhere, the elders ministered to the church, even though apostles were present. In Ch. 15, the elders play just as important a part as the apostles. In the epistles, elders are considered as the leaders in the local church. The apostles had a task to do, and did it, but that task was not to oversee the local assemblies when men qualified to be elders were within the group. Such men were chosen and were held accountable for the local group under them. Paul will later take another offering to the brethren in Judea, Acts 21.

QUESTIONS

129. Some years have passed since the foundation of the church in Acts 2. Why do you suppose the preaching was to Jews (or Hellenists) and not bona fide Gentiles?

130. What figure of speech is found in 11:22?

131. How does one “see” the grace of God?

1. What truth did Peter see as a result of his vision from God and the conversion of Cornelius and his household as described in Acts 15?

132. Can a person maintain a right relationship to the Lord and so be “once saved, always saved”?

2. Christian faith comes to an individual only by what means or method?

133. What did Saul and Barnabas do in Antioch and for how long? (Did Saul/Paul recommend something of this nature in II Tim. 2:2)?

3. In Acts 11:12, the word “distinction” can also be translated as “_____.”

4. Complete the textbook author’s comment: “Hence, _____ is a message of _____, addressed to the _____, to be received through _____ in the essential reliability of the _____ in that _____.”

134. If the famine predicted by Agabus was to be over the whole world, why did the disciples in Antioch decide to help the brethren in Judea?

5. Does Peter’s basic message that a person must hear and will to trust preclude an infant from being saved until such time as that infant can hear, understand, and decide to obey? Explain.

135. To whom was the offering sent? Who were the ones who took it?

6. What were the implications of the Holy Spirit being given to both the Jews and the Gentiles?

136. Does the sending of the help indicate a realization that brethren whoever, wherever, were members of the same body, so that if one member suffered, all members suffered?

7. Complete the textbook writer’s comment: “...many things are important to _____, but none equal the privileges of _____ one’s _____ and _____ God’s _____ which lead to _____.”

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 12

8. Is the term “Christ/Messiah” relevant to Greeks and Jews alike or only to the Jews? Explain.

9. What does the word “repentance” mean?
10. Christianity is not only a beginning in Jesus, but what else?
11. What three commendable things are said of Barnabas (11:24)?
12. Where were the disciples first called “Christians”?
13. Explain the background of the term “Christian”.
14. How many times does the term “Christian(s)” appear in the New Testament, and where are these passages located?
15. Prophets were revealers of what and to whom?
16. During what period did Claudius rule as emperor of Rome?
17. Who was Agabus and what did he do?
18. What term was used to designate the leaders in the early church?
19. Did elders minister in the early church even though the apostles were present? Explain.
20. What were the basic duties of the elders?

LESSON THIRTEEN

(12:1-25)

At Jerusalem, 12:1-24

12 *About that time Herod the king laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. 2 He killed James the brother of John with the sword; 3 and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. 4 And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. 5 So Peter was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.*

6 The very night when Herod was about to bring him out, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison; 7 and behold an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter on the side and woke him saying, “Get up quickly.” And the chains fell off his hands. 8 And the angel said to him, “Dress yourself and put on your sandals.” And he did so. And he said to him, “Wrap your mantle around you

and follow me.” 9 And he went out and followed him; he did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. 10 When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened to them of its accord, and they went out and passed on through one street; and immediately the angel left him. 11 And Peter came to himself, and said, “Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.”

12 When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. 13 And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. 14 Recognizing Peter’s voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and told that Peter was standing at the gate. 15 They said to her, “You are mad.” But she insisted that it was so. They said, “It is his angel!” 16 But Peter continued knocking; and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. 17 But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, “Tell this to James and to the brethren.” Then he departed and went to another place.

18 Now when the day came, there was no small stir among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. 19 And when Herod had sought for him and could not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and remained there.

20 Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and they came to him in a body, and having persuaded Blastus, the king’s chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king’s country for food. 21 On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and made an oration to them. 22 And the people shouted, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!” 23 Immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he did not give God the glory; and he was eaten by worms and died. 24 But the word of God grew and multiplied.

Herod the king - This is a grandson of Herod the Great (Matt. 2). He is Herod Agrippa I, whose father (Aristobulus) was murdered by his grandfather. He was educated in Rome, and was a friend of the Roman emperor of Caligula, and then of Claudius. At this time, A.D. 44, he was king over all of Palestine.

Agrippa I made every attempt to curry favor with the Jewish populace in Palestine - so it is no wonder that the events of our text happened.

V. 2 - James the brother of John - a political casualty, the first of many to follow. Josephus, the Jewish historian, makes mention of this event. Most of the persecution has heretofore been from religious people. Now religion and politics conspire. As far as James is concerned, his death because of his faith was like many others before his time (e.g., the Jews in the Maccabean period) and many Christians later. Perhaps he understood much better what it meant to follow Jesus. He said in an earlier context (Matt. 20) that “He was able.” Indeed he was.

V. 3 - the days of Unleavened Bread - the Jewish Passover in the spring, the beginning of the Jewish religious year. A great many Jews would be in Jerusalem from all parts of the world. The rulers of Rome had gotten progressively worse, and there was much unrest among the Jews. Hence, the action doubtless was meant to alleviate some of the unrest.

