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Jesus Announces He Will Build His Church

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Surrounded by his 12 disciples, Jesus Christ entered the coasts of Caesarea Philippi. He turned to them and posed the question, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” And they replied, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Christ then said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

And Jesus turned to Peter, and said, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I also say unto you that you are Peter [Petros, meaning stone], and upon this rock [Petra, meaning boulder] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades [hell] shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:13-19 *NKJ*).

Christ told his disciples He was going to build his church! And while Peter was only a little pebble, this church would be built on the giant Craig—Christ Himself. Peter would be the human leader, ruling the church

under a resurrected Christ!

Now notice what Christ told his disciples the last evening of his life, Passover, A.D. 31, as He began paving the way for his church to begin.

Jesus instituted a footwashing ceremony. Then He taught his disciples the lesson of humility behind it.

“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14-15 *NKJ*).

“By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (vv. 34-35 *NKJ*).

Jesus told them He must go and prepare a place for them and cautioned, “Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1-3 *NKJ*).

Christ then told his disciples about what is perhaps the most important thing concerning their futures. He discussed the Holy Spirit. Jesus said the works He did were not his own but were done by God through the Spirit in Himself. And He told them if they believed on Him, they would do greater works than He had done (vv. 4-12). In the

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next two chapters of John's Gospel, Jesus told his future church leaders He would not leave them alone but would send a comforter, the Holy Spirit.

Church To Have Tribulation

And yet, Jesus knew the church would have to struggle. He warned them in John 16:33, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (*NKJ*).

Jesus then prayed to his Father for the church. "I have manifested your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept your word... I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given me; for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.... I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil *one*. They are not of this world, just as I am not of this world. Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17: 6, 9-11, 14-21 *NKJ*).

Later that night Christ was betrayed by Judas Iscariot and taken by Roman soldiers. All of the disciples forsook Jesus and fled for fear of their lives (Mk. 14:50)! One man, in his haste to flee, left his clothing and fled naked (vv. 51-52). And most Christians are

familiar with Peter's three-time denial of any knowledge of Christ.

Yet, in Acts, we read of a dramatic change in the disciples. Instead of hiding in caves and cringing in fear, the apostles proclaimed Christ boldly, in spite of threats from Jewish authorities! Why this change? What caused it?

The Apostles Become Bold

After Christ was crucified and laid in the grave, Peter felt that was the end of Jesus. He did not believe Christ would be resurrected on the third day as Jesus had prophesied. Peter went back to his old profession in the fishing industry of first-century Palestine. Unto the other disciples, Peter said, "I go a fishing." And the others joined him (John 21:3).

But Jesus appeared unto them (v. 4). Christ "presented Himself alive after his suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'You have heard from me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now'" (Acts 1:3-5, *NKJ*).

Verse 5 explains the change in the apostles. First, they now knew Jesus was the Christ. A dead Messiah was a contradiction. But now they knew infallibly that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and He was alive! Second, the promise of the Holy Spirit was given. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of power and boldness, as we shall see later.

But what were the apostles to do once they had this Holy Spirit? Were they simply to live out their normal lives in their normal life-styles? Were they to set up a church which merely took care of its members? Or did Christ command them to flee into caves and await his return?

Verse 8 gives Christ's four-fold commission to the apostles: "But you shall receive

power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me *in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the end of the earth*" (NKJ).

The book of Acts tells a history of the early church. Luke wrote the book between A.D. 61 and 65, probably from Rome. It covers the years A.D. 31 to 62.

There are three dominant themes in the book of Acts. First, we find over and over that the kingdom of God is taught and preached by the Church of God. Second, we see the church kept the holy days commanded by God in the Old Testament. And third, we see an age of transition in the church. Its membership expanded very rapidly, leveled off, and then declined. When membership leveled off, changes came. And not all the changes were for the better. It was a time of difficulty and problems.

Church Today Is Similar to First Century

We need to realize we live in a time similar to the first century. Conditions were so bad

in first-century Palestine that many people believed Jesus Christ would return in their life-time. Peter probably believed this. Paul's writings indicate he believed Christ would come before he died. If we look for similarities, we can draw some parallels between the church in past centuries and the church today.

In the first century, the growth came first and then problems followed. Mr. Greg Albrecht, a minister in the Worldwide Church of God, told a theology class at Ambassador College the growth for the church in the 20th century is yet to come. "We are going to be very, very big," he said, "It is going to happen again!"

We need not read Acts (or any period of church history) as history only. This history can give us insight into problems the Church faces today! Many of the conditions Paul found in the churches to which he wrote are found in the Church of God today. And the persecution that dogged the heels of the early church is prophesied for today's church. People will once again be martyred for being true Christians!

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The Church Begins

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Now, let's begin our study of the early church.

The 12 apostles had been commanded by Jesus not to leave Jerusalem until they had received the Holy Spirit. On Pentecost, all of Christ's disciples, which now numbered approximately 120 (Acts 1:15) met with one accord in one place. This date has been calculated to be June 17, A.D. 31.

Pentecost, A.D. 31

Let's note what happened on this historic date.

"Suddenly there was a noise from the sky which sounded like a strong wind blowing, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire spreading out; and each person there was touched by a tongue. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak (Acts 2:2-4, *TEV* throughout, unless otherwise noted).

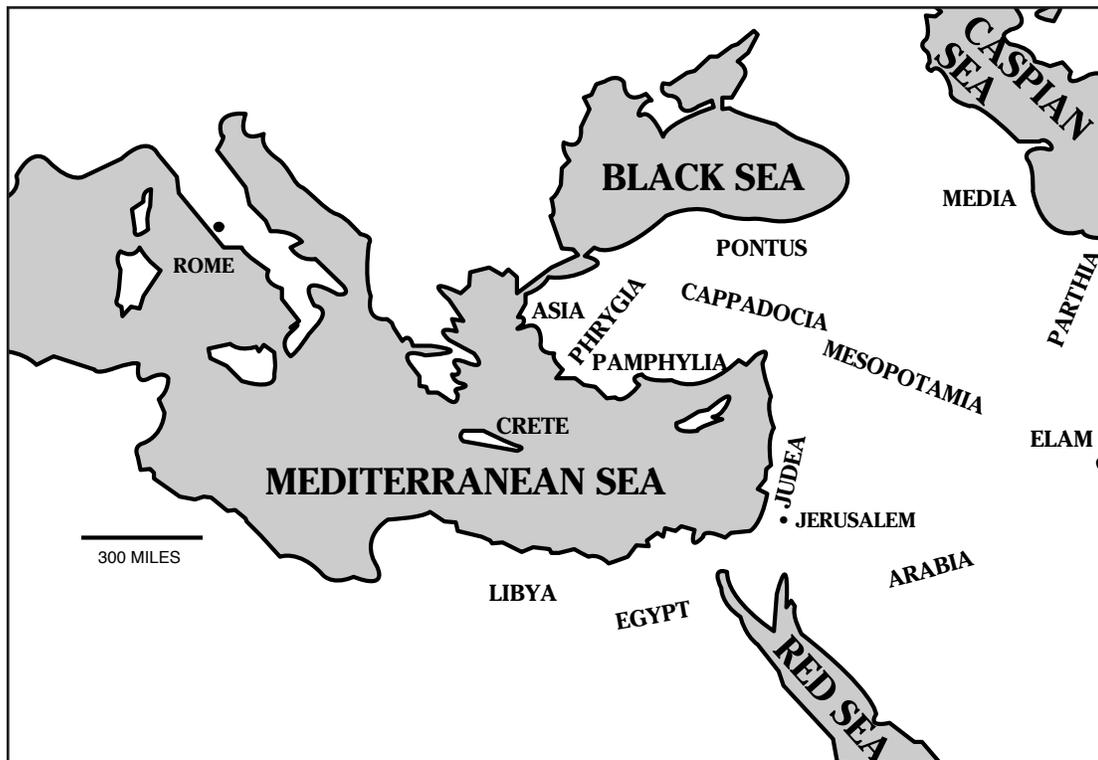
We find the miracle of glossolalia (speaking in tongues) after the New Testament church received the Holy Spirit. Why?

God used miracles to get people's atten-

tion. Notice what effect this miracle had:

"There were Jews living in Jerusalem, religious men who had come from every country in the world. When they had heard this noise, a whole crowd gathered. They were all excited, because each of them heard the believers talking in his own language. In amazement and wonder they exclaimed, 'These men who are talking like this — they are all Galileans! How is it, then, that all of us hear them speaking in our own native language? We are from Parthia, Media, and Elam; from Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia; from Pontus and Asia, from Phrygia and Pamphylia, from Egypt and the regions of Libya.... Some of us are from Rome... and some of us are from Crete and Arabia— yet all of us hear them speaking in our own languages of the great things God has done!' Amazed and confused they kept asking each other, 'What does this mean?' But others made fun of the believers, saying, 'These men are drunk!' " (vv. 5-9, 11-13).

Peter uses this accusation as a springboard for his sermon. His classic sermon is recorded in Acts 2. Nearly all of the early sermons had the same topics. first, the apostles spoke of the *ministry* of Christ.



Representatives from these areas were in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost in A.D. 31 and heard the apostles and disciples of Christ speaking in their own languages.

Then they discussed his *resurrection*, explaining that they were witnesses to this miracle. The third topic was *Old Testament proofs* of the Messiah. The sermons were wrapped up by the fourth topic, an exhortation for the listeners to *repent*. All these may be summed up in three doctrines of the church: they preached Jesus the *Messiah*, Jesus *crucified*, and Jesus *resurrected*.

When Peter stood up to speak, he began his sermon with a prophecy of Joel referring to the end time and used it to describe the event that had just occurred (vv. 14-21). And though the prophecy was written to describe a much later time, it indeed did fit that first Pentecost to a certain degree. Perhaps Peter, too, felt Christ would return in his lifetime!

Next, Peter preached the ministry of Christ (vv. 22-23). He followed this up with a discussion of Christ's resurrection (v. 24). He then took an Old Testament quote which showed Christ was the Messiah (vv. 25-28).

Again, Peter spoke of Christ's resurrection (vv. 29-34). Having convinced his listeners that Jesus was the Messiah, Peter told them they were responsible for his crucifixion.

When his listeners heard this, "they were deeply troubled and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'What shall we do, brothers?'" (v. 37). Peter then exhorted them to repent, telling them the three steps to become a Christian: "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*" (v. 38, *KJV*).

"Peter made his appeal to them and with many other words he urged them, saying, 'Save yourselves from the punishment coming to this wicked people!' Many of them believed his message, and were baptized; about three thousand people were added to the group that day" (vv. 40-41). What a day that was!

There were seven recorded miracles that first Pentecost. First was the sound of "rush-

ing mighty wind” in verse 2. Second was the “tongues of fire” in verse 3. Third was the giving of the Holy Spirit to man. Next was the miracle of glossolalia in verse 4. In verse 8, the fifth miracle is mentioned: the inspired hearing of Peter in everyone’s own tongue. The sixth miracle was inspired teachings and the seventh was the baptism of 3,000 persons.

The Church of God was off to a big start!

“Many miracles and wonders were done through the apostles, which caused everyone to be filled with awe. All the believers continued together in close fellowship, and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed” (Acts 2:43-45).

Some people have claimed these verses show the early church practiced communism. But was it really? Upon careful study, we find this sharing was voluntary and not mandatory, as communism is. This took place in only one city — Jerusalem. It is not found practiced in other New Testament churches. Perhaps one explanation for this behavior is that Christians believed Christ’s return was imminent. So they could sell their belongings and it would make no difference. They could live without their belongings until Christ returned. If this communistic-like action was continued for any great length of time, it was bound for failure, just as communism failed in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in 1989 and 1990. We will read later in Paul’s epistles that the church at Jerusalem had fallen into financial straits.

Church Grows in Power

In Acts 3 we read that Peter and John went up to the Temple and Peter healed a lame man. This caused quite a stir! When a crowd gathered, Peter gave his second recorded sermon — along the same guidelines as his first. And notice, because of the miracle and subsequent sermon, about 5,000 more men were added to the Church of God (Acts 4:4)!

Not every result of these miracles was a happy one. Sadducees—Jews who did not believe in a resurrection—were among those gathered. They heard Peter preaching a resurrected Christ and that went against their beliefs! So they had Peter and John arrested and thrown into prison. It was nearing the evening, and Jewish law forbade trials after sunset. So Peter and John were imprisoned overnight (Acts 4:1-3).

“The next day the Jewish leaders, the elders, and the teachers of the law gathered in Jerusalem. They met with the High Priest Annas, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and the others who were members of the High Priest’s family. They made the apostles stand before them and asked them, ‘How did you do this? What power do you have, or whose name did you use?’” (vv. 5-7).

Now notice Peter’s bold response: “Peter, *FULL of the Holy Spirit*, answered them, ‘Leaders of the people and elders: if we are being questioned today about the good deed we have done to the lame man and how he was made well, then *you should all know*, and *all the people of Israel should know* that this man stands here before you completely well *by the POWER of the name of JESUS CHRIST of Nazareth—Whom YOU CRUCIFIED and GOD RAISED FROM DEATH*. Jesus is the one whom the scripture says, The stone that the builders despised turned out to be the most important stone. Salvation is to be found through him alone; for there is no one else in all the world, whose name God has given to men, by whom we can be saved’ ” (vv. 8-12, emphasis mine).

Here, Peter was before the highest-ranking Jews of his day! He boldly exclaimed the resurrection of Jesus to people who did not believe in resurrections! This is a far cry from the Peter who denied any knowledge of Christ only weeks earlier. But, as the scripture tells us, this Peter was filled with the POWER, the very Spirit of God.

What were the reactions of the Sadducees to Peter and John?

“The members of the Council were amazed to see how bold Peter and John were, and to learn that they were ordinary

men of no education. They realized then that they had been companions of Jesus. But there was nothing they could say, for they saw the man who had been made well standing there with Peter and John. So they told them to leave the Council room, and started discussing among themselves. ‘What shall we do with these men?’ they asked. ‘Everyone living in Jerusalem knows that this extraordinary miracle has been performed by them, and we cannot deny it. But to keep the matter from spreading any further among the people, let us warn them NEVER AGAIN to speak to anyone in the name of Jesus.’ So they called them back in and told them **THAT UNDER NO CONDITION WERE THEY TO SPEAK OR TEACH IN THE NAME OF JESUS** (vv. 13-18).

What a set-back this could have been for the church—had they given in. “But Peter and John answered them: ‘You yourselves judge which is right in God’s sight, **TO OBEY YOU, OR TO OBEY GOD. FOR WE CANNOT STOP** speaking of what we ourselves have seen and heard’ ” (vv. 19-20).

How did the Council respond to this? What could they do, when everyone was praising God for the miraculous healing of the lame man? They set them free but not before warning them **EVEN MORE STRONGLY** against preaching in the name of Jesus Christ.

How many of us could have answered the Council in the same bold manner of Peter and John? How many of us are as excited and gung-ho about getting the Gospel message out to the world today as Peter and John were in their day? How many of us could use a little bit more of that Spirit of boldness in our lives?

Peter and John needed more of that Spirit. We read, later in Acts 4, how the two apostles returned to the church (v. 23) and reported everything that happened. The Christians then prayed to God, “Now, Lord, take notice of the threats they made and allow us, your servants, to speak your message with **ALL BOLDNESS...**” (v. 29). The meeting place was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and boldly spoke

the word of God (v. 31)!

Church Name

We use the term “Christian” only as a matter of convenience. The members of the New Testament church were not called “Christians” until several years later, when the Gentile mission was underway and the Greek-speaking inhabitants of Syrian Antioch coined the phrase. The disciples called the church “The Way” and the Jews termed them Nazarenes or Nazoraeans (*New Testament History* by F. F. Bruce, p. 213).

Later, the apostle Paul would refer to the church as “The Church of God” in his epistles. We have no indication in Acts that this term was used from the very beginning. But we have already seen that Christ asked his Father to keep the church in his name.

Church Leadership

Who was the physical head of the Church of God in these early days?

Peter, as we have already seen, was named to the chief leadership post by Jesus Christ. He remained the chief apostle during his lifetime, directing the activities of all the congregations which were established throughout the known world.

But each individual church had its own pastor. Who was the pastor of the Jerusalem church?

Jesus’ brother, James, was the eldest and most prominent of the four brothers of our Savior. He was “destined to occupy a prominent position in the Jerusalem church. He appears in a few years’ time as one of the three ‘pillars’ of that church, along with the apostles Peter and John (Gal. 2:9)... A few years later still James emerges as the undisputed leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13ff; 21:18)...” (Bruce, p. 211).

Corruption Enters the Church

The early church members were filled with love, we read in the remainder of Acts 4. But the next chapter of Acts holds bad news. For

the first time, lying and corruption enter the true church. As with everything else in the beginning of his church, God took care of this matter in a big, supernatural way. He struck dead the two liars, Ananias and his wife, Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10)!

In the next verse we read the word “church” for the first time in the book of Acts. And the church continued to grow in power as many miracles were worked, including healings. Some of the infirm people in Jerusalem waited for Peter’s shadow to pass over them hoping to be healed (vv. 12-16)!

Apostles Imprisoned

These miracles did not go unnoticed!

“Then the High Priest and all his companions, members of the local party of the Sadducees, became extremely jealous of the apostles; so they decided to take action. They arrested the apostles and placed them in the public jail” (Acts 5: 17-18).

However, God had other plans for the apostles. He miraculously intervened, as He had done so many times to get the church off to a good start. “But that night the angel of the Lord opened the prison gates, led the apostles out, and said to them, ‘Go and stand in the Temple, and tell all the people about this new life.’ The apostles obeyed, and at dawn they entered the Temple and started teaching.

“The High Priest and his companions called together all the Jewish elders for a full meeting of the Council; then they sent orders to the prison to have the apostles brought before them. But when the officials arrived, they did not find the apostles in prison; so they returned to the Council and reported: ‘When we arrived at the jail we found it locked up tight and all the guards on watch at the gates; but when we opened the gates we did not find anyone inside!’” (vv. 19-23).

A man then came and told the Council that the men they had imprisoned the night before were teaching in the Temple. The Council sent an officer and his men to bring the apostles to them. This the officer did without using force. He was afraid that if he

used force the people might stone him!

When the apostles stood before the Council, the High Priest questioned them. “We gave you strict orders not to teach in the name of this man,” he said. “But see what you have done! You have spread your teaching all over Jerusalem, and you want to make us responsible for his death!” (v. 28).

Notice the boldness in Peter’s reply: “We must obey God, not men. The God of our Fathers **RAISED** Jesus from death, after **YOU HAD KILLED HIM** by nailing him to a cross. And **GOD RAISED HIM** to his right side as Leader and Savior, to give the people of Israel the opportunity to repent and have their sins forgiven. We are witnesses of these things—we and the Holy Spirit, who is God’s gift to those who obey him” (vv. 29-32).

This reply so cut and stung the ears of the councilmembers that they became extremely angry and decided to slay the apostles (v. 33)!

Gamaliel Speaks Wisely

Gamaliel, a doctor of the Law, a Pharisee, and chancellor of the famous Jewish law school, Hillel, came to the defense of the apostles by reasoning with the Council.

After the apostles were taken to another room, Gamaliel said, “Men of Israel, be careful what you are about to do these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming that he was somebody great; and about four hundred men joined him. But he was killed, and all his followers were scattered, and his movement died out. After this, Judas the Galilean appeared during the time of the census; he also drew a crowd after him, but he also was killed and all his followers were scattered. And so in this case now, I tell you, do not take any action against these men. Leave them alone, for if this plan and work of theirs is a man-made thing, it will disappear; but if it comes from God, you cannot possibly defeat them. You could find yourselves fighting against God” (vv. 35-39)!

The councilmembers followed Gamaliel’s advice. They beat the apostles, warned them never to speak in the name of Jesus again,

and set them free. But the apostles did not cease to preach and teach Jesus (v. 42)!

From that time on, the Sanhedrin, the governing body of Jews in Jerusalem, was not responsible for initiating persecution against the Church of God. The Jews at Jerusalem kept hands off.

Unfortunately, the same was not true of the Diaspora, or the Jews which had been dispersed throughout the Middle East, Asia Minor, Africa and Europe.

Three Types of People in Palestine

There were three categories of people inhabiting Palestine in the first century.

The first group consisted of Palestinian “Hebrew” Jews. They lived under the Pharisaical Jewish laws in Palestine and were the ones who kept hands off the true Church since Gamaliel’s decision in Acts 5.

The second group was made up of Hellenistic Jews. While the Hebrew Jews were content with their way of life, the Hellenistic Jews were influenced by the Greek culture around them. They spoke Greek and were filled with zeal. The Hellenistic Jews lived mostly outside Palestine and were not bound

by the same restrictions as the Palestinian Jews. They didn’t follow Pharisaical laws. And they sought converts to Judaism from the Gentiles. They were zealous missionaries and converted many Gentile women. (Gentile women didn’t like their treatment under Gentile customs and found they were treated better in Judaism. Gentile men were hesitant to join Judaism, mainly because circumcision was mandatory.)

Stephen and Paul were converted into the true church from this Hellenistic group of Jews and carried their zeal for preaching the Law into their new Christian lives. Average Palestinian Jews, on the other hand, would not have been so zealous to pass God’s way on to others. They would have kept Christianity to themselves.

The third category of people in Palestine consisted of Gentiles—those people not of the Jewish faith. The term “Judaizer” was given to any Roman who was influenced by Jews.

This mixture of people undoubtedly led to spats throughout Palestine. It caused problems in God’s church, too. But it also produced some dramatic preachers, as we shall see in the next chapter.

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Stephen and Philip

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Shortly after the Church of God began, conflict arose between converted Hellenistic Jews and converted Hebrew Jews. This problem is recorded in Acts 6.

Office of Deacon Established

“The Greek-speaking Jews said that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of funds. So the twelve apostles called the whole group of disciples together and said: ‘It is not right for us to neglect the preaching of God’s word in order to handle finances. So then, brothers, choose seven men among you who are known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and we will put them in charge of the matter. We ourselves, then, will give our full time to prayers and the work of preaching.’ The whole group was pleased with the apostles’ proposal; so they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus from Antioch, a Gentile who had been converted to Judaism. The group presented them to the apostles, who prayed and placed their hands on them” (Acts 6:2-6).

It is very likely these seven deacons

were not only Hellenists but also leaders of the Hellenist group. We only have detailed knowledge of Stephen and Philip. Nicolaus may have figured prominently in a group which later disrupted the church: “Nicolaus, the Antiochene proselyte, figures in the second-century Christian literature as the founder of the Nicolaitans, who (as we learn from the letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in the Apocalypse) endeavored to relax the requirements of the Council of Jerusalem” (Bruce, p. 219).

What was the result of creating the new office of deacon in the church? “And so the word of God continued to spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem grew larger and larger, and a great number of priests accepted the faith” (Acts 6:7).

Story of Stephen

Luke’s narrative in Acts now singles out the story of Stephen, a man richly blessed by God and full of power, who performed miracles and wonders among the people (Acts 6:8).

“Stephen belonged to the Hellenistic Synagogue in Jerusalem called the Syna-

gogue of the Freedmen; its membership embraced Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Proconsular Asia” (Bruce, p. 220).

Luke says members of the synagogue “and other Jews from Cilicia and Asia started arguing with Stephen. But the Spirit gave Stephen such wisdom that when he spoke they could not resist him” (vv. 9-10).

What did they argue about? “It was in the synagogue that he (Stephen) first publicly voiced his criticism of the Temple order and his conviction that that order had now been decisively superseded by the coming of Jesus. This led to a regular debate in the synagogue in which Stephen’s arguments proved irrefutable” (Bruce, p. 220).

Stephen taught that Jesus was the new High Priest and the old order of the priesthood was done away! And his fellow Jews could not disprove his arguments. What did they do instead?

“So they paid some men to say, ‘We heard him speaking against Moses and against God’ ” (Acts 6:11).

“Stephen was charged with two-fold blasphemy—against God, because he affirmed that Jesus had come to abolish the Temple and all it stood for, and against Moses, because he affirmed similarly that Jesus had come to abrogate the customs laid down for Israel to keep in Moses’ law” (Bruce, p. 220).

The Jews seized Stephen and took him before the Council where they formally accused him (vv. 12-15).

Stephen Answers His Accusers

Stephen was given a chance to answer his accusers. His answer is recorded in Acts 7. Stephen told the story of the Old Testament. He showed how the Scriptures did not stop with Moses as the end-all but the entire Old Testament pointed to the coming of Jesus Christ. Stephen accused the Council of being in the same position as the rebellious Israelites who wished to return to Egypt and who worshipped the golden calf (Acts 7:39-41).