V. 4 - Just why Herod did not go ahead and kill Peter is anybody’s guess - perhaps it was because he thought it might disrupt the religious rites which he pretended to observe. The precaution of assigning 16 men to guard him probably was taken because of Peter’s previous escape (5:19) as well as the importance of Peter.

V. 5 - The church reacted in prayer, because of the seriousness of the situation. It is possible that they may have anticipated a growing persecution, as that over Stephen. It may have been true that most

of the apostles were gone from Jerusalem - thus leadership was at a premium. Because of these or other reasons, prayer was made earnestly in Peter's behalf. Just how they prayed is difficult to say; either they did not expect his release the way it happened or some thing else unknown to us.

V. 7 - Regardless of the situation, Peter could find rest! The angel suddenly appeared though, and his sleeping was interrupted, while the guards lost not a bit of sleep, which will cost them their lives. Thus is the will of God: just, but sometimes not fathomed by mortals.

V. 8 - **mantle** - the outer garment - and valuable. The soldiers gambled for Jesus' inner garment, John 19.

V. 9 - **a vision** - as he had in chapter 10.

V. 10 - The Greek word that describes the opening of the prison doors is our "automatic" (of their own accord). Evidently two men were with Peter, while two others guarded the doors leading to his cell.

V. 11 - Note that Peter does not identify himself with the "Jewish" people. He knew that they, as a group, were against him. Having realized that God had indeed delivered him again from jail, he went to a place where he could doubtless expect a friendly reception.

V. 12 - Mark was better known than his mother. The Biblical information about him is found in the following texts (assuming the same person is in mind each time): 13:5-13; 15:37-41; Colossians 4:10; II Tim. 4:11; Philemon v. 24; I Peter 5:13. Church traditions have spoken of Mark and Peter as friends, and Mark was probably the author of the Gospel which is sometimes said to be a reflection of the gospel Peter preached.

V. 14 - Peter knocked at the outside gate that led to the house.

V. 15 - You are mad - Festus used the same word to describe Paul, 26:24. Those whose words were spoken in languages not understood would be said to be mad, I Cor. 14:23. Some affirmed this of Jesus, John 10:20. Hence, it accuses one of asserting what is unbelievable, untrue. So much is the case with Rhoda that they assert it is not Peter, but his angel - somewhat of an absurd idea in view of their prayers!?! Yet, even most Christians pray in somewhat the same manner: believing while doubting. Perhaps this state of affairs exists because we know that God may choose, rightly, not to answer our prayer, because He knows best, and the best is to say no.

We should consider the fact that the angels had played important parts in past times as God dealt with his people. It is interesting, though, that they think an angel would look and sound like Peter.

V. 17 - James was a leader in the Jerusalem church, Acts 15; Gal. 2. Other than the glimpse in ch. 15 and Gal. 2, Peter disappeared from our history. His two epistles, however, indicate that he continued to serve the church, both as an apostle and an elder, unto an old age. Whether he remained in or about Jerusalem is unknown except for the above texts. There is some indication in I Cor. 9:5 that he went on preaching tours (perhaps Gal. 2 is one of those times).

V. 18 - Herod probably believed that God had intervened, but figured that such a story would not be acceptable to the Jews, and thus put the blame on the men.

V. 19 - As before noted, the official residence of the Roman governors was Caesarea - it was also true of the Jewish hierarchy, though Herod generally made his home in Jerusalem, in an effort to be acceptable to the Jews. Note the common (and accurate) description of the relationship of cities to Jerusalem: Caesarea was "down" in elevation from Judea (i.e., Jerusalem).

V. 20 - Blastus was Herod's personal valet. Herod had no authority over Tyre and Sidon. They were commercially oriented cities, and so in need of the economic advantages that could be obtained through Herod. Hence, they made efforts to end the embargo imposed upon them.

V. 21 - The occasion seems to have been a festival in honor of the Emperor Claudius, whose birthday was being observed. Josephus says Herod wore a robe of silver tissue.

V. 22 - The reaction of the people (they kept saying it) was what most heathen people do. The only thing that was evidently wrong was that Herod knew better than to accept such praise. Josephus recorded the death of Herod, but attributes it to something other than God's righteous judgment (which, of course, he would not know about).

V. 24 - This is the third time that Luke reported the church's progress (6:7; 9:31) in relationship to some significant event. Perhaps a part of the reason for the growth was that the people, in general, knew what had happened with James and Peter, and that knowledge motivated them to turn to the Lord.

Back to Antioch, 12:25

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, bringing with them John whose other name was Mark.

V. 25 - Having been sent with material aid from the Antioch brethren to those in Jerusalem who were affected by the famine (11:27-30), the two men, Saul and Joseph/Barnabas, returned from this service unto Antioch. Certainly it is an evidence of the care of brethren, many Gentiles among them, for other brethren not so fortunate. It is a good example to follow, and often a matter of scripture injunction, both O.T. and N.T. (as in Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19-22; Ruth 2:2-16; Matt. 12:1-8; Luke 6:38; Gal. 2:10; etc.). Paul will later

bring another offering to the same people, Acts 21; Romans 15:29-31; II Cor. 8,9.