After this recount of the Scriptures, Stephen boldly made his point: “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, and who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it” (vv. 51-53, *NKJ*).

Stephen’s Murder

“Stephen’s reply concludes with the denunciation of his judges, whose recent rejection of the ‘Righteous One’ is completely keeping with their fathers’ rejection of the prophets who foretold the advent. Such language could not fail to provoke their anger, and Stephen, seeing their hostility and realizing the certainty of an unfavourable verdict, appealed from their judgement to that of the heavenly court, where Jesus stood as witness or counsel for the defense...” (Bruce, p. 224).

This explains Acts 7:55-56, which reads: “But he [Stephen], being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’ ” (*NKJ*).

The Council was already furious from Stephen’s cutting personal remarks. They cried out at his latest statements about Jesus in heaven. This went against them so strongly that “they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes (cloaks) at the feet of a young man named Saul” (vv. 57-58 *NKJ*).

“They kept on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!’ He knelt down and cried with a loud voice, ‘Lord! Do not remember this sin against them!’ He said this and died. And Saul approved of his murder” (vv. 59-60; 8:1).

Was Stephen’s murder the act of angry Jews who took the law into their own hands?

Was it legal for the Jews to kill Stephen without a Roman trial?

“The most probable account of the matter is that during the closing part of Pilate’s administration, especially when he was in Caesarea, the Jewish rulers knew that they could take certain discreet liberties.... Where public order was not imperiled, an incident like the stoning of Stephen would be over and done with long before it reached the procurator’s ears, and on such a *fait accompli* he may well have judged it wise to turn a blind eye” (Bruce, p. 226).

Church Is Persecuted

From the time of Stephen’s stoning, the Jerusalem church began to suffer a cruel persecution and all Christians except the apostles fled Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). The brunt of the persecution was against the converted Hellenists, who were forced to leave. This caused an attitude change in the Jerusalem church. Now predominantly Hebrew, the Jerusalem church became more conservative than if the Hellenists had stayed.

Saul appeared as the chief persecutor of the church. We read in Luke’s account: “...Saul tried to DESTROY the church; going from house to house, he dragged the believers out, both men and women, and threw them into jail” (v. 4).

But there was a good side to the persecution. The Hellenistic Christians carried the Gospel into the surrounding regions and soon the church was taking root in non-Jewish soil.

Real Church, False Church Meet

Philip assumed the role of leader of the Hellenistic Christians after Stephen’s death. He, Peter and John traveled to Samaria, to a city which is not named in Acts. Most scholars agree that the city was Gitta, home town of Simon Magus, a priest in the Babylonian Mystery Religion. This was the first time the real church and the false church met.

Philip preached the Messiah to crowds

of Samaritans who had gathered around him and paid close attention. Philip performed miracles including casting out demons and healing paralyzed and lame persons. This caused great joy in Samaria (Acts 8:5-8).

There was a magician named Simon Magus in that city. (Magus means “priest.”) This Simon had collected quite a following because he had practiced his magic for a long time. When he and his followers heard Philip, they all believed and were baptized. And when Simon Magus saw the wonders Peter the apostle performed with God’s Spirit, he tried to buy some of that Spirit. Simon Magus saw the power and he wanted it. He realized he could use religion to control people.

Peter, however, recognized Simon’s scheme. Incensed, Peter responded to Simon’s request with stinging words: “May *YOU AND YOUR MONEY GO TO HELL*, for thinking you can buy God’s gift with money! You have *NO PART* or *SHARE* in *OUR WORK*, because your heart is not right in God’s sight. *REPENT* then, from this *EVIL* plan of yours, and pray to the Lord that He will forgive you for thinking such a thing as this. For I see that you are *full* of *BITTER ENVY*, and are a prisoner of sin” (vv. 20-23).

Simon Magus then said to Peter and John, “Please pray to the Lord for me, so that none of the things you said might happen to me” (v. 24). He did not repent. He merely asked for forgiveness.

Who was this Simon Magus, who considered the Spirit of God a superior form of magic and wanted to buy it? What happened to him after this terse meeting with the true church?

Simon Magus

Hasting’s Dictionary of Apostolic Church says Simon’s subsequent history was influenced by his meeting with the church. Simon probably carried some parts of Christianity with him when he broke from Christianity. But he wove them into a system of his own

which included germs of Gnosticism. His reprobate sect carried a Christian name and appeared to be Christian but was in reality anti-Christian.

Schaff writes that Simon unquestionably adulterated Christianity with paganism.

The historian Eusebius tells us Simon was worshiped as a god. He traveled with a whore named Helen (mentioned in John 4:9). Simon claimed to be a god and said Helen was once a goddess. But she was condemned to be a whore until he rescued her from the brothel and restored her to her goddesshood.

Eusebius adds this about Simon Magus and his followers: "Simon, we are given to understand, was the prime author of every heresy. From his time to our own those who follow his lead, while pretending to accept that sober Christian philosophy which through purity of life has won universal fame, are as devoted as ever to the idolatrous superstition from which they have escaped: they prostrate themselves before pictures and images of Simon himself and his companion, the Helen already mentioned, and give themselves to worshipping them with incense, sacrifices and libations. Their more secret rites, which they claim will so amaze a man when he first hears them that, in their official jargon, he will be wonderstruck, are indeed something to wonder at, brim-full of frenzy and lunacy, and of such kind that not only can they not be put down in writing; they involved such appalling degradation, such unspeakable conduct, that no decent man would let a mention of them pass his lips. For whatever could be imagined more disgusting than the foulest crime known has been outstripped by the utterly revolting heresy of these men, who make sport of wretched women, burdened indeed with vices of every kind" (*The History of the Church* by Eusebius, pp. 86-87).

The *Dictionary of Christian Bibliography* says Simon went to Rome A.D. 45 and established a false priesthood. He taught that everyone should love everyone, both spiritually and physically. He was called

Jupiter and Helen was called Minerva. He began teaching antinomianism, that is, he taught against God's Law. He claimed wicked demons inspired the Law to bind people. In other words, God's Law did not have to be kept. He taught grace, not works.

The Christian fathers regarded Simon Magus as the father of Gnosticism. But what is Gnosticism? It is important to understand the basics of this belief because it affected God's church not only in the first century but throughout the history of the church down to the present day!

Gnosticism

There were many types of Gnosticism, but all had a common denominator. It was a radical dualistic religion which taught salvation came by esoteric (hidden or secret) knowledge. Many scholars believe Gnosticism was derived from a combination of Greek philosophy, Oriental mysticism, Judaism and Christianity.

We have two sources of knowledge about Gnosticism. Our primary source is the Gnostics themselves. Our secondary source is the polemics of church fathers.

Gnostics believed they were saved by knowledge which was supernaturally imparted to their special group. Their god—the one who was to give them salvation—was a trans-mundane god. He had nothing to do with this world. He had a "hands-off policy." He was revealed to people only through knowledge.

One type of Gnosticism taught that all men were once part of a single, primal man which was made of light. Archons (demons) then created mankind as fleshly human beings to defeat the primal man. Humans consisted of a body which surrounded a soul and the soul surrounded the spark of life, or piece of primal man. This spark needed to be freed from the soul and from the body. Because it was part of primal man, when the human died, it went to heaven where primal man was recreated.

This belief made the earth a dungeon and the universe a prison. And it was not

easy to get from earth to heaven. The belief said there were seven spheres between earth and heaven and a different archon ruled each sphere. These archons had names such as Yah, Sabeoth, Adoni, Elohim, and El Shadai. If these names sound familiar, it is because they are names of the Old Testament God! These archons did not allow any piece of primal man to move from one sphere to the next without answering questions—not unlike a giant game of *Trivial Pursuit*. This was why knowledge was so all-important to Gnostics.

Another Gnostic belief was called Docetism. Docetism was the belief that Christ was nothing more than a mere mortal until the spirit entered Him at baptism. When Christ died, the spirit left Him and He once again was a mortal—a dead mortal. Docetists believed Aeon Christ was sent by their transmundane god to earth to live in the body of the man Jesus Christ. While in this human body, Aeon Christ imparted knowledge to other humans.

Gnostics believed the archons wanted to keep humanity on the earth and they used laws to do so. They inspired (God's) law to keep man on the earth! This belief is utterly anti-Biblical. Yet it spread through the church in the first century and was one of the hands which nearly choked the church into non-existence. And even today there are people who claim to be Christian but believe God's Law is evil, limiting one's freedom, and is done away. How absurd! How utterly pagan!

Gnostics generally lived at two extremes. They lived either ascetically, hating the world and denying themselves any pleasure, or they were libertine and believed they were free from the "yoke" of moral law.

One Gnostic, Marcian, believed God could not be *both* just and good. He also claimed people should abstain from sexual relations.

Later, as we near the end of the first century, we will read warnings from the apostles against Gnosticism as it crept into the Church of God.

This was a brief look at Gnosticism,

which was only a part of Simon Magus' belief. On the whole, the church fathers considered Simon's false religion "nothing more or less than an assimilation of imperfectly understood Christian doctrines to a fundamentally pagan scheme" (Bruce, p. 228).

Some have claimed Simon Magus was the first pope. It seems unlikely that the same Simon Magus who met Peter became the first pope, though the possibility does exist.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* considers Simon a compound Simon Magus. Although credited to one name, many persons probably held Simon's position. One of these people more than likely was the first pope.

Peter Not the First Pope

Although it cannot be proved whether Simon Magus was the first pope, it can be proved that Simon Peter was not the first pope, as Catholic tradition says he was.

1. Galatians 2:7-8 says Peter's commission was to go to Jews, not to Gentiles. Paul's commission was to the Gentiles. Rome was a Gentile church.

2. Paul told the Romans in his letter to them that he was their apostle (Rom. 15:16).

3. Paul founded the Roman church after he wrote his epistle A.D. 57. But Catholic tradition says Peter began the Roman church A.D. 45. It could be speculated that Paul built on a church which Peter began, but Rom. 15:20 says Paul would not have done this.

4. In Romans 16, Paul greets 28 different people but not Peter. Surely, if Peter were the head of the Roman church—or even residing in Rome—Paul would have mentioned his name!

5. When Paul was taken to Rome to stand trial, every Christian there came out to meet him (Acts 28:15). But there is no record of Peter coming out to meet Paul.

6. When Paul arrived in Rome, he assembled the Christian leaders and found they knew very little (Acts 28:17). Certainly Peter, if he had been in Rome, would not

have left them so ignorant.

7. Peter's actions were not mentioned by Paul during his two years of house arrest in Rome.

8. Paul said all forsook him at his second trial. Would the pope, had he been Peter, have forsaken Paul in his time of need?

It is clear to see Simon Peter was not the first pope.

Philip Meets Ethiopian Eunuch

What happened to Philip after his meeting with Simon Magus in Samaria? As we continue reading Luke's narrative in Acts, we find Philip was told by an angel of God to go south to the road which went from Jerusalem to Gaza (Acts 8:26).

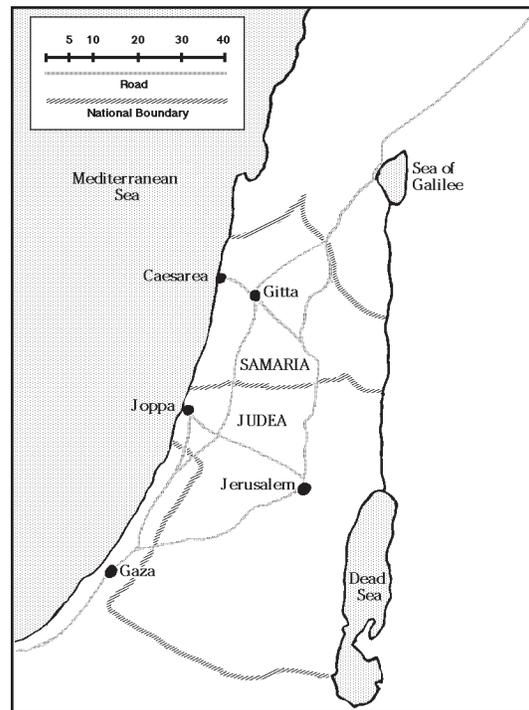
Here Philip found an Ethiopian eunuch, a high official in the court of Queen Candace. He was in charge of the national treasury. This eunuch was a Gentile convert to Judaism. He was on his way home from Jerusalem and was reading the Scriptures. But he having trouble understanding a passage in Isaiah. Philip asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (v. 30).

The eunuch did not respond as a Gnostic, for Gnostics believed their god imparted understanding of scriptures to everyone he called, using esoteric knowledge. No, the eunuch answered Philip the way a true Christian would. "How can I understand," the eunuch replied, "unless someone explains them to me?"

So Philip explained the Scriptures in question. He showed how they referred to Jesus Christ.

The eunuch became convinced in the Christian belief. When his chariot passed some water, he asked Philip, "Here is some water. What is to keep me from being baptized?" Philip replied, "You may be baptized if you believe with all your heart." The eunuch then said to Philip, "I do. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

This was sufficient to convince Philip that the Ethiopian official was indeed ready for baptism. The Ethiopian commanded that



Philip did not need to return to Jerusalem when he traveled from Gitta to meet the Ethiopian eunuch. He probably took the direct road from Gitta to Gaza, meeting the eunuch just northeast of Gaza.

the chariot be stopped and Philip baptized him, not by sprinkling, but by immersing him under the water (vv. 38-39), signifying a complete burial of the old self (Rom. 6).

The Ethiopian was not the first Gentile convert into the Church of God. He was of Gentile nationality but of Jewish religion. Nothing else is mentioned of him in the book of Acts. God did not open the door for Gentile converts until some time later.

"From Gaza Philip then made his way north along the Palestinian seaboard, evangelizing the cities on the way until he reached Caesarea. There he appears to have settled down, no doubt making Caesarea his base for further evangelistic activities; at any rate, it is there we meet him twenty years later, known to his fellow Christians as 'Philip the Evangelist'; known also as the father of four daughters with the gift of prophecy" (Bruce, p. 230).

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Paul Is Converted

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Luke, after wrapping up the story of Philip, turned his attention to a new character involved with the first-century church. We first read of him as he stood over Stephen's murder in Acts 9:1. Now, we are formally introduced to Saul, who is still threatening all Christians with murder (Acts 9:1).

Saul the Man

Some people may picture Saul (later called Paul) as a burly, handsome Charlton Heston-like character. This image is quite far from the truth. Paul's enemies said he was bald, had crooked legs and a hooked nose. Paul was a Benjaminite. He admitted in a letter to the church at Corinth that he was nothing to look at. The brethren usually got more from Paul's letters than from his sermons because his appearance distracted them. They had a hard time imagining such powerful words coming from such a frail body. Paul also said in 1 Cor. 16:21 that he had an eye problem.

Though Saul was nothing great to look at, he was filled with the zeal of a Hellenist. Saul sought not only to wipe Christianity

out of Jerusalem but distant cities as well! He went to the High Priest and asked for letters of introduction to the Jewish synagogues in Damascus so he could hunt down Christians there (Acts 9:1-2).

Saul's Calling

Saul had a problem carrying out his plans. "On his way to Damascus, as he came near the city. A light from the sky flashed all around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' he asked. 'I am Jesus whom you persecute,' the voice said. 'But get up and go into the city, where you will be told what you must do.' Now the men who were traveling with Saul had stopped, not saying a word; they heard the voice but could not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but could not see a thing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. For three days he was not able to see and during that time he did not eat or drink anything" (Acts 9:3-5).

Meanwhile, God contacted a disciple named Ananias, who lived in Damascus. Through a vision, God told Ananias to go to

“Straight Street” and meet a man from Tarsus named Saul. Ananias objected because he had heard of Saul’s persecutions. “Lord, many people have told me about this man, about all the terrible things he has done to your people in Jerusalem. And he has come to Damascus with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name” (vv. 13-14).

But God insisted, telling Ananias, “Go, for I have chosen him to serve me, and to make my name known to Gentiles and kings and to the people of Israel. And I myself will show him all that he must suffer for my sake” (vv. 15-16).

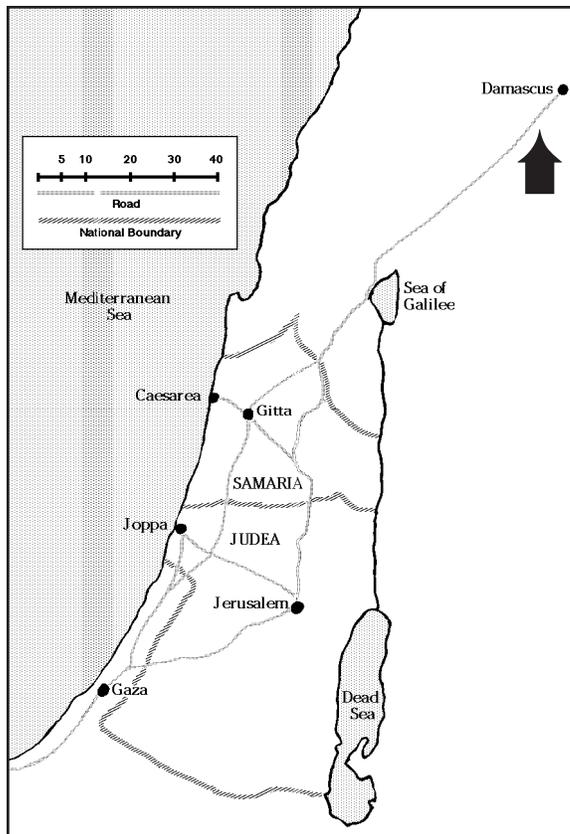
So Ananias went, entered the house and placed his hands on Saul. He told him Jesus “sent me so that you might see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (v. 17).

Immediately, “something like fish scales fell from Saul’s eyes and he was able to see again. He stood up and was baptized; and after he had eaten, his strength came back.



The Street Called “Straight” in Damascus, where Ananias met Saul.

Saul stayed for a few days with the disciples in Damascus” (vv. 18-19).



Saul Goes to Arabia

Saul then went to Arabia for a period of time (Gal. 1:17). During this time, many think Saul communed with God in desert solitude and re-thought his whole attitude on life since his conversion (Bruce, p. 242). It may have been at this time that Christ personally taught Saul, preparing him for the ministry. Paul later wrote that he had seen Jesus and was taught by Him (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:4-8; Gal. 1:11-17).

At least one scholar feels Saul began preaching to Gentiles in the Arabian kingdom of Nabataea, which bordered Damascus, and incurred the wrath of that king by his preaching. Because when Saul returned to Damascus, King Aretas ordered guards at the city gates to arrest him (2 Cor. 11:32).

Somewhere along the Road to Damascus (arrow), Saul was blinded by Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of Nabataea surrounded the city of Damascus.

34**Return to Damascus**

Saul was not arrested, though. When he returned to Damascus (Gal. 1:17), “he went straight to the synagogues and began to preach about Jesus. ‘He is the Son of God,’ he said. All who heard him were amazed and asked, ‘Isn’t this the man who in Jerusalem was killing those who call on his name? And didn’t he come here for the very purpose of arresting them and taking them back to the chief priests?’

“But Saul’s preaching became even more powerful, and his proofs that Jesus was the Messiah were so strong that the Jews who lived in Damascus could not answer him” (Acts 9: 20-22).

Saul stayed three years in Damascus, probably from A.D. 34 to 37 (Gal. 1:18). After he had preached there three years, “the Jews gathered and made plans to kill Saul; but he was told of what they planned to do. Day and night they watched the city gates in order to kill him. But one night Saul’s followers took him and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket” (vv . 23-25).

On to Jerusalem

From Damascus, Saul walked to Jerusalem, a trip of about 140 miles. During the years to come, he would travel about 6,000 miles for the Work of God (*Ambassador for Christ* by William Barclay, p. 12).

Saul tried to join the disciples in Jerusalem but they were afraid of him. They still remembered him as the enemy of the church he had been when he had left more than three years earlier.

But Barnabas befriended Saul and took him to the apostles. “He explained to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road and that the Lord had spoken to him. He also told them how boldly Saul preached in the name of Jesus in Damascus.

“And so Saul stayed with them and went all over Jerusalem, boldly preaching in the name of the Lord. He also talked and disputed with the Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the brothers found out about this, they took Saul down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus” (Acts 9:26-30).

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Peter's Early Ministry

“**A**nd so it was that the church throughout all of Judea and Galilee and Samaria had a time of peace. It was built up and grew in numbers through the help of the Holy Spirit, as it (the church) lived its life in reverence for the Lord” (Acts 9:31).

Peter in Lydda and Joppa

“Peter traveled everywhere, and one time he went to visit God’s people who lived in Lydda” (Acts 9:32).

Lydda was a town about 24 miles northwest of Jerusalem. It was about nine miles southeast of Joppa, a city on the Mediterranean coast. Between Jerusalem and Lydda was a road called “The Way of Beth-Horon.” It was, perhaps, by this road that Peter went to Lydda, and later, to Joppa.

In Lydda, Peter met Aeneas, a paralyzed man who had been bedridden for eight years. “Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ makes you well. Get up and make your bed.”

Aeneas got up at once. What effect did this miracle have on the people who knew this paralyzed man? “All the people living in

Lydda and Sharon (the fertile plain region around Lydda) saw him, and they turned to the Lord (vv. 33-35).

Nearly nine miles north of Lydda was the port of Joppa, “an important Christian center during the years when the new faith was spreading from Jerusalem across the Mediterranean. The picturesque harbor was situated halfway between Mount Carmel and Gaza at the southern end of the fertile plain of Sharon” (*All of the Women of the Bible* by Edith Deen, pp. 218-219).

In Joppa, there was a woman named Tabitha (or Dorcas in Greek) who was a church member. Tabitha lived most likely in a mud-brick structure on a ridge above the sandy beach. It very likely had a guest chamber on the roof which was reached by an outer stairway. From this roof Tabitha probably watched poor people on the beach below searching for remnants of clothing which washed up on the sand. She became stirred with a desire to help them (Deen, p. 219).

“She spent all her time doing good and helping the poor. At that time she got sick and died. Her body was washed and laid in a room upstairs” (Acts 9:36-37).

When the church in Joppa heard Peter

was only nine miles away in Lydda, two men were sent to him. They told Peter, "Please hurry and come with us." So Peter got ready and left with them.

Peter was taken to the upstairs room where the body of Tabitha lay. All of the church widows crowded around Peter, crying and showing him the shirts and coats Tabitha had made while she was alive.

Peter put them all out of the room. Alone, in the quiet, he prayed on his knees to God. Then he turned to the cold cadaver and said, "Tabitha, get up!"

Tabitha opened her eyes. When she saw Peter, she sat up. Peter reached over and helped her get up. Then he called to the brethren and presented her alive to them.

Again, the news of a miracle spread all over the local town and many believed in the Lord (vv. 38-42).

Peter stayed for many days in Joppa with a leather-worker named Simon in his house by the sea (vv. 43; 10:6).

Peter and Cornelius

Up to this time, the Gospel had been preached only to Jews. Gentiles were considered unclean by Jews, just as certain animals were unclean to eat by God's command (Leviticus 11, Deuteronomy 14).

The time had come for God to open the door, allowing Gentiles to enter the Church of God.

While Peter was in Joppa, God sent an angel in a vision to a God-fearing Gentile centurion named Cornelius. He lived in Caesarea, a port about 33 miles north of Joppa.

Cornelius was captain of a regiment known as "the Italian Regiment." He and his whole family worshiped God. He prayed continually, and manifested his faith in God by helping the Jewish poor (Acts 10:1-2).

One day, about 3 p.m., Cornelius saw an angel in a vision. The angel told him, "God has accepted your prayers and works of charity, and has remembered you. And now, send some men to Joppa to call for a certain man whose full name is Simon Peter. He is a guest in the home of a leather worker

named Simon, who lives by the sea" (vv. 5-6).

Cornelius obeyed the angel. He sent two house servants and a soldier who had been his personal attendant. About noon the next day, the three men arrived at Simon the leather-worker's house. Lunch was being prepared inside while Peter was up on the roof, praying and getting hungry.

It was now Peter's turn to receive a vision from God. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down. In it were all kinds of animals and wild birds. As Peter's stomach growled with hunger, he heard a voice telling him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!"

"Certainly not, Lord!" objected Peter. "I have never eaten anything considered defiled or unclean."

"Do not consider anything unclean that God has declared clean," replied the voice.

Three times this happened. Then the thing was taken back up into heaven.