QUESTIONS

137. Herod Agrippa I died in the year A.D. 44 - how long was it after the events in Acts 2?

138. What season of the year is the feast of unleavened bread?

139. How many soldiers (in total) were to guard Peter?

140. Was Peter much different in his initial reaction to the coming of the Lord's angel than was Rhoda or those in Mary's house to Peter's appearance?

141. What supposed relationship existed between Peter and John Mark in later years?

142. Which James does Peter have in mind in v. 17?

143. For what reason(s) do you think Herod had the 16 men killed? (What would you have done in his place?)

144. Locate Tyre and Sidon. Why were they somewhat dependent upon Herod's favor?

145. Was it an uncommon thing in that day for people to worship men as gods? Is it today?

146. Why did Barnabas and Saul go to Jerusalem?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 13

1. Which one of the twelve original apostles was the first to experience death? How and why was he put to death?
2. Describe what happened to Peter as recorded in Chapter 12.
3. Discuss the background of Herod the king.
4. Who was Josephus?
5. What event marked the beginning of the Jewish religious year?
6. Why would Herod assign sixteen men to guard Peter?
7. Discuss several reasons why the church was praying for Peter.
8. What did the angel say to Peter? What was a mantle?
9. The Greek word that describes the opening of the prison doors is the same as our word “_____”.
10. Discuss the background of John Mark.
11. What was the name of the maid who opened the door for Peter?
12. If the church was praying for Peter, why would they assert that it was Peter’s angel at the door? Does this suggest unbelief on behalf of those who prayed for Peter? Explain.
13. Identify the James named in Acts 12:17.
14. Is Acts 12:19 an accurate description of the geographical relationships of Jerusalem and Caesarea? Explain.
15. Who was Blastus?
16. Why did the people of Tyre and Sidon appeal to Herod for peace if he had no authority over their cities?
17. Describe the death of Herod and his basic sin.
18. Discuss the three times Luke reports the church’s progress in relationship to some significant event (6:7; 9:31; 12:24).
19. Thought question: What is the meaning of the verse: “But the Word of God grew and multiplied”.

20. Discuss several passages from the Old and New Testaments which teach the need to help others who are less fortunate.

SPECIAL STUDY ON BAPTISM

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by Jack Cottrell

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ACTS 2:38-39 (I)

Probably the clearest - and probably for that reason the most controversial - passage concerning the meaning of baptism is Acts 2:38,39, "And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.'" This passage is important because it describes the function of Christian baptism at the point of its very inauguration on the day of Pentecost. It is part of the apostolic instruction to sinners who are asking how they might be rid of their sin and guilt. It states quite clearly that baptism is the focal point of

God's promise of forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit.

The Messianic Outpouring of the Spirit

On the Jewish calendar the events of Acts 2 occurred on the day of Pentecost. To the Christian community the day is significant because it was the birthday of the church. On a deeper level still, it was the formal and historical point of transition from the Old Covenant age to the New Covenant age, the actual foundation for which had already been laid in the death and resurrection of Christ.

The central event marking the inauguration of the new age was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Of course the Holy Spirit was present and working among the saints of God in Old Testament times, but both the prophets and the Gospel promised a new and special presence of the spirit as part of the Messianic hope. Isaiah 44:3 says, " 'For I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring, and My blessing on your descendants.' " Joel 2:28 says, " 'And it will come about after this that I will pour out my Spirit on all mankind.' " Ezekiel 36:27 puts it thus: " 'And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes.' " John the Baptist promised that the Spirit would be given to believers as an indwelling presence (Luke 11:13; John 7:37-39). At His ascension He renewed this promise, as recorded in Acts 1:4-8. He told His apostles to "wait for what the Father had promised."

The activities recorded in Acts 2:1-4 are the initial fulfillment of these promises. The outward, miraculous manifestations were not the main point of Pentecost, but only the signs or evidence that the invisible, inner presence of the Spirit was now available for the first time.¹ The miracles - especially the speaking with "other tongues" (Acts 2:4) succeeded in their purpose of gaining the attention of the crowd and disposing them toward the message Peter was to deliver. The people asked in amazement, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:12). Peter proceeded to explain what it meant. This is the outpouring of the Spirit promised by Joel, he

said. It is one of the primary blessings of the accomplished work of Jesus the Messiah. You crucified Him, said Peter to the Jews assembled there, but God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand. “And having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear” (Acts 2:33). For this Jesus whom you crucified has been exalted as your Lord and Christ (Acts 2:15-36).

The audience that heard Peter’s sermon was a large group of devout Jews who worshipped God according to the Old Covenant relation. No doubt many of them had encountered Jesus and rejected Him, thinking they were defending Yahweh’s honor. What they heard from Peter, as confirmed by the miraculous manifestations of the Spirit, shook them to the very foundations of their faith. Jesus, whom they had sent to His death, was their God- the exalted Messiah! From His heavenly throne, as the inaugural expression of His Lordship, He had sent forth the long awaited Holy Spirit! When this realization dawned upon them, they sensed themselves as sinners exposed to the wrath of God. “They were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ ” (Acts 2:37).