Peter pondered on the meaning of this vision as the three men sent by Cornelius arrived at the front gate. "Listen," the Holy Spirit spoke to Peter, "three men are here looking for you. So get yourself ready and go down and do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

Peter went down and introduced himself to the three visitors. They told him about Cornelius' vision. Peter agreed to go with them to Cornelius' house. Six church members also went along (Acts 11:2).

When they arrived at Cornelius' home in Caesarea, Cornelius met Peter at the door, fell at his feet, and bowed down before him.

"Stand up," Peter ordered him, "for I myself am only a man." The two continued talking as they entered the house. Peter looked around to see many people gathered including relatives and close friends of Cornelius (Acts 10:24-27).

Peter said to those gathered, "You know very well that a Jew is not allowed by his religion to associate with a Gentile. But God has shown me that I must not consider any man unclean or defiled." That was the meaning of the vision. The vision had nothing to do with clean and unclean meats. It was not

changing God's clear commands on what to eat and what to avoid. But the vision was an indication from God that He was opening the door of his church to allow Gentiles to come inside! (God's church to this day continues to obey his laws concerning clean and unclean meats.)

Cornelius explained his vision to Peter (vv. 30-33).

Then, Peter preached Jesus to those Gentiles gathered there: "I now realize that it is true that God treats all men alike. Whoever fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him, no matter what race he belongs to. You know the message He sent to the people of Israel, proclaiming the Good News of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all men... you know about Jesus of Nazareth, how God poured out on him the Holy Spirit and power. He went everywhere, doing good and healing all who were under the power of the Devil, for God was with him.... They put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from death on the third day and caused him to appear. He was not seen by all the people, but only by us who are the witnesses that God had already chosen... and he commanded us to preach the gospel to the people, and to testify that he is the one whom God has appointed Judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets spoke about him, saying that everyone who believes in him will have his sins forgiven through the power of his name" (vv. 34-43).

And while Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit was given by God to Cornelius and all who had gathered in his house. The brethren who had come with Peter were amazed to see the Holy Spirit given to non-Jews.

This was a reversal of the normal order of repentance. On the day of Pentecost, when Jews were converted to Christianity, they first repented, then were baptized, thirdly, had hands laid on them, and lastly, acquired the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

But this time God reversed the order. He gave the Holy Spirit before baptism. Peter noticed this irregularity and said, "These people have received the Holy Spirit, just as

we also did. Can anyone then, stop them from being baptized with water?" (Acts 10:47).

The first Gentiles were then baptized into the Church of God. The new converts asked Peter to stay with them a few days, and he did (v. 48).

Reports of the Gentile conversions spread quickly throughout Judea (Acts 11:1). When Peter went to the church headquarters in Jerusalem, he was criticized by those who were in favor of circumcising Gentiles. So Peter gave a full account of what had happened, including the two visions (vv. 2-17).

When the accusing brethren heard Peter's story, they stopped criticizing and began praising God, saying, "Then God has given to the Gentiles also the opportunity to repent and live!" (v. 18).

Church at Antioch Begins

Believers had scattered when Stephen was martyred. They had taken the Gospel message to the Jews as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch (Acts 11:19).

Phoenicia was a coastal country whose southern tip reached within five miles of Caesarea. The narrow strip of land continued up the coast between Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea. Its great shipping centers were Tyre, about 100 miles north of Jerusalem, and Sidon, another 30 miles up the coast.

Perhaps the Gospel spread to Phoenicia overland. Perhaps it spread by sea to these ancient seaports.

There is no doubt that the Gospel sailed the seas. Cyprus also was the scene of much evangelizing. It is an island tucked about 75 miles off the coast of Phoenicia and about the same distance south of Asia Minor, or modern-day Turkey.

Antioch was a great Greek metropolis on the seacoast north of Sidon. It was the third largest city in the world at that time, with a population of almost 225,000. Only Rome and Alexandria were more populous (Bruce, p. 231; Barclay, p. 63). In this city were many competing cults and mystery

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religions, all promising salvation.

In this great city, Gentiles were converted to Christianity *en masse* for the first time. The evangelists were neither Philip nor Peter but unnamed “men of Cyprus and Cyrene” (Acts 11:20). A great number of people were converted from the ranks of both Jews and Gentiles.

The news of God’s work in Antioch soon reached the church in Jerusalem and Barnabas was sent there to be their minister. He was “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith” (vv. 22-24).

Barnabas was a Cypriot by birth and probably a Hellenist. He is said to have been a Levite and bore the Jewish name Joseph. He was given the nickname Barnabas (“Son of Encouragement”) by the church in Jerusalem because of his encouraging nature (Bruce, p. 232).

When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, he saw how God had blessed the new converts. He was glad and urged them to be faithful with all their hearts. Many were converted.

Barnabas pressed ahead, building the church in Antioch. He realized the task was more than he could handle. He knew a man who would make an admirable colleague—Saul (Paul) who was living in Tarsus, a seaport 100 miles northwest of Antioch.

Barnabas found Paul there and brought him back to Antioch where the two of them met with the people of the church and taught a large group for a year (vv. 25-26).

It was in Antioch that disciples were called Christians for the first time. The Gentiles of Antioch devised the name—Jews never would. For Jews to call Jesus’ followers Christians would have seemed like an acknowledgment that Jesus was indeed the *christos*, or “Anointed One” (Bruce, p. 232).

But to Gentiles, “Christ” sounded like a personal name, not an official designation. Therefore the people who talked so much about *Christos* were called *Christianoi* or “Christ’s people” and the name stuck.

About that time some prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, Agabus, predicted a great famine to come on the whole earth. The church in Antioch de-

cidated to send help to their brethren in Judea. So they sent money to the church elders by Barnabas and Paul (Acts 11:27-30).

The famine came A.D. 41, when Claudius was emperor (*Commentary on the Whole Bible* by Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown, pp. 1098-1099).

Barnabas and Saul took money from Antioch to the church in Jerusalem during the famine of A.D. 41. When they returned to Antioch, they brought with them John Mark, nephew of Barnabas (Acts 11:30; 12:25).

Persecution Increases

About this time, King Herod Agrippa began persecuting some members of the church (Acts 12:1). Herod Agrippa was the son of Aristobulus, and the grandson of Herod the Great.

In the year 44, Herod had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword (*New Testament Survey* by Merrill C. Tenney, p. 254). When he saw how this pleased the Jews, Herod also had Peter arrested prior to the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Acts 12:2-3).

Peter was put in jail and guarded by 16 soldiers. Eight watched in prison and eight were at the gate. Herod planned to bring Peter out to the Jewish people after Passover. Meanwhile the church prayed earnestly for Peter.

The night before Peter was to be turned over to the Jews, he was sleeping between two soldiers. His right hand was chained to the left hand of one and his left hand was chained to the right hand of the other (JFB, p. 1099).

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord stood in Peter’s cell and a light shone. The angel shook Peter by the shoulder, woke him and said, “Hurry! Get up!” The chains fell from his hands. The angel said, “Tighten your belt and tie your sandals.” Peter obeyed.

“Put your cloak around you and come with me,” ordered the angel. Peter followed him out of prison. But he did not know if what was happening was real or a vision.

They walked past two guard stations

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and came to the iron gate that opened to the city. The gate opened by itself and they went out. The two walked down a street and suddenly Peter found himself alone (Acts 12:6-10).

Alone and free, Peter now realized God had rescued him from Herod and from the Jews. He went to the home of Mary, mother of John Mark.

Many people were inside praying. Peter knocked at the outside door and Rhoda, a servant girl, answered. She recognized Peter's voice and was so happy that she raced back inside to tell everyone that Peter was outside that she forgot to open the door to let him in. Peter remained outside and kept knocking.

Rhoda tried to tell the Christians their imprisoned leader was at the door but they told her she was crazy. She insisted it was Peter and they told her it was his angel.

They finally opened the door and were amazed to find Rhoda was right! Peter held

up his hand to quiet them down and told them of his miraculous rescue.

Peter told those gathered at Mary's house to pass along the story of his rescue to James and the rest of the brothers. Then Peter left.

Back in prison there was "tremendous confusion" among the guards when morning came. No one knew what had happened to Peter. When he wasn't found, Herod had the guards questioned and put to death.

Herod Agrippa died unexpectedly later that year—A.D. 44. On a chosen day he put on his royal robes, sat on his throne, and made a speech to the people (Acts 12:21). This was probably Claudius' birthday celebration Aug. 1 (Bruce, pp. 262-263).

The people shouted, "It isn't a man speaking but a god." At once the angel of the Lord struck Herod down because he did not give honor to God. He was eaten by worms and died (Acts 12: 22-23).

After the death of Herod Agrippa, the word of God continued to grow (v. 24).

6

Journeys of the 12 Apostles

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We shall pause from Luke's narrative in Acts for a moment to examine the travels of the 12 original apostles. Where did they go?

After Peter's encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10-11—*See Chapter 4 of this book*) he and the other 11 apostles disappear from the book of Acts. Only Peter and John reappear briefly in Jerusalem for the conference recorded in Acts 15.

Did they remain in Jerusalem the whole time or did they, like Paul and Barnabas, take the Gospel to far away lands?

What was their commission from Jesus? Did he send the 12 to preach to a particular group? Notice the surprising answer from the Bible:

"Jesus sent these 12 men out with the following instruction: 'Do not go to any Gentile territory or any Samaritan towns. Go, instead, to the lost sheep of the people of Israel'" (Acts 9:15, 18:6).

God has not, until these last days, revealed where the 12 apostles went. He did not want the world to know where the lost 10 tribes of the House of Israel were. He wanted the 10 tribes to remain lost until this 20th century ("Where Did the Original Apostles

Go?" by Herman L. Hoeh, *The Good News*, August 1987, p. 3).

The patriarch Jacob had 12 sons from whom grew 12 tribes. After the death of Solomon, David's son, the 12 tribes split into two nations. The southerly kingdom, made up mostly of Jews, became known as the House of Judah. The 10 northerly tribes formed a nation called the House of Israel.

The House of Israel was taken captive in 721 B.C. by the Assyrians. Its people were transplanted beyond the Euphrates River in Assyria and in the cities of the Medes around Lake Urmia, southwest of the Caspian Sea. These Israelites never returned home to Palestine. They lost their true identity. It was to these Israelites that the 12 original apostles were sent to preach.

James wrote his epistle A.D. 60 to the lost 10 tribes. It speaks of wars being waged among those tribes. But just prior to A.D. 60 was a time of relative peace. The only wars and civil fighting were in the British Isles and in the Parthian Empire. In these two lands some of the lost 10 tribes settled after being released from captivity.

But that's not all. Peter wrote his first letter to "people who live as refugees through-

out Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (2 Peter 1:1). Peter did not write to Gentiles but to non-Gentiles who were living among the Gentiles. The lands he mentioned were north of the lands through which Paul traveled. They bordered the Black Sea on its southern shores (Hoeh, pp. 5-6).

Greeks who were being converted by Paul in southern Asia Minor and by Peter in northern Asia Minor left records of where each of the 12 apostles went. The Greeks never lost the New Testament and they did not lose these records either. But scholars have not believed these Greek historians because the scholars have confused the House of Israel with the Jews (“Where Did the Original Apostles Go?” Part 2, by Herman L. Hoeh, *The Good News*, September-October 1987, pp. 15-16).

Two sources of information are the Greek and Latin *Ecclesiasticae Historiae* of Nicephorus Callistus and, written in English, *Antiquitates Apostolicae* by William Cave.

“Universal Greek tradition declares that the apostles did not leave the Syro-Palestinian region until the end of 12 year’s ministry [A.D. 43]. The number 12 symbolizes a new organized beginning” (Hoeh, Part 2, p. 16).

Peter in Britain

Peter, the chief apostle, spent much time in Jerusalem and the surrounding area. But after 12 years, he was off to preach in Europe.

Peter “was a long time in *Britain*, where he converted many Nations to the Faith” (*Antiquitates Apostolicae* by William Cave, p. 45).

Part of the lost 10 tribes had already by this time migrated from the Black Sea to the British Isles. And about A.D. 60, great wars overtook Britain just as James wrote about in his epistle to the 12 tribes of Israel (James 4:1).

Andrew Along the Black Sea

A detailed account of the journeys of An-

drew, Peter’s brother, can be found in the writings of the Greek historians.

“In this division S. *Andrew* had *Scythia* [the vast plains north of the Black and Caspian Seas] and the Neighboring Countries primarily allotted him for his Province. First then he travelled through *Cappadocia* (a landlocked territory with a southern tip about 50 miles due east of Iconium in Galatia), [Upper] *Galatia* and *Bithynia* (the territory bordering the Black Sea), and instructed them in the Faith of *Christ*, passing along the *Euxine* [Black] Sea... and so into the solitudes of *Scythia* (Cave, p. 137).

Andrew went next to Trapezus, a maritime city on the Black Sea, about 100 miles west of the sea’s most easterly point.

After visiting many other places, Andrew came to Nice, where he stayed two years, preaching and working miracles with great success.

From Nice, Andrew traveled north to Nicomedia, a seaport on the Bosphorus Sea. He continued north to Chalcedon, a city facing Byzantium on the Bosphorus Canal, on the west end of the Black Sea. From there he caught a ship and sailed the Black Sea to Heraclea, a seaport 140 miles east.

Amastris was just east up the coast. Andrew went there. Then he continued on to the seaport of Sinope, located about halfway across the southern shore of the Black Sea.

In Sinope Andrew met Peter and the two stayed together a considerable time.

Andrew made one more stop in Amynsus before returning to Jerusalem, the headquarters church.

On his second journey, Andrew traveled into Asiatic Scythia or Sarmatia. But he found the inhabitants to be barbarous and did not stay long.

He found his way to Chersonesus, a populous city built on the peninsula which extends from the north shore into the Black Sea. He spent some time there, instructing and confirming the brethren in the faith. Then he sailed across the sea to Sinope (Cave, pp. 137-138).

From the regions in which Andrew preached migrated the ancestors of the Scots



The original apostles visited these regions and cities, preaching the Gospel to the remnants of the lost 10 tribes of Israel, which had migrated to these areas following their captivity in Assyria.

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and Anglo Saxons. To this day there is a Scottish tradition which says Andrew preached to their ancestors (Hoeh, Part 2, p. 17)!

Simon to Africa

Simon the zealot, according to Greek records, preached the Gospel in North Africa and Britain. He “directed his journey towards *Egypt*, thence to *Cyrene* (the country west of Egypt), and *Africk* (Africa west of Cyrene)... and throughout *Mauritania* (the northwest tip of the African Continent) and all *Lybya*, preaching the Gospel to those remote and barbarous Countries. Nor could the coldness of the Climate benumb his zeal, or hinder himself from shipping himself and the Christian Doctrine over to the *Western Islands*, yea, even to *Britain* itself. Here he preached, and wrought many miracles...”

It was while preaching in Britain that Simon eventually was crucified and buried (Cave, p. 203).

James to Spain

James, the brother of John, was killed by Herod A.D. 44. But the other apostle named James, the son of Alphaeus, preached the Gospel in Spain, Ireland and Britain (Cave, p. 148).

The Greek writers say James spent much time in Spain, a country which was the high road of migration from the eastern Mediterranean Sea to Great Britain. Many people of the House of Israel traveled through Spain on their way to northwest Europe and James found many fertile minds in which to plant the seeds of the Gospel.

Thomas to Parthia

Remnants of the House of Israel also were settled in Parthia near the Caspian Sea, 400 miles east of the Black Sea.

The Greek historians report that Thomas preached to these Israelites. He went to “*Parthia*, after which... he preached the Gos-

pel to the *Medes, Persians, Carmans, Hyrcani, Bactrians*, and the Neighbour Nations” (Cave, p. 189).

These lands today are called Iran, Afghanistan and western India.

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote that these lands were filled with an innumerable multitude from the lost 10 tribes of Israel (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, Chapter 5, Section 2).

Bartholomew to Vast Plains

The Greek historian Nicephorus wrote that Bartholomew shared the same vast plains with Thomas but he also spent part of his time in Armenia to the west and in a portion of upper Phrygia in Asia Minor—the same area covered by Andrew and to which Peter sent two letters (Hoeh, “Where Did the Original Apostles Go?” Part 2, p. 19).

Jude to Parthia

Jude preached in Assyria and Mesopotamia, those parts of Parthia still inhabited by Israelites in New Testament time (Hoeh, “Where Did the Original Apostles Go?” Part 2, p. 19).

Philip to Scythia, Asia Minor

Philip preached in the territories surrounding the Black Sea. These included the plains of Scythia on the north shore and northern Asia Minor on the south shore (Cave, p. 168). From Scythia migrated the Scots. The name “Scot” is taken from “Scyth” and the Scottish people are modern-day Israelites (Hoeh, “Where Did the Original Apostles Go?” Part 2, pp. 19-20).

Matthew to Parthia

Matthew “went first into *Parthia*, and having successfully planted Christianity in those Parts, thence travelled to *Aethiopia*, that is, the *Asiatic Aethiopia*, lying near to *India*: here by Preaching and Miracles he mightily triumphed over error and Idolatry, con-

vinced and converted Multitudes, ordained spiritual Guides and Pastours to confirm and build them up, and bring others to the Faith, and then finished his own course” (Cave, p. 182).

Dorotheus reports that Matthew eventually was buried at Hierapolis in Parthia (Hoeh, “Where Did the Original Apostles Go?” Part 2, p. 20).

Matthias to Romania, Northern Greece

Matthias preached to Israelites in Dacia (modern Romania) and Macedonia (northern Greece) according to Ethiopic and Greek sources. From Dacia came the Normans who settled in Scandinavia, France and Britain (Hoeh, “Where Did the Original Apostles Go?” Part 2, p. 20).

John to Gaul

When Jesus was hanging on the stake, he committed his mother, Mary, into the care of the Apostle John. French tradition says Mary visited Gaul (modern France) and it would make sense that she would be where John was working (Hoeh, “Where Did the Original Apostles Go?” Part 2, p. 20).

Paul knew Gaul was settled by Israelites. That is why he didn’t preach there when journeying from Italy to Spain (Rom. 15:24, 28).

Their Message

We can see from the Greek records that Paul was not the only preacher who carried the Gospel into distant lands. The original 12 apostles (minus the martyred James, son of Zebedee) carried the message of hope and salvation from India to northwest Africa and from the shores of the Caspian Sea across Europe to the shores of Britain.

Wherever the lost 10 tribes wandered, the apostles went. They obeyed the command of Jesus in Matthew 10.

As for the details of their preachings, it seems only natural that the apostles carried

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out Jesus' instructions fully: "Go and preach, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, make the lepers clean, drive out demons. You have received without paying so give without being paid. Do not carry any gold, silver, or copper money in your pockets; do not carry a beggar's bag for the trip, or an extra shirt, or shoes, or a walking stick. A worker should be given what he needs.

"When you come to a town or a village, go in and look for someone who is willing to welcome you, and stay with him until you leave that place. When you go into a house say, 'Peace be with you.' If the people in that house welcome you, let your greeting of peace remain; but if they do not welcome you, then take back your greeting. And if some home or town will not welcome you or

listen to you, then leave that place and shake the dust off your feet. Remember this! On Judgment Day God will show more mercy to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah than to the people of that town!

"Listen! I am sending you just like sheep to a pack of wolves. You must be cautious as snakes and as gentle as doves, watch out, for there will be men who will arrest you and take you to court, and they will whip you in the synagogues. You will be brought to trial before rulers and kings for my name's sake, to tell the Good News to them and to the Gentiles...

"And when they persecute you in one town, run away to another one. I tell you, you will not finish your work in all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes" (Matt. 10:7-23).

7

Paul's First Journey

46

The book of Acts from Chapter 13 on focuses primarily on the work God did through Paul (Saul) as he preached the Gospel among Gentiles.

About A.D. 46, the work of God took a new direction from the church firmly established at Antioch (Tenney, p. 254). This church's leaders included Barnabas, Simeon (called the Black), Lucius (from Cyrene) Manaen (who had been brought up with Gov. Herod) and Saul (Acts 13:1).

While these leaders were serving God and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul, to do the work to which I have called them." They fasted and prayed, placed their hands on them and sent them on their way (vv. 2-3).

Barnabas and Saul took John Mark with them as their assistant to help with the work (v. 5).

At Cyprus

The trio sailed 70 miles to Cyprus, Barnabas' native country. They landed in Salamis on the East Coast and traveled to Paphos on the west, 190 miles away.

In each town they stopped first in the

synagogues, probably because they could find God-fearing Gentiles to be a nucleus for a Christian congregation (Bruce, p. 272).

No record is made of success or failure of their preaching across the island. But Luke gives details of their meeting with Sergius Paulus, governor of the island.

The governor invited Barnabas and Saul to tell him the word of God. They were opposed by the magician Elymas, who tried to turn Sergius Paulus away from the faith.

Then Saul (who from this point on is called Paul) was filled with the Holy Spirit. He looked straight at the magician and said, "You son of the Devil! You are the enemy of everything that is good: You are full of all kinds of evil tricks and you always keep trying to turn the Lord's truths into lies! The Lord's hand will come down on you now; you will be blind, and will not see the light of day for a time." At once Elymas lost his sight and the governor believed (Acts 13: 6-12)!

From this point on, Paul became the leader of the expedition. Barnabas' name was listed first at the beginning of the trip (Acts 11:25; 13:4) but now the group is called "Paul and his companions" (Ch. 13:13).

Paul, who dedicated his life to reaching

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Gentiles, used his Greek name. In those days most Jews had a Jewish and Greek name.

Leaving Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed north-west across the Mediterranean Sea to Perga in Pamphylia, a province in Asia Minor. Perga was the Metropolis of Pamphylia, on the river Cestus, about seven miles inland from the seaport Attalia (JFB, p. 1102).

While they were in Perga, John Mark departed and went back to Jerusalem. The Bible doesn't say why. It may have been that this journey was an "unwarranted deviation from an established program" for Mark.

After all, it was Paul and Barnabas who were sent by the Holy Spirit—not John Mark. His mission may have been to the Jews and by now he was eager to get back to it.

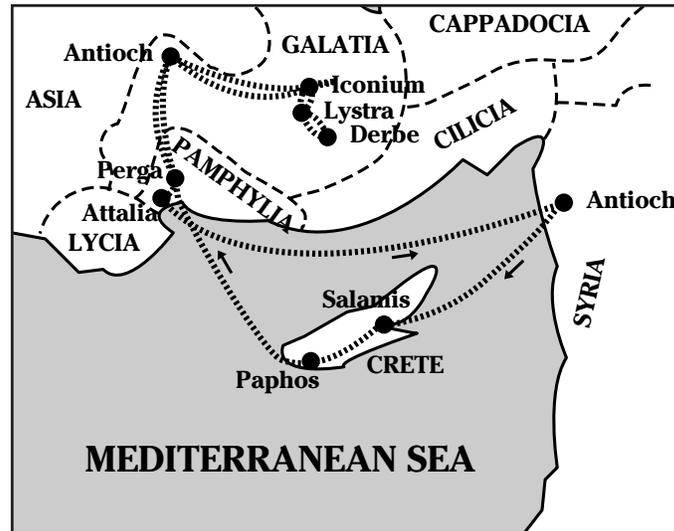
Some commentators feel John Mark left because he was jealous. Paul was now the leader and Uncle Barnabas the subordinate.

Others think John Mark may have been afraid to go on. It appears from Acts 12:12 that his father was dead and he was raised by his mother. This has led some to call him "soft."

"Now the road forward led up precipitous roads to the inland plateau. These roads were... cut by mountain streams... often the dry bed would become a raging torrent and the unwary traveler might well be swept to death before he knew what was happening. Worst of all, these roads were the paradise of brigands, marauders who would murder a man for a copper coin. The wonder is not so much that Mark went back as that Paul went on" (Barclay, p. 78).

At Pisidian Antioch

Paul became ill at this time (Gal. 4:13). Barclay explains his sickness: "Pamphylia was a low crescent-shaped stretch of land between the mountain plateau and the Mediterranean Sea. It was an unhealthy place



The route of Paul's first journey.

and notorious for malaria fever. It was there that the agonizing malaria with its prostrating headache, his thorn in the flesh, first came upon Paul. That is why he had to leave it so speedily and move on without preaching" (Barclay, p. 77).

Antioch in Pisidia, the next stop for Paul and Barnabas, lay due north and 3,600 feet above sea level in the Phrygian region of Galatia or Asia Minor. Antioch was the civil and military center of its district (Bruce, pp. 273-274). In the clear mountain air Paul regained his strength (Barclay, p. 85).

Was there a reason why Paul headed straight for Antioch from Cyprus? Archeologists have found an important public inscription in Antioch which honored a Sergius Paulus. This Sergius was probably the son of the governor of Cyprus. The governor apparently had family in Antioch. After his conversion to God's church, would it not be likely for Sergius Paulus to send Paul, Barnabas and Mark to visit his relatives and share God's truth with them? These factors "explain very neatly why Paul and Barnabas left the governor's presence and headed straight for distant Pisidian Antioch. He directed them to an area where his family had land, power and influence" (*Pagans and Christians* by Robin Lane Fox, p. 294).

On the Sabbath Paul and Barnabas en-

tered the synagogue in Antioch and sat down. It had now been more than a decade since Jesus Christ had died. But his church was still keeping the Sabbath, not Sunday.

After the customary readings from the Holy Scriptures, the leaders of the synagogue invited their guests to speak.

Paul arose and preached to the Jews and Gentiles there. He began telling the history of Israel from the Exodus to King David. He then spoke of David's descendent, Jesus Christ. He spoke of his death and resurrection. Paul offered them redemption from their sins by the blood of Christ.

"All of you, my brothers," proclaimed Paul, "are to know for sure that it is through Jesus that the message about forgiveness of sins is preached to you; you are to know that everyone who believes in him is set free from all the sins from which the Law of Moses could not set you free.

"Take care then," concluded Paul, "so that what the prophets said may not happen to you: 'Look you scorners! Wonder and die! For the work that I am doing in your own day is something that you will not believe, even when someone explains it to you!'"

As Paul and Barnabas left the synagogue, the people invited them to come back the next Sabbath to tell them more. If the church were to keep Sunday, Paul should have met with them the next day and explained Sunday-keeping. But God's church has always kept the seventh-day Sabbath.

The next Sabbath nearly everyone in town came to the synagogue to hear God's word expounded by Paul and Barnabas.

The Jews became extremely jealous of Paul. They spoke against what he said and insulted him. But Paul and Barnabas spoke out even more boldly.

"It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. But since you reject it, and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we will leave you and go to the Gentiles."

When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced and praised the Lord's message. Some became true believers.

The word of God spread throughout the

region. But the Jews stirred up city leaders and Gentile women of high society. They persecuted Paul and Barnabas and threw them out of the region. Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet and went to Iconium, leaving behind in Antioch brethren who were full of joy and the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:14-52).

At Iconium

Iconium was a city in the southeastern border of the Phrygian region of Galatia, about 80 miles southwest of Pisidian Antioch. Snow-covered mountains rose in the west and fed the city with streams, making it a luxuriant garden city. To the east and north stretched the plain of central Asia Minor (*An Atlas of the Acts* by John Stirling, p. 8).

Paul and Barnabas went to the synagogue and preached so effectively that a "great number of Jews and Gentiles" were converted (Acts 14:1).

But unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles against the new converts.

The apostles stayed in Iconium "a long time," speaking boldly and performing miracles. The crowd in the city was divided. Some sided with the apostles, others with the antagonistic Jews.

Then the antagonistic Jews and Gentiles persuaded their leaders to stone the apostles. When Paul and Barnabas learned of the plan, they fled the city for Lystra and Derbe, two cities in the region of Lycaonia, south of Iconium (vv. 2-6).

At Lystra & Derbe

Lystra, about 25 miles south of Iconium, was famous because it was at the end of the Roman Road. Paul and Barnabas had difficulty preaching in this wild territory sitting on the edge of civilization. It was a "thriving, rather rustic market town" which had been founded about 60 years earlier" (Fox, p. 99).

Lystra was difficult to preach in for several reasons. It was off the beaten path. Greek was not understood as well as in previous cities. The people spoke Lycaonian

and Greek. And there was no synagogue (Barclay, pp. 87-88).

Paul overcame the latter problem by preaching in various places, including a market square. While in the square, Paul noticed a man who had been crippled from birth was listening attentively to his words. Paul recognized the man's faith and realized he could be healed. He said in a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!"

The man jumped up and began walking around. This created a big stir among the people! They shouted in their own language that gods had become men and had come down to visit them (vv. 10-11).

It was not unusual for them to mistake Paul and Barnabas for gods. Pagans in Roman society believed their gods walked among them. "Not only in Lystra, but in old civilized Miletus, the squares and colonnaded streets were stalked by the gods, bringing close encounters into the life of every man, woman and child" (Fox, pp. 100, 102). They believed their gods could appear in human disguises of all sorts (p. 106). "To all but a few of the highly educated, the gods were indeed a potential presence whom a miracle might reveal" (p. 140).

They thought the tall, handsome, grave and dignified Barnabas was Jupiter, king of the gods. And Paul, the man who spoke, they mistook for Mercury, the god of speech and messenger of the gods (Barclay, p. 88).

The priest of the god Zeus, whose temple was just outside of town, brought bulls and flowers to the city gate to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas.

When the apostles saw this, they tore their clothes and ran into the middle of the crowd shouting they were not gods but mere men, preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. They tried to turn the citizens from worshiping worthless gods to worshiping the one, true God. They barely kept the sacrifices from occurring (Acts 14:13-18).

Some Jews from Pisidian Antioch and

Iconium caught up with Paul in Lystra. They won the crowds to their side and stoned Paul. They dragged his bruised and bloodied body out of town and left it, thinking he was dead. But believers gathered around their preacher. Paul was not dead. He slowly pulled himself to his feet and made his way back into town (vv. 19-20).

The next day Paul and Barnabas went 40 miles to Derbe, which was on the frontiers of Galatia. They could go no farther. The road stopped there (Barclay, p. 90).

In Derbe, many people were converted by the preaching of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:21).

It then came time to go home. The two apostles retraced their steps, revisiting congregations they had left behind in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch.

In each church they strengthened beliefs and encouraged young converts to remain true to the faith. "We must pass through many troubles to enter the kingdom of God," they taught.

Paul and Barnabas also, with much prayer and fasting, appointed elders in each church (vv. 21-23).

It is important to note here that Christians were not called to live alone but into an organized church with elders set over them. "The Christian life is not meant to be lived alone" (Barclay, p. 90). God's church is still that way today.

The two apostles continued through Perga, where they had not preached on their first visit, probably because Paul was sick. Then it was on to the seaport of Attalia, from which they sailed to Syrian Antioch (Acts 14:24-26).

When Paul and Barnabas arrived home in Antioch they gathered the brethren together and told them about their two-year trip and how God had opened the way for Gentiles to believe. They stayed "a long time" in Antioch—or about a year—until the Council of Jerusalem A.D. 49 (vv. 27-28).

8

The Council of Jerusalem

49

About A.D. 49, some time after Paul had returned to Antioch from his two-year journey through Cyprus and Asia Minor, some men came from Judea to Antioch and started teaching church members that they could not be saved unless they were circumcised as required by the Law of Moses.

Paul and Barnabas disputed the need for circumcision with these men (who were converted Pharisees). Finally it was decided that Paul and Barnabas should go to the headquarters church in Jerusalem and ask for guidance in this matter from the other apostles and elders (Acts 15:1-2).

The Jerusalem church welcomed Paul and Barnabas and listened to their reports of miracles God had worked through them in Gentile regions. But some converted Pharisees stood up and said, "They have to be circumcised and told to obey the Law of Moses" (vv. 4-5).

Circumcision Not Required

The apostles met to discuss the issue. After a long debate, Peter, the physical head of the church, rose and declared that God opened

the door to the Gentiles through him. God had shown his approval of Gentiles by giving his Holy Spirit to them. God had forgiven their sins. There was no need to add the physical burden of circumcision on Gentile converts.

Next Paul and Barnabas again told details of their mission throughout Cyprus and Asia Minor. They reported the wonders and miracles God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

When they had finished, James, half-brother of Jesus, spoke. He was the chief apostle of the Jerusalem Church, though Peter was chief over all the churches.

James summarized the comments so far and concluded the meeting by saying, "It is my opinion that we should not trouble the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write a letter telling them not to eat any food that is unclean because it has been offered to idols; to keep themselves from immorality; not to eat any animal that has been strangled, or any blood" (vv.6-20).

Many scholars agree that these requirements were additional rules of Christian table-fellowship (Tenney, p. 260; Bruce, pp. 287-288). These instructions were not all

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that were needed to enter God's Kingdom. For Jesus said to enter the Kingdom we must keep the Commandments (Matt. 19:17).

The Jerusalem Council did not do away with God's Law—just circumcision. The Council declared the physical sign of circumcision was not required for a spiritual Christian. A true Christian is one whose heart or mind is "circumcised"—not his foreskin (Rom. 2:29).

However, if Gentile converts wanted to know more about God's Law or about Jewish customs, James recommended they visit a Jewish synagogue. Why? Because Bibles were not readily available in those days. The converts could get access to the Holy Scriptures in their local synagogue (Acts 15:21).

The Apostles, elders and the whole church chose two prophets to return to Antioch with Paul, Barnabas and the letter.

When church members at Antioch read the letter, they were filled with joy because of the encouraging message.

The two prophets, Silas and Judas, "spoke a long time with the brothers, giving them courage and strength" (Acts 15:22-32).

The church threw a going-away party for the two prophets when it was time for them to return to Jerusalem. But then Silas decided to remain in Antioch (vv. 33-34).

Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch for a long time, preaching and teach-

ing (v. 35).

The Jerusalem Council of A.D. 49 was an important cornerstone for Paul's next journey. "The upshot of the decree was that the circumcision issue could no longer impede the progress of the Gentile mission" (Bruce, p. 290).

Matthew Writes His Gospel

There is some debate as to when Matthew wrote the first Gospel. A number of scholars have agreed on A.D. 50 as a possible date (*The New Ungers Bible Handbook* by Merrill F. Unger, p. 365; Tenney, p. 143). It could very well be that he wrote his book during the year which followed the Council of Jerusalem.

Matthew had been preaching the Gospel to Israelites of the lost 10 tribes who had settled in Parthia and Asiatic Ethiopia. Those converted to the Church of God by Matthew asked him to write a history of the Savior's life to leave with them. This he did, perhaps as early as A.D. 40. (Cave, p. 182).

Tenney makes a case for Matthew writing this Gospel from Antioch (Tenney, p. 143).

Each of the four Gospel writers wrote from a different perspective. This Jewish former tax collector wrote his history of Jesus' life for Israelites from a Jewish perspective.

9

Paul's Second Journey

50

As the first century reached its midpoint (A.D. 50), Paul realized it had been four years since he and Barnabas had established churches throughout Asia Minor. He said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in every city where we preached the word of the Lord, and find out how they are getting along" (Acts 14:36).

Barnabas thought this was a splendid idea and told Paul he would like his nephew, John Mark, to accompany them again. But Paul would not have it. John Mark had not stayed with them to the end of their first mission. He had turned back at Pamphylia. Paul felt it was not right to take him a second time.

Their disagreement turned into a "sharp disagreement" and Paul and Barnabas separated (vv. 37-39).

"The solution which they reached was the best possible one for the circumstances. Barnabas took Mark with him to Cyprus, his home territory, where any possible defection on Mark's part would do less harm and where Mark would not be subjected to so great a strain as in the pioneer country of Asia. Paul chose Silas, one of the [prophets]

who had been a delegate to Antioch from the Jerusalem Council, and struck north through Cilicia toward the frontiers of Asia Minor" (Tenney, p. 274).

At this point we lose contact with Barnabas. Apparently Paul kept in touch with him because when he wrote 1 Corinthians five years later he spoke favorably of him in that he was still doing the work (1 Cor. 9:6).

Revisiting Asia Minor

Traveling overland, Paul and Silas made their way northward from Tarsus through the Cilician Gates and then headed west along a caravan route which ran through Galatia. It probably was late spring or early summer when the pair left the parched plains and crossed the mountains into Galatia (Tenney, pp. 274-275).

When they reached Derbe and Lystra, the last outposts on the previous trip, they found Timothy, a young convert whose mother was Jewish and whose father was Greek. All the brethren in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of Timothy (Acts 16:1-2). It is probable that Timothy's mother had been converted on Paul's first visit (Tenney, p.

275).

Timothy had been trained thoroughly in the Holy Scriptures by his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15). Paul recognized his leadership potential and the value of his assistance in that territory, so he decided to ask Timothy to join him and Silas.

“The status of Timothy, however, posed a new problem for Paul. As the son of a Gentile father, and uncircumcised, he might be rejected by the Jewish population who had already proved hostile to Paul and to his message. On the other hand, if Paul had Timothy circumcised, would he not seemingly be making a concession to the Judaizers who had already plagued Galatia...? On this very journey Paul was publicizing the results of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 16:4) and the circumcision of Timothy would seem inconsistent with all for which he contended. Nevertheless he did have him circumcised. Timothy was half a Jew by birth and wholly a Jew by training. The act was not a repudiation of the principle that Gentiles need not submit to the law [of circumcision] for Timothy was not rated as a Gentile” (Tenney, p. 275).

As Paul, Silas and Timothy went through the cities Paul had visited before (Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch) they read the letter written from the Jerusalem Council and told the brethren in the cities to obey the rules set therein (Acts 16:4).

“So the churches were made stronger in the faith and grew in numbers every day” (v. 5).

Paul Goes to Europe

Now that Paul had completed his mission to revisit the Galatian churches, he looked for new fields to enter. He preached along the western border of Galatia which was Phrygian in nationality. He proceeded along the road to Asia, the province which covered the western and of Asia Minor or modern Turkey (v. 6).

Paul wanted to preach the gospel in Asia but the Holy Spirit did not allow him to do so. It also forbade him from entering Bithynia,

the area in which Andrew and Philip preached (v. 7). God did not want Paul preaching to the lost 10 tribes of Israel which inhabited those areas. God had other plans. He was opening the door for Paul to take the Gospel into Gentile Europe.

So Paul and his company, finding doors shut around them (figuratively speaking), traveled due west through the region of Mysia until they came to the seaport of Troas on the Aegean Sea (v. 8).

The road they had taken followed the valley of a river for some distance and then passed the shores of great lakes before reaching Troas. Troas was a grand, important city bumped up against lofty hills and cherishing its crowded harbor (Stirling, p. 12).

Paul and his group had traveled more than 320 miles since leaving Pisidian Antioch and now they had run out of land. The sea lay before them. Beyond the sea was Greece and the rest of Europe!

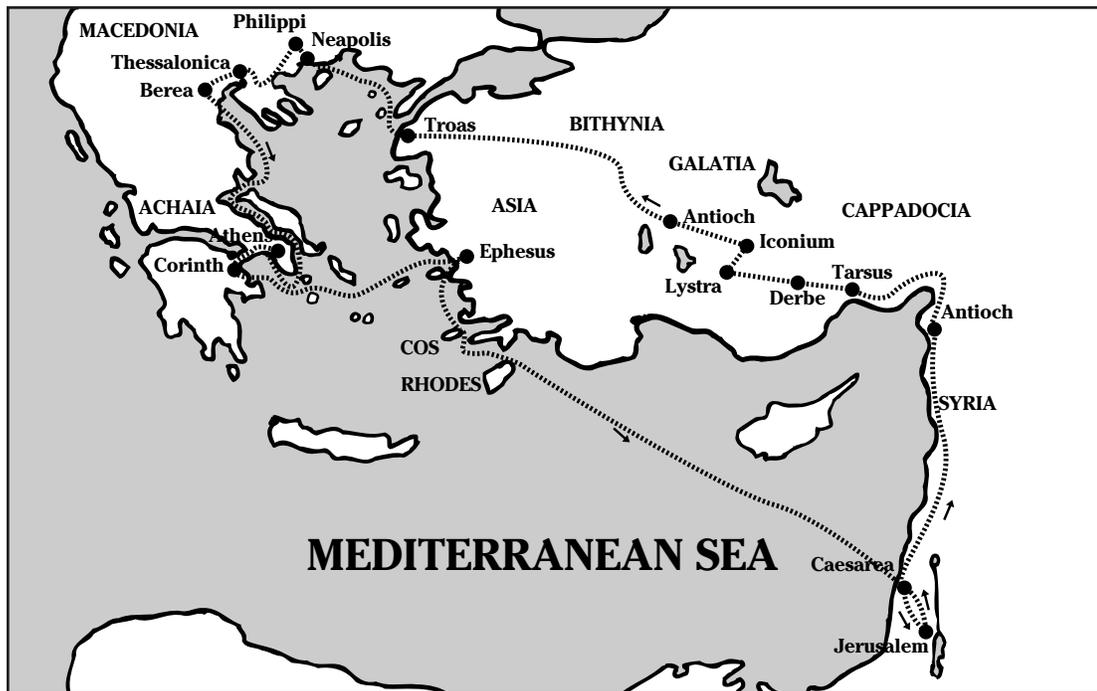
Two important events occurred while Paul was in Troas.

First was Paul’s vision. During his first night there, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia (northern Greece) standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” (Acts 16:9).

The second event was the coming of Luke, who joined Paul’s party. Acts 16:10 contains an abrupt change in person which shows that the author of Acts (Luke) became a participant in the action. Notice: “As soon as Paul had this vision, *we* got ready to leave for Macedonia, for *we* decided that God had called *us* to preach the Good News to the people there.”

Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke sailed from Troas 75 miles north to the island of Samothrace. As they came to the island, night fell. The next day the ship turned west and completed the trip—about another 75 miles—across the Aegean, landing in the Macedonian seaport of Neapolis.

This city projected into a bay, forming a double harbor. It was the eastern terminus for the Egnatian Way, a famous Roman road which ran across Macedonia and was connected by ferry to Italy (Stirling, p. 12; *The*



Paul's Second Journey

New Ungers Bible Dictionary, "Neapolis," p. 1002).

Paul and his companions disembarked from their ship and walked 12 miles up the Egnatian Way leading through a depression in the hills to the city of Philippi (vv. 11-12).

Imprisoned in Philippi

Philippi was perched at the top of a steep hill (Stirling, p. 12). It was a city of the first district of Macedonia and a Roman colony (Acts 16:12). As a Roman colony, Philippi was a little model of Rome. The Roman citizens who settled there wore Roman dress and spoke Latin. As the Christian foursome walked the streets they saw everywhere the initials "S.P.Q.R." which stood for "The Senate and People of Rome" (Barclay, p. 93). They spent several days in Philippi (Acts 16:12).

There was no large colony of Jews in Philippi so there was no synagogue where Paul could preach. But he did find a prayer group meeting on the river bank outside the city, so he went there on the Sabbath.

This may have been a special annual Sabbath, not a weekly Sabbath. The literal translation of the words "on the Sabbath" in Acts 16:13 is "on the day of the Sabbaths." The word translated "Sabbaths" can mean "weeks." What annual Sabbath is the Day (or Feast) of Weeks? None other than Pentecost! (See Lev. 23:15-16; Dt. 16:9-10, 16.) It is very likely that here, on Pentecost, 19 years to the day after the church began, that Paul preached for the first time in Europe!

Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke sat on the riverbank and talked to the women who had gathered there.

One, named Lydia, was a dealer in purple textiles who came from Thyatira (a city in the province of Asia in western Asia Minor). "Lydia's traffic in purple was either the export-import business, or she was the representative of it in Europe...."

"Lydia was a religious woman, for it is said that she 'worshipped God.' She was a Gentile but had come to unite herself with the Jews through the steps ordinarily taken by converts to Judaism. First, she became a hearer of the Word, then a God-fearer, and

then finally a proselyte. She was like so many of those noble women in book of Acts who attached themselves to the synagogues and were worshipers of the true God. They were disgusted and disillusioned with the evils of polytheism and heathenism and had turned to Judaism as the one answer” (*Women Who Made Bible History* by Harold J. Ockenga, p. 233).

Now along came Paul, preaching the truth about the Son of God. Lydia heard Paul’s preaching and her mind was opened by God. She and the people of her house were baptized. She then opened her home for Paul and his group to use as their headquarters (Acts 16:13-15).

It is interesting to note that Paul’s vision was of a man of Macedonia begging Paul to come to Europe. But when Paul arrived, his first convert was not a man but a woman.

One day as Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke were going to the place of prayer, they were met by a demon-possessed slave girl. The demon allowed the girl to tell the future and she made a lot of money for her owners doing so. For several days this girl followed the Christian foursome to their prayer meetings and shouted “These men are servants of the most high God! They announce to you how you can be saved!”

Finally Paul became so upset he turned around and said to the demon, “In the name of Jesus Christ I order you to come out of her!”

The demon left that instant.

Now when the slave girl’s owners realized their opportunity to make money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them to the Roman authorities in the public square.

“These men are Jews and they are causing trouble in the city,” accused the girl’s owners. “They are teaching customs that are against our law; we are Romans and cannot follow those customs!” The crowd joined in the attack and the officials had Paul and Silas stripped, severely beaten and thrown into prison. The jailor was ordered to lock them up tight. He placed them in the inner

cell and fastened their feet in heavy wooden stocks (vv. 16-24).

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God while the other prisoners listened. Suddenly there was a violent earthquake. All the prison doors opened and all the chains fell off the prisoners. When the jailor woke up, he saw the doors open and thought the prisoners had escaped. He pulled out his sword and would have killed himself except Paul shouted as loud as he could, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!” The jailor called for a light and rushed in. He fell trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas (vv. 25-29).

The jailor then led the two apostles out of prison and asked, “What must I do to be saved?”

“Believe in the Lord Jesus,” Paul and Silas replied, “and you will be saved—you and your family. So they preached the word of the Lord to the jailor and to the others of his house.

The jailor then took Paul and Silas and washed their wounds and he and his family were baptized. He took them to his home and fed them. The jailor and his family were filled with joy because they now believed in God (vv. 30-34).

When dawn came the Roman authorities sent word to the police officers: “Let those men go.” So the jailor told Paul and Silas they were free to leave and could quietly go on their way.

But Paul would not have it! He said to the police officers, “We were not found guilty of any crime, yet they whipped us in public—and we are Roman citizens! Then they threw us in prison. And now they want to send us away secretly? Not at all! The Roman officials themselves must come here and let us out.”

The police officers relayed Paul’s comments to the Roman officials. When they heard Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were afraid.

To beat a Roman citizen was a terrible crime. If Paul had wanted to follow up on this, he could have had the magistrates deposed and possibly executed and they knew

it! Paul chose this action not to glorify himself or to get even, but because he knew he was going away and he didn't want the magistrates making life miserable for the new church there. Paul wanted the magistrates to know the church had influential friends behind them (Barclay, p. 96).

So the officials went into the prison, apologized to Paul and Silas, led them out of prison and asked them to leave the city.

Paul and Barnabas walked from the prison to Lydia's house where they encouraged the brethren before leaving for Thessalonica (vv. 35-40).

Luke apparently stayed behind in Philippi, as he no longer writes in first person. "Here in the story the 'we section' ends and a fair inference may be drawn that the writer remained in Philippi. His obvious interest and pride in the city, his knowledge of detail concerning it and the fact that with the return of Paul to Philippi at a later date the 'we sections' are resumed constitute a fair proof that [Luke] remained to act as pastor for the new church and perhaps to serve as an evangelist for Macedonia" (Tenney, p. 277).

On to Thessalonica

Paul, Silas and Timothy walked west from Philippi upon a main Roman highway called the Via Egnatia (Egnatian Way), which wound along the southern coast of Macedonia, overlooking the Aegean Sea. The Via Egnatia ran from Dyrrhachium on the Adriatic Sea to Constantinople and on to Asia Minor in the east (Barclay, p. 100).

After 33 Roman miles, the Christian trio came to Amphipolis (Barclay, p. 99). This seaport city stood "like a lofty watchtower at the meeting of the ways [and] guarded the entrance to the Macedonian plains" (Stirling, p. 12).

Another 30 Roman miles down the road was Apollonia (Barclay, p. 99). This city "lay near the shores of a lake, amidst the beauty of wooded valleys" (Stirling, p. 12).

Paul continued on the Via Egnatia to his destination: Thessalonica, another 37 miles

west of Apollonia (Barclay, p. 99).

Thessalonica was the bridge between east and west. Its main street was part of the Via Egnatia. The preaching of Christianity in Thessalonica was a in a very real sense the beginning of preaching Christianity to the whole world (Barclay, p. 100).

The city was founded about 315 B.C. by Cassander, who named it in honor of his wife, the half-sister of Alexander the Great. It was a free city, a seaport and a center of trade (Tenney, p. 277).

Immediately south of Thessalonica was the famous snow-covered Mount Olympus, the supposed home of the Greek gods. Paul was heading into the heart of the pagan Greek religion (*Commentary on Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans* by J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, p. 1).