“What shall we do” about what? About the burden of their sin and guilt. What could they do to be free of this burden? Here is a primary example of the point made earlier while discussing Matthew 28, that even the most faithful Jews, when confronted with the new revelation of the Gospel of Christ, became lost sinners unless and until they accepted Jesus as their Savior and Messiah. Peter’s audience now felt this state of lostness and cried out for help. “What shall we do” to be saved?

Peter’s statement concerning baptism in Acts 2:38,39 must be understood against this background. Baptism is at the very heart of his answer to the question about what must be done to be free from sin and guilt.

The Gospel Offer

Peter’s reply to the sinner’s question may be analyzed in two parts: first, the nature of the salvation offered; and second, the conditions for receiving it.

The Gospel offer made here in Acts 2:38 is a classic representation of the “double cure” referred to in the song “Rock of Ages,” viz., “Be of sin the double cure; save me from its guilt and power.” An alternative version says, “Save from wrath and make me pure.” This double cure is God’s answer to the “double trouble” sinners bring upon themselves through their sin.ⁱⁱ

The first and most immediately pressing problem caused by sin is *guilt*. The sinner has broken God’s law and thus has incurred its penalty. He stands under the constant condemnation of the wrath of God. This is an objective problem, a problem of wrong relationships with God and with His law. God’s solution to man’s guilt is the death of Christ, in which He took our sin with its guilt upon Himself, paying its penalty through His own suffering. As a result God is able to offer the sinner full pardon for his sin, full remission, complete justification, complete liberation from the fear of condemnation and hell.

This is “the forgiveness of your sins” that Peter offers in Acts 2:38, and it is no doubt what his Jewish audience was inquiring about. Forgiveness itself is not a new blessing of the Messianic age, but was enjoyed by all believers in the pre-Christian era also. The newness is that now it is offered only “in the name of Jesus Christ” since His death and resurrection are the events that make it possible in the first place. In any case Peter’s offer included first of all what was most wanted and most needed by his audience.

The second part of the double trouble is not as readily perceived and understood as the first. It is the effect that sin has on the soul itself. It can be described as sinfulness, depravity, spiritual weakness, spiritual sickness, even spiritual death. The vitiating effects of sin permeate the soul just as the ravages of disease permeate the body; they make the soul weak in the face of temptation and

inclined to sin more and more. In other words, sin affects not just our *relationship* to God and His law; it also affects us *personally*. Our very nature is corrupted.

The Gospel offer to sinners in the Christian era includes a divine cure for this disease of the soul. It is the new birth or regeneration, as discussed earlier in connection with John 3:3-5. As noted there, this was not made available to sinners in the Old Testament era. Though they were provided with some resources to combat the power of sin, still they were not given the gift of rebirth. This is one of the principal new blessings of the Messianic age and one of the main aspects of the Gospel offer. Thus the Jews who asked “Brethren, what shall we do?” probably were not even aware of this side of the sin problem and thus were not asking about any solution to it. So when Peter’s offer included the words, “and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,” this was an unexpected bonus! For “the gift of the Holy Spirit” is the person and presence of the Spirit Himself, who will enter the receptive sinner’s heart in order to regenerate him and will remain there in order to give him strength to overcome sin day by day. The offer of the Holy Spirit *is* the offer of regeneration.

This was Peter’s ultimate explanation of the tongues and other phenomena recorded in Acts 2:1-4 and about which the audience originally asked, “What does this mean?” (Acts 2:12). What this means, says Peter, is that God through Christ has now poured out the promised Spirit. And what it means for *you* is that, if you will repent and be baptized in the name of Christ for the remission of your sins, *you* will receive this very Holy Spirit as a gift. For the promised Spirit is *for you* (Acts 2:39; the word order makes the “you” emphatic).

The Conditions

As is the case in Mark 16:16, the Gospel offer in Acts 2:38 is conditional. A large segment of conservative Protestantism teaches that God’s gracious salvation is completely unconditional, but this view is based on a faulty view of divine sovereignty and some questionable exegesis.ⁱⁱⁱ

Scripture clearly connects the sinner’s reception of salvation with his meeting of certain basic conditions. In Mark 16:16 faith and baptism are specified; here in Acts 2:38 repentance and baptism are specifically mentioned.

When his Jewish brethren asked “What shall we do?” Peter’s first instruction was that they should *repent*. Repentance as a condition for salvation is not a controversial point, even among those who like to emphasize “faith alone.” It is generally recognized that the faith which God requires for salvation cannot really exist without repentance. The latter is basically an attitude toward *sin*. It is a hatred of sin in general and especially a hatred of the sin in one’s own life; it is a determination and commitment to be rid of all sin as quickly as possible. Since the holy God Himself hates sin, one cannot truly believe in Him without sharing this hatred. Since Christ’s very purpose and work was to oppose and conquer sin in all its forces and forms, and since His very blood was shed to accomplish this, one cannot truly believe in Christ without hating the sin which caused His suffering. Thus even in passages where it is not specified (as in Acts 16:31), it is understood that repentance is the Siamese twin or silent partner of faith.

In Acts 2:38 repentance is the first condition mentioned because the thing foremost in the minds of those who heard Peter’s sermon was the conviction of their sin, especially their sin of rejecting Christ and causing His death. Their question specifically meant, “What shall we do *about these terrible sins?*” First, says Peter, you must have the right attitude toward them: you must repent.