People who lived in Thessalonica—and much of this part of northern Greece—were "a special breed—tough-minded, strong-willed, highly emotional." The tanned and weather-beaten people of this seaport could have heated, emotional confrontations over insignificant issues (*Life As It Was Meant to Be* by Lloyd John Ogilvie, p. 9).

Thessalonica had a synagogue (Acts 17:1). So Paul, as his custom was, went there. For three Sabbaths he argued with the people from the Scriptures, explaining them and proving from them that the Messiah had to suffer and be resurrected (v. 2).

(The reader will again note that Paul's custom was not to meet on the first day of the week. Nineteen years after Christ had died and been resurrected, his true followers were still keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. His church today is still keeping the Sabbath!)

There was a time when half the population of Thessalonica was Jewish. The congregation of this synagogue may still have numbered in the thousands. And by preaching there, Paul had a double audience. He had the Jews but he also had the Gentiles who crowded around the synagogues when they became dissatisfied with the many pagan gods and loose moral life (Barclay, p. 100).

A few Jews believed but mostly Gentiles were converted—“...a large group of Greeks who worshipped God and many of the leading women” (Acts 17:4).

“Immediately the Jews were infuriated. They had always regarded these Gentiles as their own special property and they had no intention of sitting and doing nothing about it while they were led away, as they thought by Paul” (Barclay, p. 101).

The Jews gathered some of the worthless loafers from the streets and formed a mob. They set the whole city in an uproar and attacked the home of Jason, where Paul had been staying. The Jews had intended to drag Paul and Silas before the magistrates, but they were not in Jason’s house. So the Jews brought Jason and other church members instead.

“These men have caused trouble everywhere,” the Jews accused. “Now they have come to our city and Jason has kept them in his house. They are breaking all the laws of the Emperor, saying that there is another king by the name of Jesus.”

These words caused a greater uproar among the residents and city leaders. The authorities made Jason and the others pay the required amount of money to be released and let them go.

As soon as night came, the brethren sent Paul and Silas to Berea, about 40 miles southwest of Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-10).

Jews Follow Paul to Berea

“Berea sat at the foot of a mountain under the shade of forest trees” (Stirling, p. 12). Paul’s visit there was more peaceful because the people were more open-minded.

When Paul, Silas and Timothy arrived there, they went to the synagogue. The Bereans “listened to the message with great eagerness and everyday they studied the scriptures to see if what Paul said was really true. Many of them believed; and many Greek women of high society and many Greek men also believed. But when the Jews in Thessalonica heard that Paul had preached the word in Berea also, they came

there and started exciting and stirring up the mobs.

“At once the brothers sent Paul away to the coast but both Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea. The men who were taking Paul went with him as far as Athens. Then they went back to Berea with instructions from Paul that Silas and Timothy join him as soon as possible” (Acts 17:11-15).

“In spite of the persecution the Thessalonian church flourished as the Pauline correspondence shows, when Paul left Berea, Silas and Timothy remained behind to complete the work that he could not finish” (Tenney, p. 278).

Paul in Athens

The city of Athens stood on the southeast point of Achaia, southern Greece, about 200 miles southeast of Berea, though the trip was much farther if his ship followed the curvy coastline. It was one of the wonders of the ancient world.

“In its golden age, the fifth century B.C., it had probably held within its walls more literary genius, more philosophical brilliance and more architectural beauty than any other city of antiquity. In the time of Paul its political and commercial importance had declined greatly but a faint aura of intellectuality and of culture still hung over it” (Tenney, p. 284).

“While Paul was waiting in Athens for Silas and Timothy, he was greatly upset when he noticed how full of idols the city was. So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the Gentiles who worshiped God, and in the public square every day with the people who happened to come by” (Acts 17:16-17).

“Here he met a new type of opponent, the educated and cynical pagan, who was ready to hear anything and unready to believe it” (Tenney, p. 285).

Certain Epicurean and stoic teachers heard Paul’s preaching and brought him before the meeting of the Areopagus, or Mars’ Hill (Acts 16:18-19).

It is interesting to examine the beliefs of

these people who brought Paul before the court of the Areopagus, which watched over public morals and public religion. The epicureans and stoics were the two great schools of philosophy at that time.

The epicureans believed the sole end of life was pleasure, both pleasure for the moment and, more importantly, pleasure which had a good, lasting effect. They believed the greatest enemy of happiness was fear, especially fear of death. At death humans simply disintegrate into the atoms from which they came and after death there is nothing. If there were gods, they lived in the space between the worlds and were not interested at all in humans. Think of how they felt when Paul spoke of God caring for men and of life after death!

The stoics were in the other philosophical ditch. They believed God was a fiery spirit and that everything was a part of God. The spirit at its highest tension was God. At a little less tension, the spirit became air. When it became more dull it became water and when it became totally dull and heavy, the fiery spirit became matter. Stoics believed a particle of the fiery spirit gave man the power to live and think but at death it went back to God and was absorbed by Him. Stoics also believed God was incapable of feelings and urged people to become the same way. They urged people to reach a stage when they could say of anything, "I don't care." Think of how they reacted when Paul preached that God is love. This was the opposite of their beliefs (Barclay, pp. 107-109).

These stoic teachers told Paul, "We would like to know this new teaching that you are talking about. Some of the things we hear you say sound strange to us and we would like to know what they mean" (Acts 17:19-20).

So Paul stood up before the court of Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked through your city and looked at the places where you worship, I found also an altar on which is written, 'To an Unknown God.' That which you worship, then,

even though you do not know it, is what I proclaim to you."

Paul then spoke of the Creator God who made the heavens and earth and all races of humanity that populate this planet. He quoted from the Greek's own literature, driving home his point that God is not far from us humans and that we are his children (vv. 22-27).

"In him we live and move and are" was an expression suggested by the poet Epimenes of Cnossos in the sixth century B.C., and "we too are his children" came from the first half of the fifth line of the *Phainomenia*, an astronomical poem of Aratus of Sicily, who wrote in the third century B.C. (Footnotes, *Jerusalem Bible*, Acts 17:28; p. 231).

Paul then attacked idols, telling the Greeks that if we are God's children, his nature is like us, not like stone. And he warned that God had overlooked their evil ways in the past but now they must repent. A day of judgment is coming and that is proved by Christ's resurrection.

When the Greeks heard Paul speak of a resurrection they reacted in three ways. Some made fun of him. Others said they would like to hear more from him. But only a few believed. The new converts included Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus Court and a woman named Damaris (Acts 17:29-34).

"Apparently the ministry in Athens was a disappointment to Paul. He created no great stir in the synagogue and the pagan population dismissed him with ridicule. He was accustomed to being thrown out of town but he was not used to being subjected to contemptuous indifference. Evidently it cut deeply into him, for he wrote to the Corinthians concerning his arrival among them after leaving Athens: 'I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling' (1 Cor. 2:3). Possibly this timorous attitude had physical causes but it seems more likely that the unusual dismissal which Athens gave him unnerved him and caused him to rethink his whole procedure in apologetics (preaching)" (Tenney, p. 287).

Evidently Timothy caught up to Paul in

Athens and brought news of turmoil in Macedonia. The new churches there afflicted and suffering from temptation. Paul immediately sent Timothy back to encourage the churches and to report back how they were standing the test (1 Thes. 3:1-5). Silas probably returned to Macedonia too, perhaps to Philippi (Tenney, p. 278).

Paul Goes to Corinth

Alone, discouraged and probably running out of money, the apostle Paul walked 50 miles to Corinth, a metropolis nestled in the Greek isthmus, where Achaia was nearly cut in two by the seas.

On one side was the Saronic Gulf and the port of Cenchrea. On the other side was the Corinthian Gulf and the port of Lachaeum. The land is just a few miles across and on this land bridge was Corinth. Men called it “The City of Two Seas” and “The Bridge of Greece” because every item of traffic and commerce that did not travel by ship had to pass through Corinth from north to south. East-west traffic also went through Corinth because in Paul’s day sailing around the southern tip of Greece (Cape Malea) was equivalent to sailing around Cape Horn in the days of sail. It was so dangerous that there were two Greek proverbs: “Let him who sails round Malea forget his home” and “Let him who thinks of sailing round Malea make his will” (Barclay, pp. 111-112).

In 27 B.C. Corinth became the seat of government for the province of Achaia (Bruce, p. 314). Its government was a Roman colony like Philippi. Its population was cosmopolitan (Tenney, p. 288).

One of the city’s most famous functions was the Isthmian Games, second in fame only to the Olympics.

It is likely that Paul attended these



Ruins from the Temple of Apollo in Corinth.

games while in Corinth. People came from all over Greece and Paul could have used the opportunity to preach. And Paul was somewhat of a sportsman. He knew of boxing (1 Cor. 9:26), how beasts fought in the arena (1 Cor. 15:32), and the foot race (1 Cor. 9:27; Phil. 3:14; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 4:1; 1 Tim. 4:7-8; 2 Tim. 2:5).

There was another side to Corinth. It was one of the most wicked cities in the world. A Greek phrase “to play the Corinthian” meant to live in drunken and immoral debauchery (Barclay, pp. 112-113).

The temple of Aphrodite (goddess of love) lent religious sanction to immoral behavior. The temple had 1,000 priestesses who were sacred prostitutes and for the profit of the goddess they descended to the streets each evening and plied their immoral trade (Bruce, p. 114).

“The temple of Aphrodite... was devoted to a hellenized form of the Syrian cult of Astarte. No greater contrast could be imagined than that between this cult and another cult from the Levant—the reading and exposition of the Jewish Torah which took place every Sabbath day in the synagogue of Corinth from which came the fragmentary door inscription, ‘Synagogue of the Hebrews’ now in the Corinth Museum. The inartistic quality of the lettering suggests that the

synagogue congregation was not wealthy enough to command the services of an expert engraver in stone" (Bruce, p. 314).

It was to this or some other Corinthian synagogue that Paul came and preached when he arrived in Corinth (Acts 18:4).

Paul was not the only Jew to arrive in Corinth at that time. He met a Jew from Pontus named Aquila and his wife, Priscilla. They had just come from Italy because Emperor Claudius had expelled all Jews from Rome in A.D. 49 (Acts 18:1-2; Bruce, p. 314).

Paul went to see them and ended up living and working with them because they were tent-makers by trade as was Paul (Acts 18:2-3).

Every Sabbath Paul could be found in the synagogue preaching to Jews and Greeks (v. 4).

Before long Silas and Timothy arrived again from Macedonia, bringing good news of the churches there. Timothy said the church at Thessalonica always thought well of Paul and his companions and wanted to see them as much as Paul longed to return to the church members there. Their faith encouraged Paul (1 Thes. 3:6-7).

Silas may have brought with him at this time a contribution for Paul from the brethren at Philippi (Phil. 4:15-16).

Now that his companions had arrived, Paul dropped his tent-making business and preached full time, telling the Jews that Christ was the Messiah. They rejected the message and said evil things about the messenger—Paul. So Paul protested by shaking the dust from his clothes and saying to them, "If you are lost, you yourselves must take the blame for it! I am not responsible. From now on I go to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:5-6).

Paul quit the synagogue and moved his headquarters next door to the house of a Gentile named Titius Justus who worshiped God. Crispus, leader of the synagogue, and his family, were converted. Many other Corinthians also came to the Truth and were baptized.

One night Paul had a vision in which God said to him, "Do not be afraid but keep on speaking and do not give up, for I am with

you. No one will be able to harm you because many in this city are my people." So Paul remained in Corinth a year and a half, probably from fall A.D. 50 to spring A.D. 52 (vv. 7-11).

Paul Writes to Thessalonians

During his stay in Corinth, Paul wrote his first two epistles. His first epistle to the Thessalonians was written shortly after Timothy arrived from Thessalonica in the fall of A.D. 50 and the second was written a short time later in A.D. 51.

Notice Paul's greeting: "From Paul, Silas and Timothy— to the people of the church in Thessalonica, who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ..." (1 Thes. 1:1).

Paul then wishes them grace and peace.

In Chapter 1, Paul wrote of the state of the Thessalonian church, its character and reputation: "You imitates us and the Lord; and even though you suffered much, you received the message with the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. So you became an example for all the believers in Macedonia and Greece.... you turned away from idols to serve the true and living God and to wait for his son to come from heaven—his son, Jesus, whom he raised from death, and who rescues us from God's wrath that is to come" (1 Thes. 1:6-7; 9-10).

In Chapters 2 and 3 Paul described his relationship with the Church at Thessalonica. He reminded the brethren that Silas, Timothy and he came there from Philippi and spoke the plain truth boldly in spite of opposition with no intent to trick them with words (Ch. 2:2-6).

"Our conduct toward you who believe was pure and right and without fault. You know that we treated each of you just as a father treats his own children. We encouraged you, we comforted you and we kept urging you to live the kind of life that pleases God," Paul wrote (vv. 10-12).

The Thessalonians received God's truth heartily, Paul said (v. 13). But they were suffering persecution from the Jews for their belief (vv. 14-16).

Next, Paul wrote how he had wanted to see them again but could not get back. So he had sent Timothy from Athens in his place. And now Timothy had returned with a glowing report (Ch. 2:17-3:13).

But Timothy's report also brought some of the Thessalonian's spiritual flaws into light. After three chapters of praise and thanksgiving, Paul began offering correction. They had problems with sexual immorality (Ch. 4:1-8), social misconduct (Ch. 4:9-12), understanding the state of the dead (vv. 13-18) and understanding when Christ will return (Ch. 5:1-11).

Paul commanded the church to be "holy and completely free from immorality" or, as the King James Version says, "abstain from fornication" (Ch. 4:3).

Socially, the Thessalonians (and we today) should "make it your aim to live a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to earn your own living... In this way you will earn the respect of those who are not believers, and will not have to depend on anyone for what you need" (Ch. 4:11-12).

Some of the brethren in Thessalonica had died since Paul had departed and Timothy had reported a sadness over these deaths.

Paul reminded the church of the resurrection. Those who die in the faith are neither gone forever nor wafting about in heaven as some pagans believed, but will live again at the sound of the last trump when Christ returns to the earth. All brethren, dead and living, will be reunited in the clouds as Christ returns and will be together forever ruling the universe from God's headquarters on this earth (Ch. 4:13-18; cf 1 Cor. 15; Rev. 11:15, 9:11-21:11).

While the Jews, who rejected Jesus, for centuries have been looking, waiting and yearning for the Messiah to come, God's church has, since the first century, been looking, waiting and yearning for Christ's second coming.

Jesus had given his disciples some clues about when he would return. In Matthew 24 He warned that world conditions would become bad. There will be false religions (vv. 5, 11, 24), wars (vv. 6-7), famines (v. 7), pesti-

lences (v. 17), persecutions (vv. 8-10, 21-23), lack of love among people (v. 12) and a preaching of the Gospel to all nations (v. 14). Worldly people will be eating and drinking, unaware of world conditions around them (vv. 36-39). But Jesus warned his disciples to watch because they would know neither the day nor the hour of his return (Ch. 24:42, 25:13).

Paul, at this early point in his ministry, may have thought Christ would return in his lifetime. In 1 Thessalonians he wrote, "Then *we which are alive and remain* shall be caught up together with them (resurrected believers) in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thes. 4:17, *NKJ*).

God's people always have wanted to know when Christ will return to set up his government on earth. Paul addressed this issue as he neared the end of his first letter:

"There is no need to write you, brothers, about the times and occasions when these things will happen, for you yourselves know very well that the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. When people say 'everything is quiet and safe' then sudden destruction will hit them!... But you, brothers, are not in the darkness, and the day should not take you by surprise.... So then, we should not be sleeping, like the others (unconverted); we should be awake and sober (1 Thes. 5:1-4, 6).

As Paul wrapped up his letter, he offered some final exhortation and a greeting (vv. 12-28).

He commanded them to respect their ministers and be at peace with themselves, warn the idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with all seek no revenge, always pray, be filled with joy and be thankful. Paul warned them not to quench God's spirit or despise inspired messages. They ought to prove all things, keeping what is good and avoiding all evil—even the appearance of evil.

Paul then asked for their prayers for him and the others in the church. And he urged them to read his letter to all the brothers.

He concluded his letter, "The grace of

our Lord Jesus Christ be with you" (v. 28).

51

Paul Writes Again to the Thessalonians

Shortly after sending off his letter to the Church of God at Thessalonica, Paul wrote a second letter to the brethren there.

"That the second epistle to the Thessalonians was written very soon after the first is apparent from the fact that the two epistles show that practically the same condition existed in the church, and also from the fact that Silas and Timothy join with Paul in both letters; and it can not be shown that these three men were ever together after the earlier part of Paul's ministry in Corinth" (McGarvey and Pendleton, p. 28).

There was a problem in the Thessalonian church that remained uncorrected in Paul's first letter. The brethren expected Christ's return at any minute of the day. Some had quit their jobs in anticipation of Christ's return.

This idea may have been spread by spurious preachers and by forged letters which seemed to have been signed by Paul (2 Thes. 2:2).

While Paul may have expected Christ to return in his lifetime, he knew certain prophecies had yet to be fulfilled before it could happen. However, in his first letter there were certain passages which could have been misconstrued and added wood to the fire (1 Thes. 4:15, 17; 5:4, 6).

"The design, therefore, of this second epistle was to correct the error as to the Lord's coming, and thus restore tranquility to the church. To do this the apostle reminds them of his former (verbal) instruction, wherein he showed that the rise and fall of the man of sin must precede the coming of the Lord" (McGarvey and Pendleton, p. 29).

Paul began his second letter with exactly the same greeting as his first (2 Thes. 1:1-2).

Paul then addressed their endurance through persecution (vv. 3-12), reminding them that God will punish persecutors at Christ's return (v. 8).

In Chapter 2, Paul explained a sequence of events which must occur before Christ can return. "I beg you, brothers, do not be so easily confused in your thinking or upset by the claim that the Day of the Lord has come," Paul wrote to calm the church (Ch. 2:1-2).

Before Christ will return there must be a great rebellion or falling away of church members from the body of Christ and the "Wicked One" or the "man of sin" and "son of perdition" be revealed (Ch. 2:3-12).

"The Mysterious Wickedness is already at work," Paul wrote of the great false church begun by Simon Magus after his confrontation with Peter in Acts 8:9-20.

But the "Wicked One" who will lead this Mystery religion had not yet come on the scene. When he is revealed he "will oppose everything which men worship and everything which men consider divine. He will put himself above them all, and will even go and sit down in God's temple and claim to be God!" (2 Thes. 2:7, 4). He will be empowered by Satan to work all kinds of miracles, false signs and wonders, and wicked deceit (vv. 9-10). But this "Wicked One" will be destroyed by Christ when He returns to the earth (v. 8).

Paul then encouraged the Thessalonians to remain strong in the faith (vv. 13-17).

Again, as in his first letter, Paul asked for their prayers that God will deliver him and the other ministers from wicked men (Ch. 3:1-5).

Paul also exhorted them to work and not lazily lie around waiting for Christ's return (vv. 6-12). He reminded them that he worked day and night when he was in their church area. He could have demanded tithes and offerings from the brethren for his personal expenses but chose rather to earn his own way to set an example for them (vv. 7-9). "Whoever does not want to work is not allowed to eat," wrote Paul (v. 10).

Paul then addressed what was to be done if brethren refused to obey their minister, or in this case, his epistle:

"If so, take note of him and have nothing to do with him, so that he will be ashamed. But do not treat him as an enemy; instead, warn him as a brother."

Paul concludes his letter with a benediction and a salutation.

“With my own hand I write this: ‘*Greetings from Paul.*’ This is the way I sign every letter, this is how I write” (v. 17).

“This, like most of Paul’s epistles, was dictated. Verses 17-18 were written by Paul’s own hand, this being the guarantee of the epistle’s genuineness, just as our signatures are today (McGarvey and Pendleton, p. 47).

Who penned Paul’s letters? He had an amanuensis, a type of secretary. The amanuensis knew the mind of the author. Paul would read over what was written, pen in comments and approve the letter. The only amanuensis ever named in Paul’s epistles is Tertius (Rom. 16:22). But from the frequency of Timothy’s name with Paul’s in the superscription of Paul’s letters, we may assume that Timothy penned most of Paul’s letters.

Paul Taken to Court

Paul had been in Corinth less than a year when a new proconsul of Achaia, Gallio, took up official residence in that city. The date he came to power in Corinth can be substantiated by an inscription at Delphi to be July 1, A.D. 51. His health was poor and he did not remain in office long.

“It was during Gallio’s proconsulship that Paul had what was probably his most impressive experience of Roman justice” (Bruce, pp. 315-316).

Shortly after Gallio took office, the Jews banded together, seized Paul and took him to court. “This man,” they said, “is trying to persuade the people to worship in a way that is against the law!” (Acts 18:12-13).

Paul was about to speak when Gallio said to the Jews, “If this were a matter of some wrong or evil crime that has been committed, it would be reasonable for me to be patient with you Jews. But since this is an argument about words and names and your own law, you yourselves must settle it. I will not be judge of such things!” And he drove them out of the court (vv. 14-16).

The Jews had hoped to convince Gallio that Paul’s activity was illegal according to

Roman law.

“Gallio, however, summed up the situation quickly... To him, Paul was a Jew like his accusers, and spoke the same sort of language as they did. If there were differences between Paul and them, these differences concerned interpretations of Jewish law and religion, and it was no part of Gallio’s responsibility to pronounce judgment on questions like these... Accordingly, he had them ejected from the court, and turned a blind eye when the new ruler of the synagogue [Sosthenes], was mobbed by the bystanders” (Bruce, pp. 316-317).

Sosthenes replaced Crispus as leader of the synagogue after Crispus had been converted to Christianity (Acts 18:8). It is likely that this Sosthenes also was later converted (1 Cor. 1:1, 14).

Had Paul lost this court case before Gallio, it would have served as a precedent. Paul’s adversaries would have used this case against him for the rest of his life.

“The mere fact that Gallio refused to take up the case against Paul may reasonably be held to have facilitated the spread of Christianity during the last years of (Emperor) Claudius and the earlier years of his successor” (Bruce, p. 317).

Paul Returns Home

“Either when the appearance before Gallio was pending, or at some other crisis during his stay at Corinth, Paul undertook a vow which required for its fulfillment a ceremony in the Temple in Jerusalem. Accordingly, when the seas were open for navigation in the early spring of 52, he left Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla.

“Before embarking at Cenchreae, the eastern seaport of Corinth, he cut his hair, which he had allowed to grow long for the duration of the vow. The cutting of his hair—which indicated that it was a temporary Nazarite vow that he had undertaken—was a partial discharge of his obligation, but full discharge called for a sacrifice in the Temple” (Bruce, p. 318).

Paul, Timothy, Silas, Aquila and Pris-

cilla sailed 250 miles across Aegean Sea to Ephesus, the commercial metropolis of Asia, on the western edge of Asia Minor or modern Turkey. The city lay between two chains of mountains near the mouth of the loveliest ravine that cut into the plateau of Asia Minor. From Ephesus roads radiated in every direction over the peninsula, making the city a great trading center. Its temple to Diana was one of the grandest in the world and on a future visit of Paul, worshipers from this temple will riot in this city (Stirling, p. 16).

But there were no riots during this first visit. Paul did preach to the Jews in the synagogue for a short time before he had to leave. The Jews asked him to stay a long time but he would not agree to it (Acts 18:19).

He bade them farewell, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing" (v. 21, *NKJ*).

"Since Passover fell at the beginning of April in A.D. 52 and navigation did not begin until about 10 March, this could explain Paul's haste" (Bruce, p. 318).

Aquila and Priscilla remained at Ephesus (Acts 18:19). But a ship was about to leave the Ephesian harbor and could take Paul to Palestine in time for Passover, so he set sail (Bruce, p. 318).

After 650 miles on the Mediterranean Sea, Paul arrived at the Palestinian seaport of Caesarea. He walked another 30 miles to Jerusalem where he fulfilled his vow, greeted the church and kept the spring holy days of

Passover and Unleavened Bread in A.D. 52.

Then he left Jerusalem for a 360-mile journey up the Mediterranean seacoast to his headquarters in Syrian Antioch.

Paul Rebukes Peter

Paul spent some time in Antioch reunited with Barnabas, who had sailed for Cyprus when Paul had left for Asia Minor (Acts 18:22-23; Gal. 2:11, 13).

Peter also came to Antioch. At first the chief apostle ate with Gentile converts. But later, when James sent some Jewish converts to Antioch, Peter drew back and would not eat with the Gentile converts, fearing those who were in favor of circumcising Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-12).

The other Jewish converts, including Barnabas, also started acting like cowards, following the lead of Peter.

Paul described his reaction to this: "When I saw that they were not walking a straight path in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter, in front of them all: 'You are a Jew, yet you have been living like a Gentile, not like a Jew. How, then, can you try to force Gentiles to live like Jews?'" (vv. 13-14).

This unseemly reaction of former Jews to former Gentiles while all were of the body of Christ drew sharp criticism from Paul. By confronting the chief apostle about his embarrassing behavior, Paul nipped this problem in the bud.

Paul remained in Antioch throughout the summer of A.D. 52.

10

Paul's Third Journey (Part 1)

52

By fall A.D. 52, Paul was once again on the road. He would never again return to this church that he and Barnabas had pastored.

To begin his third journey, Paul revisited Galatia to strengthen the believers in the churches at Derbe, Iconium, Lystra and Pisidian Antioch (Acts 18:23).

Apollos in Ephesus and Corinth

A Jewish Christian named Apollos, who had been born in Alexandria, Egypt, came to Ephesus after Paul had departed on his way to Jerusalem in the spring of that year. He was an eloquent speaker with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been baptized by John the Baptist. He had correct knowledge of Jesus Christ but knew nothing of the Holy Spirit.

Apollos spoke boldly in the synagogue, where he was heard by Aquila and Priscilla, whom Paul had left in Ephesus. They invited Apollos to their home and explained to him the Way of God.

Apollos decided to go to Greece. The brethren in Ephesus wrote to the brethren in Greece and urged them to welcome him.

When Apollos arrived, he was a great help to those God had called into the church. With strong arguments he defeated Jews in public debates, proving from Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 18:24-28).

Paul Arrives in Ephesus

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior of the province of Asia. He arrived at Ephesus before winter set in (Acts 19:1).

The geographics of Ephesus were discussed in Chapter 8 when Paul first passed through this seaport in Asia (western Turkey) on his way to Jerusalem. But Paul spent more time in Ephesus than any other city—about three years. We need to examine the political and religious background of this city to better understand the events which took place there.

Ephesus, in addition to being a great trade center, was important politically. Like Philippi, it was a free city. Therefore, it never had a Roman garrison quartered there. Free cities were self-governing and had the power to execute citizens who were given the



The first part of Paul's third journey brought him from Antioch through Galatia, to Ephesus, where he spent about three years. He may have made a trip to Corinth during this time. When he left Ephesus for good, he traveled to Troas and then to Macedonia.

death penalty. They had their own laws, customs and magistrates.

Ephesus was ruled by a board of principal magistrates called the *strategoï*, an elected senate called the *Boule* and an assembly of all its citizens called the *Demos* or *Ecclesia*. Ephesus, like Corinth, also was the seat of the Roman proconsul, where judicial cases could be heard.

The month of May was sacred to the goddess Artemis (or Diana) and a great festival was held in Ephesus. Activities included gymnastics, music and games.

The temple of Diana was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was 435 feet long by 220 feet wide by 60 feet high. Within the colonnades were 127 pillars of marble, of which 36 were richly inlaid with gilt and covered with delicate work.

The worship of Diana was a weird, ecstatic, hysterical service. Worshipers worked themselves into emotional passion while listening to shouts, cries, wailings and flute music. Burning incense filled the air.

Ephesus also was the center of trade in good-luck charms called "Ephesian letters" (Barclay, pp. 118-121).

Into this pagan metropolis came Paul. There he found 12 disciples of John the Baptist who, like Apollos, had not heard of

the Holy Spirit. Paul explained Christ and his mission to these men and they were rebaptized, this time in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then Paul placed his hands on them and the Holy Spirit entered them. As proof, God allowed these new converts to speak in tongues and utter Scriptures from the word of God (Acts 19:1-7).

Lost Letter to Corinthians

"During Paul's stay in Ephesus he maintained relations with the churches of Achaia which he had founded on the preceding journey. The church at Corinth was a vexing problem to him because of its instability. Since it was largely composed of Gentiles who had no training in the Old Testament Scriptures, and whose religious and moral antecedents were the exact opposite of Christian principle, much teaching was required to bring them up to the place of spiritual maturity (1 Cor. 3:1-3)....

"While Apollos and possibly Cephas [Peter] were visiting Corinth and preaching there, Paul was on the tour that took him back to Palestine and thence to Ephesus... shortly after his return to Ephesus, he wrote a letter to which he alluded in 1 Cor. 5:9: 'I wrote unto you in my epistle to have no

company with fornicators...’ The moral atmosphere of Corinth was such that an absolute separation from evil was necessary if the church were to survive. Evidently there had been some misunderstanding of his injunction, for in 1 Corinthians he explained that he was not advocating withdrawal from the world, but that there should be separation from professing Christians who persisted in this sin.

“The full content of the previous letter will never be known, since it has been lost” (Tenney, pp. 294-295).

Preaching in Ephesus

After arriving in Ephesus, Paul preached for three months in the synagogue, trying to convince Jews about the Kingdom of God. Some of the Jews were stubborn and did not believe his bold preachings. They said evil things about the Way of the Lord before the whole group so Paul left them.

He and his disciples took up headquarters and had public discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-9).

Tyrannus was a public teacher to whose hall students came regularly for lectures in the cooler parts of the day—early morning and late afternoon. The hall was available and Paul used it during the hottest part of the day—11 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Bruce, p. 327).

Paul continued preaching in the lecture hall for two years so that all the Jews and Gentiles in the province of Asia heard the Word of God (Acts 19:10).

God performed miracles, including healings, through Paul. When people from all over the region requested Paul to come and heal them, he realized he could not be everywhere at once and keep up his daily speaking schedule. So he initiated a new church custom: that of “anointed cloths.”

Instead of anointing the sick with oil and praying over them, Paul anointed pieces of handkerchiefs and aprons and sent them to the sick, who were healed of diseases and had evil spirits driven from them (vv. 11-12).

The seven sons of Sceva (a Jewish high priest) saw Paul’s success and they went

around driving out evil spirits too. But when they tried to use the name of Jesus—apparently without believing and obeying Him—they got in trouble.

When they commanded an evil spirit to come out “in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches,” the spirit replied, “I know Jesus and I know Paul, but you—who are you?”

The demon-possessed man then attacked the seven sons with such force they were all wounded and ran from his house with their clothes torn off.

News of this incident spread quickly throughout Ephesus. Both Jews and Gentiles were filled with fear and the name of the Lord Jesus was given greater honor.

Many believers came to Paul and publicly admitted their sins. A lot had practiced magic. They now brought their books together and burned them at a public bonfire. The books were valued at \$50,000.

“In this powerful way the word of the Lord kept spreading and growing stronger” (vv. 13-20).

Paul Writes 1 Corinthians

The Corinthian response to Paul’s first letter—the lost letter—“was quite unsatisfactory. Apollos and Cephas had removed to other fields and the church, bereft of adequate leadership, had fallen into confusion. Disquieting rumors concerning it began to drift back to Ephesus through slaves of a Corinthian family who were in Ephesus on business. Finally three members of the church, Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, brought a contribution to Paul and also a letter containing questions which the Corinthians wanted clarified. In response Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. It was composed near the end of his sojourn at Ephesus for he had already formulated his plans for leaving Asia and making an extended visit to Macedonia and Achaia (1 Cor. 16:5-7). It must have been composed during winter or in fall for he spoke of staying at Ephesus until Pentecost because of the success which was attending his work (16:18)” (Tenney, p. 295-296).

While it is true the letter was written at the end of Paul's stay at Ephesus, it is much more likely Paul wrote the letter in spring A.D. 55, prior to Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, than in the previous fall. This is because of the references Paul made to these holy days.

The first nine verses of 1 Corinthians contain Paul's salutation. Paul used the church's proper name—"Church of God"—when addressing the called-out ones at Corinth. The church was never named after a man, a form of government or a method. Christ had prayed that the church would remain in God's name (John 17:11). Now 24 years after Jesus' death, the church was still named "Church of God" (1 Cor. 1:2).

Sosthenes, the former leader of the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:17), had converted to the Church of God since Paul's visit there. He was visiting Paul in Ephesus when Paul wrote to Corinth. Paul included him in his salutation (1 Cor. 1:1).

For the remainder of Chapter 1 and on through the next five chapters, Paul replied to a report from the "house of Chloe." He wrote of party strife from Ch. 1:10 to Ch. 3:23. He defended his ministry in Ch. 4. He criticized Corinthian morality in Ch. 5, their lawsuits in Ch. 6:1-11; and replied to libertinism in Ch. 6:12-20.

This letter is not dead history but living words. The epistle "reflects the conflict which took place when Christian experience and Christian ideals of conduct came into conflict with the concepts and practices of a pagan world. The problems discussed in it are by no means outdated, for they are still to be found wherever Christians come into contact with a pagan civilization" (Tenney, p. 296).

The Corinthians had become followers of men instead of followers of God. "Each one of you says something different. One says, 'I with Paul'; another, 'I am with Apollos'; another, 'I am with Peter'; and another, 'I am with Christ'" (1 Cor. 1:12).

Later, Paul told the Corinthians this behavior was carnal and worldly (Ch. 3:4). "After all, who is Apollos? And who is Paul?

We are simply God's servants, by whom you were led to believe... I planted the seed, Apollos watered the plant, but it was God who made the plant to grow. The one who plants and the one who waters really do not matter, it is God who matters..." (Ch. 3:5-7).

Paul reminded the brethren that they were the weak, foolish and despised of the world when God called them. But God will use them to confound the mighty and wise people of this world (Ch. 1:26-31).

The wisdom of God cannot be understood by the carnal mind. The "spirit in man" gives mankind a mind, lifting us above the animals. It allows us to think and understand the things of man. But mankind cannot comprehend godly things until God gives him another Spirit—his Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10-16).

Paul told the Corinthians they were God's temple— God's Spirit lived in them (Ch. 3:16-17). Therefore, they were commanded to take care of their bodies.

But the Corinthians still lacked understanding. Paul said he had to treat them as babes in Christ, giving them simple concepts—the milk of the word instead of solid spiritual food (Ch. 3:1-2).

Paul defended his ministry in Chapter 4 by making sarcastic comments about the apostle's ministry and mocking those at Corinth who claimed to be rich and honorable. He begged the church to follow his example and told them he would send Timothy (carrying this letter) to them. He hoped to visit them soon himself. He told them to shape up! "Which do you prefer?" asked Paul, "shall I come to you with a whip or with a heart of love and gentleness?" (1 Cor. 4:16, 19, 21).

In Chapter 5, Paul corrected their immoral behavior. He had been told about a Corinthian church man having marital relations with his step-mother (Ch. 5:1). This was something even the pagans abhorred. But the young Christians not only allowed it, they were proud and puffed up by it—and their "great" ability to overlook his sin. But Paul commanded them to put the sinner out of the church so he may be brought to repen-

tance and saved from eternal damnation (vv. 2-5).

Paul allegorized sin to leaven—a lesson understood by the Church of God because it kept the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. Each spring church members cleaned all leaven from their homes following the Biblical command of Ex. 12:15-20. This pictured removing sin from their lives.

“Purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump.... For indeed Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the Feast, not with old leaven, nor with the old leavened bread of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (Ch. 5:6-8 *NKJ*).

God’s church at this time was still keeping Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread! And it still is keeping them today!

Next, Paul corrected a misconception from his first letter. He told the Corinthians they did not need to avoid worldly people—but they should avoid Christians who act worldly—“a man who calls himself a brother but is immoral, or greedy, or worships idols, or is a slanderer, or a drunkard, or a law-breaker” (vv. 9-13).

Some of the brethren were taking each other to court. Paul said this shouldn’t be! He said they should settle their disputes inside the church. “Don’t you know that God’s people will judge the world? Well then, if you are to judge the world, aren’t you capable of judging small matters?” (Ch. 6:1-2) Paul said it would be better to have been wronged and get no retribution than to take a brother to court (v. 7).

In the remainder of Chapter 6, Paul commanded the church members, who were members of the body of Christ, to abstain from immoral acts. “Shall I take part of Christ’s body and make it part of the body of a prostitute? Impossible! Or perhaps you don’t know that the man who joins his body to a prostitute becomes physically one with her?” (vv. 15-16).

Remember—Corinth was an immoral city whose streets were infested every evening with 1,000 temple prostitutes. But Paul commanded Christians to “Flee forni-

cation” (v. 8, *KJV*) or “Flee sexual immorality” (v. 18, *NKJ*). A Christian’s body is not for joining with harlots but to be used in God’s service (vv. 19-20).

Paul Answers Corinthian Questions

The third part of this epistle to the Corinthians was Paul’s response to questions from brethren there (Ch. 7:1). The Corinthian brethren had questions about marriage (Ch. 7), things sacrificed to idols (Ch. 8:1-11:1), problems of worship (Ch. 11:2-34), spiritual gifts (Chapters 12-14), the resurrection (Ch. 15) and the collection for the Jerusalem Church (Ch. 16:1-9).

We don’t know what specific questions the Corinthians had about these subjects. All we have are Paul’s answers.

Concerning marriage, Paul wrote, it was good for singles to remain single so they could dedicate their entire lives to God’s service; married people must be concerned about their families (1 Cor. 7:1, 7, 8, 25-38).

Marriage was not condemned by Paul. If an unmarried couple could not restrain their desires for each other, then they should marry—“It is better to marry than to burn with passion” (vv. 2, 9, 28, 36, 38).

Couples married in the faith should remain married. They should not deny each other sexual satisfaction, except for a short time for prayer if both partners agree (vv. 2-5, 10, 17, 20, 39).

In cases in which one mate was converted and one remained unconverted, Paul commanded those Christians to remain with their mates. They were to live a good example, and perhaps be instrumental in converting their mates (vv. 12-17).

Divorce was not approved by Paul. The only way a Christian marriage was disbanded was when one partner died (vv. 11-13, 39).

Paul next addressed a question of meat offered to idols. In his day, when beasts were sacrificed to idols, the parts not burned up went partly to the priests and partly to the offerers. The meat was eaten at feasts in the

pagan temples and in private homes. It also often was sold in the meat markets. So Christians could easily be exposed to the meat—even unknowingly—that they had been forbidden to eat by the Jerusalem Decree of A.D. 49 (*JFB*, p. 1203).

Paul reminded the Christians that idols really were nothing and could not contaminate meat (Ch. 8:1-6, 8).

But, he wrote, some Christians “are so used to idols that this very day when they eat such food they still think of it as food that belongs to an idol; their conscience is weak and they feel they are defiled by the food.” If eating meat offered to idols would cause one of these little ones in the faith to stumble or take offense, then it was better not to eat it, Paul advised (vv. 9-13).

In Chapter 9, Paul went further into the details of his rights and duties as an apostle. Yet he had not always exercised these rights. “I am a free man, nobody’s slave,” he wrote, “but I make myself everybody’s slave in order to win as many as possible. While working with the Jews, I live like a Jew in order to win them... when with Gentiles I live like a Gentile... in order to win Gentiles. This does not mean that I don’t obey God’s law, for I am really under Christ’s law. Among the weak in faith I become weak like one of them, in order to win them...” (vv. 19-22).

Paul urged the Corinthians to join him in his spiritual race. In a physical race, all run but only one receives the winner’s wreath. In the Christian race all can win. And they receive not a wreath that decays but an eternal crown. Paul said he remained in spiritual training lest he call others to the race and he, himself, lose out (vv. 23-27).

Continuing in his thesis about meat offered to idols, Paul brought out an historical example in Chapter 10.

He reminded them of what happened to the Israelites under Moses—how they were baptized in the Red Sea and ate and drank of the Great Spiritual Rock—Jesus Christ (who was the God of the Old Testament) but turned to idolatry at Mount Sinai.

“Now all these things are examples for

us, to warn us not to desire evil things, as they did, nor to worship idols, as some of them did. As the scripture says, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to dance.’ We must not commit sexual immorality as some of them did—and in one day 23,000 of them fell dead. We must not put the Lord to the test, as some of them did—and they were killed by snakes. You must not complain, as some of them did—and they were destroyed by the Angel of Death” (vv. 6-10).

Temptations to sin—to commit fornication, idolatry or to eat meat offered to idols when it offends weak brethren—these temptations were all around the Corinthians just as Satan has set traps about Christians through the ages to this day. Christians who think they can withstand temptation on their own power should take heed lest they fall (v. 12). But God will not allow his people to be tempted beyond what they are able to bear. He offers a means of escape (v. 13).

“So then, my dear friends,” stated Paul, “keep away from the worship of idols” (v. 14).

Paul then delved into specifics. Christians were allowed to eat any clean meat (Leviticus 11, Deuteronomy 14) that was sold in the meat market without asking questions of its origins.

If a believer was invited to the home of unconverted friends and they offered clean meat to eat, the Christian need not ask if it had been offered to idols. He was free to eat it. But if the unbeliever announced that the meat was offered to idols, the Christian shouldn’t eat it, or the unconverted host would think the church member wished to join him in his idol worship by sharing that meat which the host considered special (vv. 25-29).

After answering questions about marriage and meat offered to idols, Paul next addressed problems of worship.

He explained that Christ is head of the church and the husband is head of the wife. To symbolize this, a man should keep his hair short and a woman should keep hers long (Ch. 11: 3, 5, 7-9, 14, 15). Men ought to worship God with their heads uncovered.

Women ought to have their heads covered with hair.

The second problem of worship Paul addressed was the Corinthian observance of Passover. Instead of congregating for a special, quiet, solemn observance of the Lord's Passover, the church in Corinth was having a big supper together. Some went hungry while others became drunk. "Don't you have your own homes in which to eat and drink?" asked Paul.

He then described the correct Passover observance and its solemn meaning. There was the broken bread which pictured Christ's body and the wine which pictured Christ's blood. "For until the Lord comes, you proclaim his death whenever you eat this bread and drink from this cup," Paul wrote (vv. 23-26).

God's true church has kept this observance through the ages to this day!

Paul warned the Corinthians if they ate the bread or drank the wine in an unworthy manner, they became guilty of the body and blood of Christ—and ate and drank damnation to themselves (vv. 27-29). Because of their inappropriate Passover observance, many in the Corinthian church were sick and some had died (v. 30). Therefore, Paul commanded all Corinthian brethren to examine themselves in the coming weeks before Passover A.D. 55.

Having concluded his remarks on proper worship, Paul addressed spiritual gifts in chapters 12, 13 and 14 of 1 Corinthians. Chapter 12, the "Gifts Chapter," discusses various spiritual gifts and their rank of importance. "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit gives them," Paul wrote, stressing unity. The different gifts were to be used to serve God (vv. 4-5). Spiritual gifts included wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracle-working, preaching, the ability to discern gifts, speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues (vv. 4-11).

Paul explained that just as the human body is made up of many members, each with a different role, so is Christ's body (the church) made up of many members, each

with a different role and spiritual gift. Members should not be jealous of each other's position or gifts (vv. 12-26).

God puts people into his church where He sees fit (vv. 27-28). Paul explained the hierarchy of how the church was organized in his day: "In the first place, apostles, in the second place, prophets, in the third place, teachers, then those who perform miracles, followed by those who were given power to heal, or to help others, or to direct them, or to speak with strange sounds" (v. 28).

In Chapter 13, Paul told the Corinthians that one could have all the spiritual gifts and it would profit nothing if that Christian had not the most important ingredient: Love.

Paul told them in the "Love Chapter" that true Christian Godly love has 15 attributes: It is patient, kind, not jealous, conceited or proud, not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; it does not keep a record of wrongs; it rejoices not in evil but in truth. Love never gives up, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things and never fails.

In the "Tongues Chapter"—Chapter 14—Paul explained that if one speaks in another language by the power of the Holy Spirit (as happened at Pentecost A.D. 31 when the church began), it is useless unless there is an interpreter. Paul said it was much better to speak an inspirational message in a language that could be understood by listeners than in a tongue only God could understand. "But in church worship I would rather speak five words that can be understood in order to teach others, than to speak thousands of words with strange sounds," he wrote (v. 19). Those who spoke in tongues were required to have interpreters if they wished to speak in services, Paul wrote (vv. 27-28).

Paul then explained how men with gifts of tongues, prophecy, teaching and revelation should participate in church services. They should be in an orderly fashion with the sole purpose of edifying the church. But women were not allowed to preach—they were to remain quiet in church (vv. 26-35, 40).

In the "Resurrection Chapter"—

1 Corinthians 15—Paul gave his fifth response to Corinthian concerns. They, like the Thessalonians, had questions about Christ's return and the resurrection of the dead.

Paul introduced the topic by describing the death of Christ and his resurrection three days and three nights later (1 Cor. 15:1-11).

Some in Corinth had said their was no resurrection (v. 12). Paul replied, "If that is true, it means that Christ was not raised, and if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is a delusion and you are still lost in your sins. It would also mean that the believers in Christ who have died are lost. If our hope in Christ is good for this life only, and no more, then we deserve more pity than anyone else in the world.

"But the truth is that Christ has been raised from death, as the guarantee that those who sleep in death also will be raised," Paul wrote (vv. 13; 17-20).

Christ's resurrection was proved by witnesses who saw him raised. They included Peter, the 12 apostles, more than 50 believers who saw him at one time, James, all the apostles and even Paul himself (vv. 5-8).

People will be resurrected in order. Christ was first. Those belonging to Christ will receive eternal life at his second coming (v. 23).

Paul asked, "And as for us—Why should we run the risk of danger every hour? Brothers, I face death every day!... If, as it were, I have fought 'wild beast' here at Ephesus, simply from human motives, what have I gained? (vv. 30-31, 32).

Did Paul actually fight lions in an arena? It is possible but not probable. What is more likely meant is "I have fought men resembling savage beasts." Heraclitus of Ephesus had called his countrymen "wild beasts" 400 years earlier (*JFB* p. 1223).

Corinthian brethren wondered what type of body they would have when resurrected. Paul told them the resurrection is like planting a seed. The seed must die before it sprouts into a wonderful, glorious new creation (vv. 35-41).

Paul dispelled the myth that humans have an "eternal soul": "This is how it will be when the dead are raised to life. When the body is buried it is mortal; when raised it will be immortal. When buried, it is ugly and weak. When raised, it will be beautiful and strong. When buried, it is a physical body. When raised, it will be a spiritual body...

"This is what I mean, brothers: what is made of flesh and blood cannot share in God's kingdom, and what is mortal cannot possess immortality.

"Listen to this secret: we shall not all die, but in an instant we shall all be changed, as quickly as the blinking of an eye, when the last trumpet sounds. For when it sounds, the dead will be raised immortal beings, and we shall be changed" (vv. 42-44, 50-52).

At this point Paul had answered the questions from the Corinthian brethren about marriage, meat sacrificed to idols, problems of worship, spiritual gifts and the resurrection. One question remained: What to do about a collection for the Jerusalem Church. Paul addressed this issue in 1 Corinthians 16.

True Christians were not in Paul's day, and are not today, to conduct business and handle money matters on the Sabbath. So Paul told the Corinthians to wait until the Sabbath was over and then immediately the next day put money aside for the brethren. The money was to be saved up and ready for Paul when he would arrive. He would then send the men they had approved to take the money to Jerusalem. Paul said he might go with them (Ch. 16:1-4).

Paul said he would come to Corinth after he had traveled through Macedonia (northern Greece). He hoped to spend the entire winter A.D. 55-56 there. But his plans for the immediate future were to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost. "There is a real opportunity here for great and worthwhile work, even though there are many opponents," he told them (vv. 5-9).

Paul was sending this letter of correction with the young Timothy. He may have feared that the church at Corinth would become angry and blame the messenger for

the message, because he wrote, “If Timothy comes your way, however, be sure to make him feel welcome among you, for he is working for the Lord, just as I am. No one is to look down on him, but you must help him continue his trip in peace, so that he will come back to me; for I am expecting him back with the brothers” (vv. 10-11).

Paul had been encouraging Apollos to revisit Corinth, but Apollos was not convinced this was the right time (v. 12). He may have been afraid that his going to Corinth would cause more division (Tenney, p. 298).

Paul gave some final words of encouragement before signing off with his own writing: “Be alert, stand firm in the faith, be brave, be strong. Do all your work in love” (vv. 13-14).

The Corinthians were told to follow the example of Stephanas and his family. They were the first Christian converts in Greece (vv. 15-16).

Special praise was given to Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, the three men from Chloe’s family who had brought the news of Corinth and their questions to Paul in Ephesus (vv. 17-18).

Paul sent greetings from Aquila and Priscilla and from the church at Ephesus which met in their house, as well as from the other churches in Asia (v. 19).