The only other condition given by Peter is baptism: “Let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” Since Mark lists baptism as a condition for salvation, and since John gives it as a condition for entrance into the kingdom of God, we should not be surprised that it is presented here as a condition for the forgiveness of sins, as well as for receiving the gift of the Spirit.

Of course many do find it difficult to accept what Peter says about baptism and look for ways to avoid its implications. One such way is to deny that Acts 2:38 refers to *water* baptism. As one writer says, “I doubt very seriously whether Peter was referring to water baptism,” because there would not have been enough water in the temple area to immerse 3,000 people (Acts 2:41) and because neither here nor anywhere else is *water* baptism specifically connected with the forgiveness of sins.^{iv}

Such an idea is not very well thought out, however. Peter must have meant water baptism for the following reasons. First, he must have been speaking of the same baptism prescribed in the Great Commission, which had to be water baptism because it was something the apostles themselves were to administer. Second, the baptism prescribed by Peter was something the sinners themselves were to do (“What shall we do?”); it was their decision and initiative. A purely *spiritual* baptism would be at God’s initiative. Third, Peter’s language would have immediately called to his audience’s mind the baptism of John (which was “a baptism of *repentance* for the *forgiveness of sins*,” Mark 1:4), which was known to all as water baptism. Finally it should be noted that there was ample water in the Jerusalem area (it did not have to be in the *temple* area) for immersing 3,000 people.^v

Thus there is no good reason for seeing this as a reference to anything besides water baptism. It is set forth alongside repentance as a condition for receiving the blessings of salvation. This should not be surprising in view of the prominence of baptism in the Great Commission as reported by both Matthew and Mark. In fact, it would have been surprising if Peter had *not* mentioned baptism when asked “What shall we do?”

This leads to a final consideration relative to the conditions specified in Acts 2:38, namely, why is *faith* not included here, especially since the commission in Mark 16:16 includes both faith and baptism? We could not infer from both the question in Acts 2:37 and the reply in Acts 2:38 that it was not necessary to specify faith since those who heard

the message and were “pierced to the heart” by it (verse 37) *already believed*. This is why they asked for further instruction on what to do. If Peter had perceived that they did not yet believe, he surely would have required this first of all.

This may be compared with the situation in Acts 16:30,31, when the Philippian jailer asked basically the same question, “What must I do to be saved?” This man, a pagan, had not as yet had the benefit of hearing a message about the true God or our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus Paul’s reply focused on the foundation requirement: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved.” This instruction was not meant to be comprehensive and all-inclusive; it was an opening statement immediately followed by more teaching: “And they spoke the word of the Lord to him” (Acts 16:32). Though neither repentance nor baptism is specifically mentioned, we can fairly infer that they were included in this “word of the Lord.” This is surely the case with baptism, since the jailer was immediately baptized after hearing the teaching (Acts 16:33).

In a similar way we can consider Peter’s instruction in Acts 2:38 to have been determined by the level of response already achieved by his hearers. Since a measure of faith was already evidenced by their question, there was no need to mention it specifically.

In this connection one other point may be noted. Even though faith is not specifically mentioned here as a condition for salvation, the content of Peter’s reply was an *implicit* call for faith, and not just the faith of the Old Testament saints. It was a call for these devout Jews to rise to a new level of faith, to focus their faith upon a God who is Three as well as One. As we noted in the discussion of Matthew 28:19-20, from this time forward saving faith must include faith in Jesus as the divine Redeemer and faith in the Holy Spirit as the divine gift. A conscientious response to Peter’s instruction would have to include these elements, since he told this group to be baptized *in the name of Jesus Christ* in order to *receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*. Their Old Covenant faith was no longer adequate; whether they had been baptized

with John's baptism was now irrelevant. They are now required to accept God's word about Jesus Christ and the Spirit as part of their acceptance of baptism itself.

In summary, then, the conditions for receiving the "double cure" according to Acts 2:38 are repentance and baptism, plus an implied faith.

ANDANTES

- ⁱ See Jack Cottrell, "Are Miraculous Gifts the Blessing of Pentecost?", *Christian Standard* (May 9, 1982), 117:9-11.
- ⁱⁱ See Jack Cottrell, *Thirteen Lessons on Grace: Being Good Enough Isn't Good Enough* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1988 reprint of 1976 edition published by Standard Publishing), chs. 5-7.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible Says About God the Ruler* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1984), chs. 5,9 and *What the Bible Says About God the Redeemer*, pp. 389-99.
- ^{iv} Richard A. Seymour, *All About Repentance* (Hollywood, Fla.: Harvest House, 1974), p. 123. The last point of course is a case of begging the question.
- ^v Several large pools were available, such as the Pool of Siloam (just south of the temple area), which measures approximately 15 by 50 feet. A large reservoir on the southwest side of the city had a surface area of about 3 acres. See J.W. McGarvey, *Lands of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1881), pp. 189-202, for a full description of the pools of Jerusalem.

ACTS 2:38-39 (II)

In chapter four above we noted that in Acts 2:38-39 Peter specifies two conditions for receiving the Gospel blessings of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit, namely, repentance and baptism. In this chapter we will explore in more detail how baptism is related to each of these blessings.