Visits to Corinth

Timothy took Paul’s epistle and headed for Ephesus.

“Nothing is said concerning the outcome of Timothy’s mission, but it seems to have been a failure. In 2 Corinthians Paul spoke twice of his plans and said ‘This is the third time I am ready to come to you’ (2 Cor. 12:14, 13:1). Since his first visit to Corinth was the founding of the church, and since his letter was written from Macedonia after leaving Ephesus where he was waiting to come to Corinth, there must have been an unrecorded visit somewhere between Timothy’s visit and Paul’s departure from Asia. Such a call need not have occupied any great length

of time, for transit from Ephesus to Corinth could be made easily” (Tenney, p. 298).

F. F. Bruce agrees that there was an unrecorded visit by Paul to Corinth at this time. It is obvious that 1 Corinthians was written and delivered to Corinth prior to Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. Paul said in that epistle that he hoped to leave Ephesus at Pentecost, which follows the Feast of Unleavened Bread by about seven weeks. It is possible that Paul traveled to Corinth for the Last Day of Unleavened Bread and preached to them on that holy day.

From Timothy when he returned to Ephesus after delivering 1 Corinthians, or possibly from someone else who had come from Corinth, Paul learned that the party spirit or division in the Corinthian church had not been checked by 1 Corinthians. Instead, it had intensified. “This was due to the arrival in Corinth of some Jewish Christian teachers whose conception of the Gentile mission in the purpose of God was radically different from Paul’s” (Bruce, pp. 331-332).

These false teachers preached that Jewish Christians must rigidly follow the instructions of the Torah—the first five books of the Old Testament—and Gentile Christians must not relax at all on the requirements of the Jerusalem decree.

“These visitors had no hesitation asserting their primacy as Israelites, and some members of the Corinthian church were disposed to submit to them.”

The acceptance of such teachings and from others who taught from the ditch on the other side of the road—the party of the “Enlightenment”—undermined and eroded Paul’s authority among his Corinthian converts.

“Nothing would serve, he decided, but a personal visit to Corinth. This brought the opposition to a head. Paul appears to have been grossly insulted and humiliated at a meeting of the church. Plainly nothing was to be gained by further attempts at conciliation on the spot.

“Paul withdrew [went back to Ephesus] and sent the church a stinging letter, writ-



Drawing of an Ephesian coin with the Temple of Diana.

ten with the full weight of his apostolic authority, in which he demanded in the name of Christ that the church should put itself in the right by taking severe disciplinary action against the offenders. So sharp was the tone of the letter that, after he had sent it by the hand of Titus, he began to fear that he had gone too far in severity” (Bruce, pp. 332-333).

There is some speculation by scholars that part of this letter is incorporated as chapters 10 through 13 of 2 Corinthians. But there is no evidence from manuscripts that 2 Corinthians was ever divided. Others say this intermediary severe letter was lost (Tenney, p. 299).

Riot at Ephesus

“After these things had happened, Paul made up his mind to travel through Macedonia and Greece and go on to Jerusalem. ‘After I go there,’ he said, ‘I must also see Rome.’ So he sent Timothy and Erastus, two of his helpers, to Macedonia (northern Greece, which had churches at Philippi, Berea and Thessalonica), while he spent more time in the province of Asia (Acts 19:21-22). It was now summer A.D. 55.

That summer there arose a great commotion about “the Way” as Luke described Christianity (v. 23). A silversmith named

Demetrius made silver models of the temple of Artemis (or Diana), the moon goddess. He had been making a good profit from selling these souvenirs but was now seeing a dip in sales because of Paul’s preachings. So he called a meeting of all his employees and of all the people who made similar charms and souvenirs (vv. 24-25).

Demetrius told them: “Men, you know that our prosperity comes from this work. You can see and hear for yourselves what this fellow Paul is doing. He says that gods made by men are not gods at all, and has succeeded in convincing many people, both here in Ephesus and in nearly the whole province of Asia. There is a danger, then, that this business of ours will get a bad name. Not only that, there is danger that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will come to nothing, and that her greatness will be destroyed—the goddess worshiped by everyone in Asia and in all the world!” (vv. 25-27).

“Silver images and the goddess Artemis figure prominently in the incident recorded by Luke. Ephesian Artemis bore the same name as ‘queen and huntress, chaste and fair’ of Greek mythology, but, far from being a virgin goddess, she was a local manifestation of the *great mother of gods and men* who had been worshiped in Asia Minor from time immemorial” (Bruce, pp. 328-329).

Today, nearly 2,000 years later, there are millions of people, who, deceived by Satan, are worshiping this same pagan goddess—a virgin mother of god and man—and carry around little statuettes of her. She is known today not by the name Artemis or Diana but by “Mary” (*Babylon Mystery Religion* by Ralph Woodrow, pp. 21-29).

As the crowd heard the words of Demetrius, they became furious and began shouting, “Great is Artemis of Ephesus!” The uproar spread throughout the whole city. The mob grabbed two Christians from Macedonia—Gaius and Aristarchus—who were traveling with Paul and rushed them into the city theater (Acts 19:28-29). The open-air theater was the regular meeting place of the civic assembly and could seat 25,000

people (Bruce, p. 328).

Paul wanted to address the crowd but was prevented from doing so by some of his friends in the church. Fortunately, Gaius and Aristarchus suffered no harm. They probably gave Luke the details of the meeting so he could record them in Acts.

The crowd demonstrated not only against Paul but against Jews in general, because they also showed no respect for Artemis. That is why Alexander, a leader of the Jewish community, rose to speak and was howled down by two hours of shouting, "Great is Artemis of Ephesus" (Acts 19:33-34, Bruce, p. 329).

Finally, the top city official calmed the crowd (v. 35). Luke calls him the "town clerk" but he was more than a clerk. He was secretary for the governing body of the city (the *demos*) but he also acted as liaison between the city government and the Roman administration of the province (Bruce, p. 319).

This civic leader supported the worship of Artemis and warned the population not to do anything foolish or reckless. He told Demetrius if he and his workers have accusations against anyone, they should handle it in court. "There is the danger that we will be accused of a riot in what has happened today," he told the quieted crowd. "There is no excuse for all this uproar and we would not be able to give a good reason for it." Then he dismissed the meeting (Acts 19: 35-41).

After the uproar died down, Paul called together the brethren at Ephesus. He offered words of encouragement and said goodbye.

Paul Revisits Macedonia

Paul left Ephesus for Troas, 150 miles up the coast of Asia. It was while in Troas five years earlier that Paul had been joined by Luke and had a vision of an invitation to come to Macedonia.

Now A.D. 55, Paul returned to Troas and "hoped to undertake some missionary activity in Troas and the vicinity, where there were promising opportunities for evangelism, but his anxiety over Corinth prevented

him from settling down to his work. His mind could not rest until Titus returned with news of the reception given to his letter. He waited at Troas until Aegean navigation ceased for the winter of A.D. 55-56, then, knowing that Titus could not come across the open sea direct from Corinth or Athens, he himself took the overland route to Europe (which involved no more travel by sea than the crossing of the Dardanelles) and met Titus in Macedonia" (Bruce, pp. 333-334).

"When Paul reached Troas after Ephesus, he looked eagerly for Titus, but Titus did not appear (2 Thes. 2:12, 13). Paul, oppressed with worry over what might have happened at Corinth, went across to Macedonia, where his troubles multiplied (7:5). While he was laboring there and arranging with the Macedonian churches for their gifts to Jerusalem, Titus suddenly arrived with good news that a revival had broken out in the Corinthian church and that its attitude had changed from one of carelessness and obstinacy to one of repentance" (Tenney, pp. 299-300).

Titus' news brought overwhelming relief to Paul. "The Corinthian church had been stung to such a sense of shame and indignation by Paul's letter that there was a complete revulsion of feeling in his favor. The required disciplinary action had been taken against the offending party, and especially against their ring leader...

"It may seem strange that such a letter should have been so effective after the failure of his visit; perhaps there was some substance in observation of those critics who said, 'His letters are weighty and strong but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is of no account' (2 Cor. 10:10)" (Bruce, p. 334).

Paul Writes 2 Corinthians

With joy Paul sat down and wrote the letter we call 2 Corinthians. It was written in the winter months of late 55 or early 56 from Macedonia.

The first two verses of 2 Corinthians contain Paul's salutation. He reminded the Corinthians that he was an apostle by God's

will and let them know Timothy was with him (in Macedonia) as he wrote.

As in his other letters, Paul addressed this epistle to “the Church of God.” God’s church has always been called simply, “The Church of God” with an occasional identifier added. For example, Paul wrote this to “The Church of God in Corinth” (v. 1).

After his greeting, Paul described his personal conduct from Chapter 1:3 to 2:13.

Paul wrote he had troubles in Asia and feared that he was about to die. But such trials were only to help him trust in God, who delivered him (vv. 8-11). We are not sure what this great trial was but it may have been at the time of the riot in the theater at Ephesus.

Paul mentioned his intermediate visit to Corinth: his intent was to save them from error. But when he saw he could not win the personality battle against the fake apostles he made up his mind not to visit them again to make them sad. That’s why he wrote the stinging letter (Ch. 2:1-4).

He let the Corinthians know he was concerned about how they reacted to his stinging letter (v. 4, 12-13).

In the third section of 2 Corinthians, Paul defended God’s ministry from Ch. 2:14 to 7:5.

Ministers don’t need to carry physical letters of recommendation. Instead, Christ wrote their recommendations on human hearts with the Holy Spirit (Ch. 3:1-3).

God’s church, because it has God’s Spirit, shines boldly in a dark world which is ruled by Satan (Ch. 3:4, 4:15).

“For this reason we never become discouraged,” wrote Paul. “Even though our physical being is gradually decaying, yet our spiritual being is renewed day after day” (v. 16). The resurrection gives hope to Christians (Ch. 4:17-5:10).

God’s ministers speak on behalf of Christ. When they preach, it is God speaking through them (vv. 11-20). Ministers try hard not to put obstacles in anyone’s way (Ch. 6:3). Paul’s defense in the next few verses could describe the church down through the ages: “enduring troubles, hardships, and difficul-

ties with great patience. We have been beaten, jailed, and mobbed; we have been overworked and have gone without sleep or food. By our purity, knowledge, patience and kindness we have shown ourselves to be God’s servants; by the Holy Spirit, by our true love, by our message of truth, and by the power of God. We have righteousness as our weapon, both to attack and defend ourselves. We are honored and disgraced; we are insulted and praised, we are treated as liars yet we speak the truth... Although punished, we are not killed; although saddened, we are always glad; we seem poor, but we make many people rich; we seem to have nothing, yet we really possess everything” (vv. 4-10).

Paul told his “dear friends at Corinth” the ministry has spoken frankly and opened wide its heart. He asked the brethren to open wide their hearts.

As Paul neared the end of his defense of the ministry, he told Christians to come out from the world and be separate. A Christian’s closest friends and partners in life should be other Christians—not those who are unbelievers (vv. 14-18).

After defending the ministry, Paul commented on the effects of his letter of correction (Ch. 7) He told them Titus had brought him good news of their godly repentance (vv. 5-7). “For even if that letter of mine made you sad, I am not sorry I wrote it. I could have been sorry about it when I saw that the letter made you feel sad for a while. But now I am happy—not because I made you sad but because your sadness made you change your ways” (vv. 8-9). Godly sorrow works repentance—a change of ways. They did not have worldly sorrow—a sorrow only at getting caught—for that leads only to death (v. 10).

Godly sorrow produces seven fruits: diligence, clearing of the self, indignation, fear, vehement desire, zeal and vindication (v. 11, *NKJ*).

In Chapters 8 and 9, Paul wrote of Christian giving. First, he told the Corinthians how the other Greek churches—those in the northern province of Macedonia—were very

generous in helping the Judean brethren. Then he told the Corinthians he expected them to be generous too. The Corinthians had been one of the first churches to organize a collection the year before, and Paul had used their desire to stir up the brethren in Macedonia, from where Paul was writing this letter (Ch. 9:1-4).

“Remember this,” wrote Paul, “the man who plants few seeds will have a small crop; Each one should give, then, as he has decided, not with regret or out of a sense of duty, for God loves the one who gives gladly. And God is able to give you more than you need, so that you will always have all you need for yourselves and more than enough for every good cause” (vv. 6-8).

Throughout Chapters 10, 11 and most of 12, Paul defended himself personally.

“I, Paul, make a personal appeal to you—I who am said to be meek and mild when I am with you, but bold toward you when I am away from you. I beg of you, by the gentleness and kindness of Christ: Do not force me to be bold with you when I come...” (Ch. 10:1-2).

Paul boasted of his God-given authority, not to terrify the brethren, but to build them up (v. 8). The false ministers who had stirred up the Corinthians against Paul had no God-given authority. They simply made up their own standards and judged themselves by them. They compared themselves among themselves. Paul called them stupid. Christians should compare themselves to Christ (vv. 12-18).

Paul wanted the Corinthian church to be part of the chaste, spotless body of the wife of Christ. But he feared they would fall by the wayside because false ministers were preaching erroneous concepts: another Jesus, a different spirit and a different gospel.

Centuries later, in today’s modern world, churches which call themselves Christian are still teaching these false concepts. Instead of preaching the true Jesus who was a powerful, short-haired Jewish carpenter who looked like any other Jew of his day (for he easily evaded his captors in a crowd several times), these churches preach a weak and

spindly long-haired freak.

Instead of preaching the Holy Spirit as the power of God through which God works, these churches teach that the Spirit is God—a third personage in the Godhead.

Instead of preaching the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God—the gospel which Christ and the apostles preached, these churches preach a gospel only about the Messenger.

Paul told the Corinthians not to tolerate these false teachers and their teachings and added, “I do not think that I am the least bit inferior to those very special ‘apostles’ of yours! Perhaps I am an amateur in speaking, but certainly not in knowledge...” (Ch. 11: 5-6).

Paul said he humbled himself when he first came to Corinth from Macedonia so the brethren could be exalted. He did not even bother the Corinthians for money. While he worked among them he was supported by brethren from Macedonia (vv. 7-9).

The false apostles didn’t work in the same way Paul worked. “Those men are not true apostles—they are false apostles, who lie about their work and change themselves to look like real apostles of Christ. Well no wonder! Even Satan can change himself to look like an angel of light! So it is no great thing if his servants change themselves to look like servants of right. In the end they will get exactly what they deserve for the things they do” (vv. 12-15).

“You will tolerate anyone who orders you around, or takes advantage of you, or traps you, or looks down on you, or slaps you in the face. I am ashamed to admit it: we were too timid to do that!” (vv. 19-21).

Paul next described some of his sufferings. “But if anyone dares to boast of something—I am talking like a fool—I will be just as daring. Are they Hebrew? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. Are they Christ’s servants? I sound like a madman—but I am a better servant than they are! I have worked much harder. I have been in prison more times, I have been whipped much more, and I have been near death more often. Five

times I was given the thirty-nine lashes by the Jews; three times I was whipped by the Romans, and once I was stoned; I have been in three shipwrecks, and once I spent twenty-four hours in the water. In my many travels I have been in danger from floods and from robbers, in danger from fellow Jews and from Gentiles; there have been dangers in the cities, dangers in the wilds, dangers on the high seas, and dangers from false friends. There has been work and toil, often I have gone without sleep; I have been hungry and thirsty; I have often been without enough food, shelter, or clothing. And, not to mention other things, every day I am under the pressure of my concern for all the churches. When someone is weak, then I feel weak too; when someone falls into sin, I am filled with distress" (vv. 21-29).

Paul's personal testimony recorded more trials than are recorded in Acts.

Up to this point in his life, we have record in Acts that Paul was imprisoned just once—on his first visit to Philippi (Acts 16).

The Jews were not permitted to give more than 40 stripes with a whip (Deut. 25:3). To avoid exceeding the limit, they gave one less. They may have given 13 strokes with a whip which had three lashes attached to it (*JFB*, p. 1252). We have no record in Acts of these lashes.

We have record of only one of the three Roman beatings. It occurred at Philippi prior to Paul's imprisonment (Acts 16:22).

Paul was stoned in Lystra (Acts 14:19).

In the whole book of Acts, six sea journeys are mentioned. But nothing is mentioned of these three shipwrecks. These came before the shipwreck at Melita (Acts 27). These shipwrecks were "probably in some of his voyages from Tarsus, where he stayed for some time after his conversion, and from which, as being a seafaring place, he was likely to take missionary journeys to adjoining places (Acts 9:30; 11:25; Gal. 1:21)" (*JFB*, p. 1252).

Why aren't all these events recorded in Acts? The book "does not profess to give a complete journal of his life, but only a sketch of it in connection with the design of the

book, viz., to give an outline of the history of the Gospel Church from its foundation at Jerusalem, to the period of its reaching Rome, the capital of the Gentile world (*JFB*, p. 1252).

Paul continued his personal defense in the first 13 verses of 2 Corinthians 12.

He wrote about a vision he had had 14 years earlier—A.D. 42—about the time he and Barnabas had established the church in Syrian Antioch and had brought aid from that church to Jerusalem in the famine of A.D. 41. Some scholars feel the vision occurred in Jerusalem, others think it happened in Antioch. Nevertheless, while Paul revealed his vision of being caught up into the third heaven (God's throne), he did not glory in it. Instead, he gloried in his infirmities and told the Corinthians of his "thorn in the flesh" that continued to trouble him even though he had prayed for relief three times (Acts 12:1-10).

What was Paul's thorn in the flesh? "From the earliest ages down men have indulged in wild speculation as to what Paul meant by his thorn in the flesh... The most plausible theory is that it was disfiguring and acute ophthalmia (a disease of the eye). Suffice it to say that it was some bodily infirmity which acted as a balance to Paul's mind, drawing his thoughts and attention to his earthly state, lest they should dwell too constantly in meditation upon the things which had been revealed to him" (McGarvey & Pendleton, p. 236).

From Chapter 12:14 to Chapter 13:10 Paul wrote of his upcoming visit to Corinth. "This is the third time that I am ready to come to visit you—and I will not make any demands on you. It is you I want, not your money.... I am afraid that when I get there I will find you different from what I would like you to be and you will find me different from what you would like me to be. I am afraid I will find quarreling and jealousy, hot tempers and selfishness, insults and gossip, pride and dishonor... and I shall weep over many who have sinned in the past and have not repented of the immoral things they have done, their sexual sins and lustful

deeds” (Ch. 12:14, 20-21).

“That is why I write this while I am away from you; it is so that when I arrive I will not have to deal harshly with you in using the authority that the Lord gave me— authority to build you up, not to tear you down” (v. 10).

In the final five verses of his epistle, Paul wrote a concluding salutation.

Once the letter was completed, it was sent to Corinth by Timothy.

We will continue Paul’s third journey in the next chapter.

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Paul's Third Journey (Part 2)

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Little is known of Paul's movements during the spring, summer and fall A.D. 56. All Luke says in Acts is when Paul came to Macedonia "he went through those regions and encouraged the people with many messages" (Acts 20:2).

Paul Visits Macedonia, Illyricum

We get some clues of Paul's travels from a letter he wrote to the Romans the following year. In Rom. 15:19 he summed up his ministry to date with these words: "from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum."

"Since he uses the Roman form Illyricum and not the Greek Illyria or Illyris, even though he his writing in Greek, he probably means the Roman province, which lay along the eastern shore of the Adriatic, north of the westernmost region of Macedonia... If he crossed the provincial frontier, he would have found himself for the first time in his apostolic career in a province where the culture was more Latin than Greek" (Bruce, p. 335).

In Romans 15, Paul wrote of his plans to preach in Spain. This journey into the Latin

culture of Illyricum during the summer of 56 "would have given him some idea of what it would be like to evangelize a province, such as Spain was, where the culture wholly Latin and not at all Greek" (Bruce, p. 336).

Paul Visits Corinth a Third Time

Paul then traveled south to Corinth and spent the winter months of A.D. 56-57 with a loyal friend, Gaius (Acts 20:23; Bruce, p. 335).

Paul's thoughts turned to Rome. He was a Roman citizen and he longed to visit the capital of the civilized world. There was a church of true believers in Rome and Paul hoped to see them but could not do so immediately. Perhaps he learned about the Rome Church of God from travelers he met during his Macedonian journeys. He decided to put his thoughts into a letter to brethren in Rome. But before he began writing to them, a messenger brought bad news from places where Paul had been before.

Paul Writes Galatians

Paul received disturbing news from the

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churches he founded in Galatia—Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. False ministers had appeared there who taught that they must earn salvation through strict adherence to all the do’s and don’ts of the Jewish faith of that day. (The Jewish faith of that day had changed greatly from the religion of Israel in the Old Testament. It included much oral tradition in addition to the laws God gave Israel). These false ministers demanded that adult Gentile male converts be circumcised. There also was a problem with Gentiles going back to their pagan superstitions which Paul called the “weak and beggarly elements” (Gal. 4:3, 9). Paul responded to this news by writing his epistle to the Galatians.

Paul’s letter to the Galatians and his letter to the Romans which followed shortly after are very similar in nature. But Paul based his letter to the Galatians, the churches he founded, upon his apostolic authority. His letter to the Romans, to whom he was not personally known, was based upon argument (JFB, p. 1257).

In his introduction, Paul told the Church of God in Galatia his apostleship came not from men but directly from the resurrected Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:1).

Paul had been to Galatia just three years prior to this writing. But in those three years false teachers had come there and corrupted their beliefs.

“I am surprised at you!” Paul wrote. “In no time at all you are deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ, and are going to another gospel. Actually, there is no ‘other gospel’ but I say it because there are some people trying to change the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:6-7). Paul then pronounced a double curse on anyone who preached different from the truth he had preached when he was there (vv. 8-9).

Paul defended Christian liberty from the accusations of Judaizers who were bewitching the brethren with their false ideas demanding that Christians keep ritualistic laws, including circumcision (Gal. 3:1). Paul’s defense lay in three arguments: biographical (Ch. 1:10-2:21), theological (Chapters 3

and 4) and practical (Ch. 5:1-6:10).

Paul told the Galatians of his conversion from a church-persecuting Jew to an independent apostle who spent little time with the other apostles in Jerusalem (Ch. 1:11-24).

In Chapter 2, Paul defended Christian liberty from the rituals of Jewish law. He reminded the brethren of the result of the Jerusalem Council A.D. 49—that circumcision should be of the heart, not of the foreskin. God opened the doors for Gentiles to be called into the church but they were not to be bound by the same rituals Jews had kept in their past. He reminded them of the time he had rebuked Peter for avoiding Gentiles (vv. 11-14).

Paul told the Galatians they were not justified or made right with God by performing works or rituals of the Law. No, mankind is justified only by faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice (v. 16). This did not do away with the need to keep God’s law, as Paul would later tell the Romans (Rom. 2:13, 3:24-25). But no amount of law-keeping pays the penalty for sin.

In Chapters 3 and 4, Paul presented his theological arguments on the failure of legalism.

Abraham believed God and his faith was counted to him as righteousness. Therefore, people who have faith—whether Jews or Gentiles—are the real descendants of Abraham, Paul wrote (Ch. 3:6-14).

The rituals were added to God’s law to teach Israel obedience. Sacrifices and ceremonial washings were added because ancient Israel disobeyed God’s spiritual law—the Ten Commandments. These rituals were added to the law and were meant to last until Abraham’s Seed—Jesus Christ—came (Ch. 3:19-24).

In the Church of God there is no distinction among peoples. All are one in Christ: “For it is through faith that all of you are God’s sons in union with Christ Jesus. For you were baptized into union with Christ, and so have taken upon yourselves the qualities of Christ himself. So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between

slaves and free men, between men and women: you are all one in union with Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are the descendants of Abraham, and will receive what God has promised (Gal. 3:26-26).

Paul wrote of his concern for the Galatians in Chapter 4:

"I beg of you, my brothers, be like me. After all, I am like you. You have not done me any wrong. You remember why I preached the gospel to you the first time; it was because I was sick. But you did not despise or reject me, even though my physical condition was a great trial to you. Instead you received me as you would God's angel; you received me as you would Christ Jesus! You were so happy! What has happened? I myself can say this about you: you would have taken out your own eyes, if you could, and given them to me! Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?"

"Those other people (the false ministers) show a great interest in you, but their intentions are not good. All they want is to separate you from me, so that you feel the same way toward them as they do toward you... My dear children! Once again, like a mother in childbirth, I feel the same kind of pain for you, until Christ's nature is formed in you. How I wish I were with you now, so that I could take a different attitude toward you. I am so worried about you!" (vv. 12-20).