Baptism and Forgiveness

Baptism for the forgiveness of sins in the Christian age is not without antecedents in the previous era. It was foreshadowed by the Old Testament ritual purification ceremonies, also called lustrations or washings.

In the context of the Mosaic law, some acts and conditions produced a state of ritual or ceremonial uncleanness, e.g., having certain bodily discharges (Lev. 15) and touching a corpse (Num. 19:11-22). The state of uncleanness produced thereby was not moral in nature, but ritual or ceremonial. No moral fault of guilt was attached; some of the situations causing it were natural and unavoidable. The principal effect was that the person rendered unclean was considered unfit to engage in the religious services before God. To remove such defilement, certain purification rites were prescribed, most of them involving water (e.g., Lev. 11:32; 14:8; Deut. 23:10-11).

On certain occasions and for worship leaders especially, water purification was required before one could approach God even when no specific offense was in view. See Exodus 19:10,14; 29:4; Lev. 16:4. The bronze laver used for priestly washing was particularly significant. The ministering priests were required to wash therein before serving in the tabernacle; "they shall wash with water, that they may not die" (Exod. 30:20).

In what sense did the water or the act itself have such a dramatic effect or bring about purification? The fact is that neither water nor the act of washing *caused* any change. It was a matter of divine decision and declaration. God simply declared that before the act of washing, the person was unacceptable in His sight; afterwards the person was regarded as acceptable.

If the state of uncleanness and the washing rites themselves had only a ceremonial significance, then what was the purpose of this whole system?

Basically it had a symbolic or typical purpose. The whole system of *ceremonial* uncleanness and purification was an object lesson to teach about *moral* pollution and true *legal* guilt before God, and the necessity of the heart's being cleansed from these. This is how the prophets made use of the ceremonies in their teaching. They used the ritual cleansings as analogies of the moral cleansing with which God is especially concerned. Typical teaching involving this conceptual transition from ritual to moral includes Psalm 51:2,7, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.... Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow"; Isaiah 1:16, "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight"; Jeremiah 4:14, "Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, that you may be saved"; and Ezekiel 36:25, "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols."

The Old Testament water ceremonies, together with the prophetic imagery of divine spiritual cleansing, are the forerunners of Christian baptism. The latter unites outward washing and inner moral cleansing into a single act, viz., baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Baptism is to moral and spiritual defilement what the Old Testament washings were to ritual defilement.

John the Baptist's baptism also had a connection with forgiveness, though it is never stated in the same terms as Christian baptism. It was a baptism "for repentance" (Matt. 3:11), "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). Those who were baptized confessed their sins in the process (Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5). Thus repentance, confession of sin, and forgiveness of sin were all related to John's baptism. Whether the baptism was preached as a condition for this forgiveness or whether it was only an aid to quicken and intensify repentance is not clear.

The relation between Christian baptism and forgiveness of sins is much more specific and clear,

though, especially here in Acts 2:38, where baptism is said to be "for [eis] the forgiveness of sins." The key word here is *eis*, translated in different versions in a wide variety of ways including "for," "unto," "into," "in order to," "in order to have," "so that," "with a view to," and "in relation to." The preferred terminology is a matter of considerable controversy since exegetes often try to make the word conform to a preconceived view of baptism.

Three main approaches may be identified. The first is that *eis* here retains its most common meaning of *direction or motion toward something*, which includes the concepts of *purpose* and *goal*. On this understanding the purpose or goal of baptism is to bring about forgiveness of sins. This view is consistent with the idea of baptism as a condition for salvation and for entrance into the kingdom of God. A second approach is that *eis* here means *because of*, the idea being that a person is baptized because his sins have already been forgiven. The third view is that *eis* here means the same thing as the preposition *en* (in), which does not mean motion toward but simply *location in*. This view posits only a very general connection between baptism and forgiveness, viz., "be baptized *in relation to* forgiveness of sins." The last two views are preferred by those who reject the conditional relation between baptism and salvation.

Of these three views, the first is clearly the meaning in Acts 2:38 on both lexicographical and contextual grounds. Regarding its actual meaning, a study of the lexicons shows that the primary meaning and the overwhelmingly most common use of *eis* is "motion toward" in any one of a number of senses, the explanation of which takes two full pages in the Arndt and Gingrich lexicon. In this general category the two most common meanings are "moving from one physical place to another" (88 lines in the lexicon) and "goal or purpose" (127 lines - one full page). By contrast only five lines are devoted to the alleged causal use of *eis*. Arndt and Gingrich call this use "controversial" because there is reason to doubt that it ever has this meaning in Greek usage. M.J. Harris flatly declares that this causal sense "seems unlikely in any one of the

passages sometimes adduced,” including Acts 2:38. A meaning similar to that of *en* is not disputed but is still relatively infrequent. Arndt and Gingrich use only 16 lines to explain that *eis* sometimes means “with respect to” or “with reference to.” Most of the cases where *eis* is used where *en* would be expected (30 of 34 lines) refer to physical location.

Of course it is understood that simply counting lines in a lexicon does not decide the meaning of a word in a particular verse. The point is to show that the primary meaning of *eis* involves motion toward or purpose, and that this is how it is used in the overwhelming majority of cases. The meaning “because of” is highly debatable simply because it has no solid basis in the Greek language as such. The meaning “with reference to” is possible but not as likely given its relatively infrequent use. Thus if *eis* has one of these last two meanings in Acts 2:38, that meaning would have to be contextually clear.

In this final analysis the meaning of *eis* in this passage will be determined by the context. The general meaning “with reference to” would be warranted only if the context itself did not suggest a more specific meaning, only if the connection between baptism and forgiveness remained vague in the context. But this is certainly not the case. We must remember that Peter’s statement is part of his answer to the Jews’ question of how to get rid of the guilt of their sins, especially their sin of crucifying Christ. They specifically asked, “What shall we do” to get rid of this guilt? Any instruction Peter gave them would have been understood by them in this light, and must be so understood by us today. When he told them to repent and be baptized “*eis* the forgiveness” of their sins, the only honest reading is that baptism is for the *purpose* or *goal* of receiving forgiveness. This meaning is not just warranted but is actually demanded by the context.

The fact that baptism is paralleled here with repentance confirms this meaning. Surely no one questions that Peter is telling his audience to repent

for the purpose of bringing about forgiveness of sins. Even if such a connection between repentance and forgiveness were not already understood, it is perfectly unambiguous in this context. The fact that baptism is part of the same response to the same question makes its meaning just as clear and gives it the same basic meaning as repentance. In whatever way repentance is connected with forgiveness, so also is baptism. If repentance is for the purpose of bringing about forgiveness, so also is baptism.

Even if the so-called “casual” meaning of *eis* were not in doubt on lexicographical grounds, it would surely be excluded in Acts 2:38 by the context itself. “Be baptized because your sins have been forgiven” is the exact opposite of what would be expected and required in the situation. The whole point is that the Jews’ sins are *not* forgiven, and they are asking what to do to receive such forgiveness.

The bottom line is that the only meaning of *eis* that is consistent with the context of Acts 2:38 is its most common meaning of “motion toward,” specifically the purposive meaning of “unto” or “for the purpose of.” The Greek construction is exactly the same as Jesus’ statement in Matthew 26:28, that he shed his blood “for [*eis*] forgiveness of sins,” namely, for the purpose of bringing about forgiveness. Thus we must conclude that Peter is saying in Acts 2:38 that part of what a sinner must do to bring about forgiveness of his sins is be baptized.

One other point must be made concerning the relation between baptism and forgiveness. Quite often we hear that a person is baptized “for the remission of sins that are past.” The idea that baptism brings forgiveness for every sin committed up to that point, and that a person thus remains completely forgiven until he sins again. Then he reverts to a state of lostness because of the newly committed sin, and remains in this state until some further forgiving act is performed, such as partaking of the Lord’s Supper or making specific confession of such sin (I John 1:9). Such thinking underlies the

development of the Roman Catholic sacrament of penance.

Such thinking is false, however, and is based on a faulty concept not only of baptism but of forgiveness itself. The forgiveness of sins is in essence the same as justification (cf. Romans 3:28; 4:6-8). When one receives forgiveness in baptism, he becomes a justified or forgiven person. He enters the state of being justified. This is a continuing state that is maintained through continuing faith in the blood of Jesus. Through his sincere and working faith a Christian remains free from guilt and condemnation (Rom. 8:1) even if he is not free from sin itself. This is the heart of the concept of justification by faith.

This means that baptism is not for the forgiveness of past sins only, but for the forgiveness of sins, *period*. As long as one remains in the relationship to Christ begun at baptism, he is justified or forgiven as the result of what happened in his baptism. Thus all our lives we should remember our baptism, and be encouraged by that memory when we begin to feel discouraged in our Christian living or to doubt the validity of our hope in Christ Jesus.

Baptism and the Holy Spirit

In our study of John 3:5 we have already seen that there is a close relationship between baptism and the Holy Spirit, in that both are related to the new birth. Here in Acts 2:38 that connection is made even stronger and more specific. The gift of the Spirit Himself as an indwelling presence is promised as the result of Christian baptism: "Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The reality of the inner presence of the Spirit in our very lives and bodies is a fact taught forcefully and clearly in Scripture. See Romans

8:9-11; I Cor. 6:19; II Tim. 1:14. Acts 2:38 tells us that baptism is the point of time when the Spirit enters our lives in this way.

Though baptism is a single act involving both water and Spirit (John 3:5), this passage shows that baptism in water actually precedes or is a precondition for the Spirit's regenerating work accomplished therein. In baptism the Holy Spirit is given; He then gives the new birth by His very presence. Thus, although they are for the most part simultaneous, technically they do not begin at the same time.

As suggested earlier in this chapter, the gift of the indwelling Spirit is the very heart of the Pentecost message and promise. Before His ascension Jesus told His apostles to wait in Jerusalem for "what the Father had promised" (Acts 1:4-5). The phenomena of Pentecost confirmed that this promise was fulfilled on that day (Acts 2:16-17,33); from that time forward the gift of the Spirit has been offered to anyone who repents and is baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38-39). Thus as unlikely as it may seem, this long-promised and long-expected gift of inestimable value is by God's design made to depend on baptism! This is indicated in Acts 5:32 also, where Peter notes that God has given the Holy Spirit "to those who obey Him" - an obvious reference to Acts 2:38. From this alone we can see what an important place God has assigned to baptism in the economy of salvation.

A problem is raised by the fact that on several occasions in the book of Acts the Holy Spirit seems to be given apart from baptism, either before it or after it. Some conclude from these events that the giving of the Spirit follows no set pattern and especially that it has no particular connection with baptism.

Twice the Holy Spirit is given *before* baptism, namely at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and at the conversion of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44-48). It is a serious mistake, however, to see

these events as typical and as representative conversion experiences. In fact, they are intended to be just the opposite. In the first place, it is not clear whether the pre-baptismal presence of the Spirit in these cases resulted in conversion (the new birth) at all, or whether it was simply a matter of equipping these particular individuals with the miraculous ability to speak in tongues.

In the second place, even if they did involve new birth, the evidential purposes of these two events required them to be unusual and unique and contrary to the normal pattern of conversion. In each case the main point was the miraculous tongues, which functioned as signs of the truth of the apostolic testimony. At Pentecost the tongues established the message that this was the beginning of the new-age outpouring of the Spirit. In Acts 10 tongues were evidence that God wanted the Gentiles to be received into His church along with Jews. Thus these events were not intended to be paradigms of conversion. They were meant to be exceptions to the rule in the sense that every miracle is an exception; this is what gives them their evidential value.

In the third place, Peter specifically indicates that the manner of the Spirit's coming at Pentecost and upon Cornelius stood apart from the normal experience. He notes that Cornelius and his household "received the Holy Spirit just as we did" (Acts 10:47; cf. 15:8), but Acts 11:15 shows that he regards the *manner* in which they received Him comparable only to the Pentecost experience itself: "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as He did upon us at the beginning." And what was the unique thing about these two occasions? These are the only two recorded cases where the Spirit was given without any human intermediary of any kind, where the Spirit *immediately* fell upon the chosen individuals. In every other case a human mediator is involved, either through baptism or the laying on of hands.

The conclusion is that Acts 2:1-4 and Acts 10:44-48 do not negate the truth of Acts 2:38

concerning the appointed connection between baptism and the Holy Spirit. They give no warrant whatsoever for expecting the Spirit to be given prior to baptism.

On the other two occasions in the book of Acts, however, the Spirit seems to be given *after* baptism, in the separate action of the laying on of an apostle's hands: see Acts 8:17-18; 19:6. The assumption that these two passages refer to the gift of the indwelling Spirit is one reason for the rise of the practice of confirmation in some church groups. But that is the question: is the giving of the Spirit in these two cases the same as that promised in Acts 2:38? It seems not to be.

What sets these two events apart from the normal conversion experience in which the indwelling Spirit is given in Christian baptism? Basically, they both appear to involve not the indwelling of the Spirit but the bestowing of *miraculous gifts* of the Spirit. At Samaria what was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands was something observable and awesome (Acts 8:18); in Acts 19:6 the result is specifically given as "speaking with tongues and prophesying." Especially from the account of Philip's mission in Samaria (Acts 8:5-18), we are justified in concluding that miraculous spiritual gifts could be bestowed only through the laying on of an apostle's hands. (This is why the Pentecost and Cornelius events were unique: even the *manner* in which the miraculous abilities were given was a miracle.) Because of the unqualified promise in Acts 2:38 (cf. Acts 5:32), we may thus conclude that both the Samaritan disciples and the Ephesian disciples received the indwelling of the Spirit when they were baptized (Acts 8:12; 19:5); subsequently they were given miraculous spiritual gifts when the apostles laid their hands on them.

Again the connection between baptism and the Holy Spirit established in Acts 2:38 remains unshaken. Events which depart from this pattern are either deliberately unique or are referring to something other than the gift of the indwelling

Spirit that provides the new birth. This understanding is consistent with the testimony of other New Testament passages which tie baptism to the regenerating work of the Spirit, viz., John 3:5; Romans 6:3ff; Colossians 2:12; and Titus 3:5.

that baptism is a clear precondition for receiving the gift of the regenerating and indwelling presence of the Spirit. Passages in Acts which separate baptism from the gift of the Spirit are deliberately unique exceptions or are not talking about the saving presence of the Spirit in the first place.

Summary

In this chapter and the one preceding we have sought to explain the meaning of baptism as found in Peter's instruction in Acts 2:38-39. We have emphasized the significance of the historical context, namely, that this was the day when God gave the long-awaited messianic outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This was also the occasion when the Jews were confronted with their guilt of rejecting and crucifying Christ, who was confirmed as their Messiah by His resurrection and enthronement and by His participation in the sending of the Spirit. Thousands in Peter's audience came under conviction and asked what they could do to be free from the guilt of their sin.

We have seen that Peter's response included the promise of a "double-cure" from the "double trouble" of sin; forgiveness to remove their guilt, and the indwelling Holy Spirit to give them a new birth to new spiritual life. His response also included the conditions for receiving these blessings: repentance and baptism.

We have discussed in some detail the connection between baptism and forgiveness as stated here in Acts 2:38. Of special significance is the use of the Greek word *eis*, which is shown by lexical considerations and by the context to mean "unto" or "for the purpose of." Thus the very purpose of baptism is to bring about forgiveness or justification.

Finally we have discussed the connection between baptism and the Holy Spirit, emphasizing