Paul then wrote about the example of Hagar and Sarah. He compared the Jewish way of life to Hagar, who was a slave woman. The Christian way of life was compared to Sarah, who was free.

"At that time the son who was born in the usual way (Ishmael) persecuted the one who was born because of God's Spirit (Isaac) and it is the same now. But what does the scripture say? It says, 'Throw out the slave woman and her son; for the son of the slave woman will not share the father's property with the son of the free woman.' So then, my brothers, we are not the children of a slave woman, but of the free woman. Freedom is what we have—Christ has set us free! Stand, then, as free men, and do not allow yourselves to become slaves again" (Ch. 4:21-

5:1).

These Judaizers who had come to Galatia told Gentile converts they needed to be circumcised. This was contrary to church teachings. "For when we are in union with Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor the lack of it makes any difference at all; what matters is faith that works through love" (vv. 2-6).

Paul continued, "You were doing so well! Who made you stop obeying the truth? How did he persuade you? It was not done by God, who calls you... But I still feel sure about you. Our union in the Lord makes me confident that you will not take a different view, and that the man who is upsetting you, whoever he is, will be punished by God... I wish that the people who are upsetting you would go all the way: let them go on and castrate themselves!" (vv. 7-12).

Paul warned the Galatians that Christian freedom did not mean they were free from obeying God's spiritual laws! "But do not let this freedom become an excuse for letting your physical desires rule you. Instead, let love make you serve one another. For the whole Law is summed up in one commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself" (vv. 13-14). The first four of the 10 Commandments tell how to love God. The last six teach how to love mankind.

"This is what I say," continued Paul, "let the Spirit direct your lives, and do not satisfy the desires of the human nature. For what our human nature wants is opposed to what the Spirit wants...the two are enemies..."

"What human nature does is quite plain. It shows itself in immoral, filthy, and indecent actions; in worship of idols and witchcraft: People become enemies, they fight, become jealous, angry and ambitious. They separate into parties and groups; they are envious, get drunk, have orgies, and do other things like these. I warn you now as I have before: those who do these things will not receive the kingdom of God.

"But the spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. There is no law

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against such things as these. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have put to death their human nature, with all its passions and desires...we must not be proud, or irritate one another, or be jealous of one another" (vv. 16-26).

Paul told the Christians to gently correct each other when they saw wrongdoing. They also should avoid temptation and carry each other's burdens (Gal. 6:1-2).

"A man reaps exactly what he plants. If he plants in the field of his natural desires, from it he will gather the harvest of death; if he plants in the field of the Spirit, from the Spirit he will gather the harvest of eternal life. So let us not become tired of doing good; for if we do not give up, the time will come when we will reap the harvest. So then, as often as we have the chance we should do good to *everyone*, but *especially* to those who belong to our family in the faith" (Gal. 6:7-10).

Paul gave one final warning written in his own handwriting against the Judaizers who wanted Gentile converts to be circumcised:

"See what big letters I make as I write you now with my own hand!... Even those who practice circumcision do not obey the Law; they want you to be circumcised so they can boast that you submitted to this physical ceremony... It does not matter at all whether or not one is circumcised. What does matter is being a new creature... To conclude: let no one give me any more trouble; for the scars I have on my body show that I am the slave of Jesus" (vv. 11-17).

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Paul Prepares to Leave Corinth

As spring approached A.D. 57, Paul made plans to leave Corinth for Jerusalem. He planned to bring with him contributions he had collected from the brethren in Achaia and Macedonia (Rom. 15:25-26).

His thoughts turned again to the brethren in Rome. He learned that Phoebe, a church member from Cenchræa, one of the ports of Corinth, was about to depart for Rome (Rom. 16:1-2). So he wrote an epistle

to the Roman brethren for Phoebe to take with her.

Paul Writes Epistle to Romans

The origin of the church at Rome is unknown. But there were sojourners from Rome present in Jerusalem when the church began on Pentecost A.D. 31 (Acts 2:10).

Aquila and Priscilla had come from Rome (Acts 18:2) and had returned there (Rom. 16:3).

"The church could not have been a large one and probably it consisted chiefly of Gentiles, since in addressing them he classified them as Gentiles (1:3), and since the later account his visit to Rome as given by Acts indicates ignorance concerning Christian truth on the part of the Jews. They had heard of the movement, but had not investigated it for themselves, nor had others reported to them about it (Acts 28:21). The Gentile church of Rome had in it a small minority of Jews at the most; and the Jews who lived in Rome, having come to the city since the expulsion under Claudius, had not made the acquaintance of those who were in the church" (Tenney, p. 303).

Paul had many friends in Rome. He had tried several times to visit them but had been hindered (Rom. 15:22, 1:3).

"Paul had several reasons for interest in this church. His desire to see the imperial city, the need for Christian instruction, his wish to forestall any Judaizing activity in a group of great potential importance, and his hope of support from them as he undertook a tour to Spain (Rom. 15:24)—all contributed to his resolve to spend some time with them.

"Romans was written as a substitute for immediate personal contact.... Romans, therefore, unlike Corinthians, is not devoted so much to the correction of errors as to the teaching of truth" (Tenney, p. 304).

Paul dictated this letter to Tertius, his amanuensis (secretary), who penned it and added his salutation to the end (Rom. 16:22). The central theme of Romans, according to Tenney, is the revelation of the righteous-

ness of God to man and its application to man's spiritual need.

Introduction

The first 17 verses of Paul's epistle to the Romans contain Paul's introduction. In verse 7 Paul wrote, "May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace." There is no mention of the Holy Spirit as a third person of the Godhead. Paul, and God's church, did not hold to the false doctrine of the Trinity.

Paul told the Romans how he longed to be with them (vv. 10-15).

The theme of Romans is stated in verses 16-17: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith" (KJV).

Paul was not ashamed of his Christianity. He did not hide the fact he kept the Sabbath and holy days, that he obeyed God's laws and believed in Christ. Do we Christians today sometimes worry about what others will think of us if they learn we are members of God's true church? Perhaps some in Rome in Paul's day kept their beliefs quiet to avoid problems with Roman authorities.

Need for Righteousness

After his introduction, Paul discussed the need for divine righteousness from Chapter 1:18 to 3:20. He described the ungodly world in the remainder of Chapter 1.

God reveals Himself through his creation. But humanity has rejected God and worshiped the creation instead of the Creator, Paul wrote. (This concept holds true among evolutionists in the 20th century!)

"Because of what men do, God has given them over to shameful passions," Paul wrote. "Even the women pervert the natural use of sex by unnatural acts. In the same way men give up natural sexual relations with women and burn with passion for each other" (vv. 26-

27). God condemns homosexuality.

The world Paul knew was governed by Rome but its culture was heavily influenced by Greece. To the Greek mind, beauty was praised foremost, and sex was subordinate. "That a beautiful boy should be attractive only to women was a thought utterly foreign to the Greek mind, as was any suggestion that a lovely lady's desirability was limited to male admirers. Beauty was beauty, and one always desired to draw near and if possible to possess it.

"Thus, Greek society produced a bisexual orientation, a fact that modern homosexual cultists sometimes forget... The Greek found beauty magnetic without respect to sex. The perfect symbol of this genteel neutrality is embodied in the myth of Hermaphroditus, who was the divinely fused body of a beautiful boy and an adoring nymph, possessed of the organs of both sexes, able to love and be loved at will" (*Sex and Love in the Bible*, by William Cole, pp. 198-199).

Unlike the Greeks, the Romans celebrated the physical differences between the sexes. They tended to glorify heterosexual love and were repelled by abnormal sex. "Homosexuality, called 'the Greek practice,' was not a crime, but it was weak and feminine, uncharacteristic of the manly Roman citizen-soldier" (Cole, p. 205).

Homosexuality was a problem in Rome but the bigger problem was prostitution and adultery, which weakened the marriage institution (Cole, p. 206, 210-215).

Paul listed other evils done by people who reject God: "They are filled with all kinds of wickedness, evil, greed, and vice; they are full of jealousy, murder, fighting, deceit and malice; They gossip, and speak evil of one another; they are hateful to God, insolent, proud, and boastful; they think of more ways to do evil; they disobey their parents; they are immoral; they do not keep their promises, and they show no kindness or pity to others" (Rom. 1:29-31).

In Chapter 2, Paul wrote of God's judgment. People in the Church of God should not condemn those in the world if they are doing the same evil deeds (vv 1-3).

It is the goodness of God which leads people to repentance (v 4). God is no respecter of persons. He treats all the same—Jews and Gentiles; men and women; black, white red and yellow (v. 11).

Paul told the Christians in Rome the unconverted have sinned without the law and perish without the law. But people in the church who sin in the law are judged by the law, “for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified” (vv, 12-13).

Circumcision is good only if the circumcised person obeys God’s laws, Paul told the Romans. But if an uncircumcised (Gentile) convert keeps God’s laws, then his obedience counts as circumcision. He becomes a Jew inwardly—his circumcision is of the heart (vv. 25-29).

Being a Jew has advantages, Paul wrote in Chapter 3. The greatest advantage is that God gave the Holy Scriptures to them to keep through the ages. But if a Jew doesn’t keep the law, he is no better than a Gentile. All people have sinned. There is none righteous. None seek after God (Rom. 3:1-23).

Manifesting Righteousness

Paul discussed the manifestation of divine righteousness from Chapter 3:21 through Chapter 8.

Christ paid the penalty for our sins. Therefore, Christians are made right with God by faith apart from the deeds of the law. But does faith make void God’s law? No, it establishes the law! (Rom. 3:24-31).

As in his letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote to the Romans about Abraham being the father of the faithful (Chapter 4).

He wrote about Christ’s sacrifice for us in Chapter 5. “But God has shown us how much he loves us: it was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us!” (v. 8).

Christ paid the death penalty for our breaking of God’s laws. Does this mean we are free to continue breaking God’s laws? Paul answered this question in the “baptism chapter,” Romans 6:

“What shall we say, then? That we should

continue to live in sin so that God’s grace will increase? Certainly not! We have died to sin—how then can we go on living in it? For surely you know this: When we were baptized into union with Christ Jesus, we were baptized into union with his death. By our baptism, then, we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might live a new life... sin must no longer rule in your mortal bodies, so that you obey the desires of your natural self... What, then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the [penalty of the] law but under God’s grace? By no means! For surely you know this: when you surrender yourselves as slaves to obey someone, you are in fact the slaves of the master you obey—either sin, which results in death, or of obedience, which results in being put right with God” (Rom. 6:1-4, 12, 15-16).

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 23, *KJV*), wrote Paul as he concluded the “baptism chapter.” Note that Paul and true Christians did not believe in man’s “immortal soul.” The sinner dies. Eternal life is not something man has from birth but is something God gives to Christians.

In Chapter 7, Paul discussed the carnal (human) mind. It is tough to obey God’s law. “I do not understand what I do; for I don’t do what I would like to do, but instead I do what I hate... I know that good does not live in me—that is, in my human nature. For even though the desire to do good is in me, I am not able to do it... What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is taking me to death? Thanks be to God, through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (v. 15, 18, 24-25).

In Chapter 8, Paul wrote of the spiritual mind. “To have your mind controlled by what human nature wants will result in death; to have your mind controlled by what the Spirit wants will result in life and peace. And so a man becomes an enemy of God when his mind is controlled by what human nature wants; for he does not obey God’s law,

and in fact he cannot obey it. Those who obey their human nature cannot please God.

“But do not live as your human nature tells you to; you live as the Spirit tells you to—in fact, God’s Spirit lives in you” (Rom. 8:6-9).

Paul then defined a true Christian: “Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (v. 9). A true Christian is not one who “gives his heart to the Lord” or “accepts Jesus as his Savior” or any such thing. The mark of a true Christian is the Holy Spirit working inside that person.

Those led by God’s Spirit are the begotten sons of God. Upon their resurrection into spiritual bodies, they will become full members of the God family—like Jesus Christ; they will become heirs of all creation and co-heirs with Christ (vv. 14-23).

The Holy Spirit helps Christians communicate with their Father in heaven. “For we do not know how to pray; the Spirit [itself] pleads with God for us, in groans that words cannot express” (v. 26).

Paul offered the brethren in Rome these words of encouragement: “For we know that in all things God works for good with those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose... If God is for us, who can be against us?” (vv. 28, 32).

Revealing Righteousness to Jews

The election, salvation and failure of Israel are discussed in the fourth section of Romans in Chapters 9 through 11.

“For they (Jews) being ignorant of God’s righteousness, are going to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (Rom. 11:3-4 *KJV*). Some have erroneously concluded this verse says Christ put an end to God’s law. But nothing could be farther from the truth. The Greek word for “end” is *τελος* (*telos*) and means “the point aimed at as a limit; the conclusion of an act or state; result” (“Greek Dictionary of the New Testament,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, by

James Strong, p. 71).

Jesus Christ did not put an end to the law of God. Instead, He is the end result. Obedience to the law builds Christ-like character. God’s church obeys God’s laws.

Paul continued, “But concerning Israel he (God) says, ‘I held out my hands the whole day long to a disobedient and rebellious people’ (Rom. 10:21).

Paul then asked the rhetorical question, “Did God reject his own people?” He answered, “Certainly not! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin” (Ch. 11:1).

Apparently some of the Gentile converts in Rome were boasting that God had rejected Israel and selected them. Paul corrected this error. He told them Gentiles had been grafted onto the tree of the church (v. 17).

“How can you be proud?” asked Paul. “You are just a branch, you don’t support the root—the root supports you. But you will say, ‘Yes, but the branches were broken off to make room for me.’ This is true. They were broken off because they did not believe, while you remain in place because you believe. But do not have proud thoughts about it; instead, be afraid. God did not spare the Jews, who are the natural branches, do you think he will spare you?” (vv. 19-21).

Christian Righteousness

Chapters 12 through 14 of Romans are the “Christian living chapters.” They describe various aspects of how Christians conduct their lives.

God is not interested in sacrifices of dead animals. “Offer *yourselves* as a *living sacrifice* to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him,” Paul wrote in Romans 12:1.

Other highlights of these chapters include:

“Do not conform outwardly to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God” (v. 2).

“Do not think of yourselves more highly than you should...” (v. 3).

“We are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us. If our gift is to preach God’s message, we must do it according to the faith that we have. If it is to serve, we must serve. If it is to teach, we must teach. If it is to encourage others, we must do so. Whoever shares what he has with others must do it generously; whoever has authority, must work hard, whoever shows kindness to others must do it cheerfully” (vv. 6-9).

“Love must be completely sincere. Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good. Love one another warmly as brothers in Christ, and be eager to show respect for one another. Work hard and do not be lazy” (vv. 9-11).

“Let your hope keep you joyful, be patient in your troubles, and pray at all times. Share your belongings with your needy brothers, and open your homes to strangers. Ask God to bless those who persecute you; yes, ask him to bless, and not to curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep... Do not be proud, but accept humble duties. Do not think of yourself as wise” (vv. 10-16).

“If someone does evil to you, do not pay him back with evil... Do everything possible on your part, to live at peace with all men. Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God’s wrath do it” (vv. 17-18).

“Everyone must obey the state authorities; for no authority exists without God’s permission, and the existing authorities have been put there by God... For rulers are not to be feared by those who do good but those who do evil... This is also the reason that you pay taxes... Pay then, what you owe them; pay them your personal and property taxes, and show respect and honor for them all” (Rom. 13:1-7).

“Be in debt to no one—the only debt you should have is to love one another” (v. 8).

“The commandments... are summed up in the one command, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ...To love, then, is to obey the whole law” (vv. 9-10).

“The time has come for you to wake up

from your sleep. For the moment when we will be saved is closer now than when we first believed... Let us conduct ourselves properly, as people who live in the light of day: no orgies or drunkenness, no immorality or indecency, no fighting or jealousy (vv. 11, 13).

In Chapter 14, Paul told the Roman brethren not to offend each other with their eating habits. Some ate meat and others were vegetarians. They should not judge each other (vv. 1-4). Some fast on one day, others fast on another. They too should not judge each other (vv. 5-6).

The first 13 verses of Chapter 15 conclude this section of the epistle. Paul told those strong in the faith to help those who are weak (vv. 1-2). He instructed the church to be of one mind and speak the same things (v. 6).

Conclusion of Romans

Paul concluded his letter to the Church of God in Rome in Chapter 15:14-33. He wrote of his personal plans through verse 29 and finished with a prayer request.

He told them he had preached from Jerusalem to Illyricum (v. 19). “But now I have finished my work in these regions, and since I have been wanting for so many years to come to see you, I hope to do so now. I would like to see you on my way to Spain, and be helped by you to go there, after I have enjoyed visiting you for a while. Right now, however, I am going to Jerusalem in the service of God’s people there. For the churches of Macedonia and Greece have freely decided to give an offering to help the poor among God’s people in Jerusalem... When I have finished this task, and have turned over to them the full amount of money that has been raised for them, I will leave for Spain and visit you on the way there” (vv. 23-26, 28-29).

Paul asked for prayers for his journey. “I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love that the Spirit gives: join me in praying fervently to God for me. Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in

Judea, and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to God's people there. And so I will come to you full of joy, if it is God's will, and enjoy a refreshing visit with you. May God, our source of peace, be with all of you. Amen" (vv. 30-33).

Postscript to Romans

The seventh section of Paul's letter to the Romans is a postscript in Chapter 16.

Paul asked them to receive Phoebe. She was a member from a Corinthian church and she was delivering this letter to them (vv. 1-2).

He sent greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, with whom he had worked in Corinth and Ephesus. They had returned to Rome, the city they had fled when Emperor Claudius evicted all Jews. Now a congregation of the Church of God met in their house in Rome (vv. 3-5).

The first man in the province of Asia (Ephesus) to believe in Christ also had moved to Rome. Paul greeted him by name—Epaenetus.

Paul also greeted Mary, Andronicus and Junias (fellow Jews who were imprisoned with Paul at one time and had become Christians before Paul was converted), Ampliatus, Urbanus, Stachys, Appelles, Aristobulus, Herodion, the Christian brothers in the family of Narcissus, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus and his mother (who treated Paul like her own son), Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the Christian brothers with them, Philologus, Julia, Nereus, Olympus and God's people with them (vv. 6-15).

Paul then warned the brethren to avoid people who would cause division in the church: "Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (v. 17 *KJV*). Paul further explained, "For those who do such things are not serving Christ our Lord but their own appetites. By their fine words and flattering speech they deceive the minds of innocent people" (v. 18).

Paul sent greetings from those with him at Corinth. They included Timothy, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, Tertius (Paul's amanuenses), Gaius (Paul's host and in whose house the church met), Erastus (the city treasurer) and Quartus (vv. 21-23).

Paul wrapped up his postscript by praising God for making his truth known to all nations (vv. 25-27). Paul gave the letter to Phoebe and she took it to Rome.

Paul Revisits Troas

Passover was approaching in the spring of 57 and Paul made plans to sail from Corinth to Jerusalem by way of Syrian Antioch, his home base. But he discovered that Jews were plotting against his life, so he decided to go back overland through Macedonia (Acts 20:3).

"It was the Passover season; the ships would be crammed with Jews returning to Jerusalem to keep the most sacred of their feasts, for every Jew all over the world prayed then (and still) that he might keep the next Passover in Jerusalem. Perhaps the plot was that on the crowded ship Paul would be silently despatched overboard and never heard of again. The Jews hated him because he had taken what they considered the privileges God had given them and them alone and had opened them to the accursed Gentiles. They would go to any lengths to stop him" (Barclay, p. 125).

Several brethren went with Paul when he left Corinth for Philippi, 310 miles north in Macedonia. They included people Paul had mentioned in his letter to the Romans: Sopater (the son of Pyrrhus, who was from Berea in Macedonia), Aristarchus and Secundus (from Thessalonica in Macedonia), Gaius (from Derbe in Galatia), Timothy, Tychicus and Trophimus (from the province of Asia).

When the group arrived at Philippi, they split up. Paul and Luke remained there to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the spring of 57. The others went ahead and kept the Feast in Troas. They waited for Paul there.



The last part of Paul's third journey took him from Corinth to Jerusalem. It included overland and sea travel.

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After the Days of Unleavened Bread, Paul and Luke sailed from Philippi to Troas. It took them five days to sail across the Aegean Sea. Once in Troas, Paul spent a week there (Acts 20:4-6).

On Saturday evening, the brethren in Troas gathered for a meal. Paul preached to them late into the evening. It was after midnight and Paul continued preaching, because he was leaving the next day.

A young man named Eutychus sat in a window listening to Paul. But as the sermon went longer and longer, Eutychus became sleepier and sleepier until he finally fell asleep and fell from the third story to the ground.

When the brethren picked up Eutychus, they discovered he was dead. But Paul went down and threw himself on Eutychus and hugged him. "Don't worry," Paul said, "he is still alive!"

Paul then went back upstairs and ate. He then continued preaching until sunrise and left. But the brethren in Troas took Eutychus home alive and were greatly comforted (vv. 7-12).

Paul Visits the Ephesians

Paul's companions boarded a ship at Troas and sailed about 40 miles around Cape Lectum and easterly along the northeast shore of the Gulf of Adramyttium to the port of Assos.

Paul chose to be alone. He walked to Assos, taking the "excellent Roman road which then existed." His direct route was only 25 miles (JFB, p. 1122).

At Assos Paul rejoined his companions and sailed to Mitylene—"the capital of the beautiful and classical island of Lesbos, which lies opposite the eastern shores of the Aegean Sea, about 30 miles south of Assos; in whose harbor they seem to have lain for the night" (JFB, p. 1122).

Mitylene was well known in Roman times for its beautiful buildings. In Paul's day it was a free city ("Mitylene," *Smith's Bible Dictionary* by William Smith, p. 415).

Paul and his party sailed south from Mitylene and arrived the next day off Chios, an island 60 miles south (Acts 20:15). Chios,

now called Scio, is “one of the most beautiful of those islands between which and the coast the sail is so charming. They appear not to have touched it” (*JFB*, p. 1122).

But the ship did stop the next day in the port of Trogyllium across from the island of Samos (Acts 20:15). Samos was another island very close to the mainland of Asia Minor. Trogyllium was an anchorage on the projecting mainland, not more than a mile from the southernmost point of Samos. The port was just about 25 miles southwest of Ephesus.

The next day the ship landed in Miletus, a port 25 miles due south of Ephesus. “At one time the chief port on the Ionian coast [Miletus was] situated at the entrance of an irregular gulf; but the constantly changing coastline has reduced it to an obscure village five or six miles from the sea. The overland route to Ephesus was about 70 miles; by crossing the gulf the traveler reduced the distance to not more than 25 miles” (Stirling, p. 16).

Paul had spent more time in Ephesus than in any other city but he dared not make a journey inland lest he miss his ship. He was anxious to be in Jerusalem by Pentecost and already three of the seven weeks between Unleavened Bread and Pentecost had expired. So instead, Paul sent to the elders of the church at Ephesus and had them come to Miletus (Acts 20:16-17).

“Luke used the speech (verses 18-35) to epitomize Paul’s missionary policies and achievements up to date... It discloses his own consciousness that trouble awaited him at Jerusalem (Acts 20:22, 23) and that his work in Asia was ended (20:25), for he contemplated going farther west on his next trip. Perhaps he realized that old age was beginning to overtake him, and that there would not be time to retrace his first steps as he had done in former journeys for the purpose of confirming the believers” (Tenney, pp. 307-308).

Paul reminded the elders from Ephesus that he held nothing back as he preached to them in public and in their private homes (Acts 20:20). The *King James Version* says

“from house to house.” Some false churches have used this as their basis for preaching door-to-door to those not of their faith. Paul did not go door-to-door to unbelievers. He preached to unbelievers in public places—the synagogues, the riverside at Philippi, the lecture hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus. But church services and Bible studies were conducted in the *brethren’s* homes.

Paul continued his talk with the Ephesian elders: “I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit has warned me that prison and troubles wait for me... And now I know that none of you will ever see me again... Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock which the Holy Spirit has placed in your charge. Be shepherds of the Church of God, which he has made his own through the death of his own Son. For I know that after I leave, fierce wolves will come among you, and they will not spare the flock. And the time will come when some men from your own group will tell lies to lead the believers after them. Watch then, and remember that with many tears, day and night, I taught every one of you three years.

“And now I place you in the care of God and the message of his grace... I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that with these hands of mine I have worked and have provided everything that my companions and I have needed. I have shown you in all things that by working hard in this way we must help the weak, remembering the words that the Lord Jesus himself said, ‘there is more happiness in giving than in receiving’” (vv. 23, 25, 28-32, 33-35).

When Paul finished, he and the elders knelt and prayed together. There was not a dry eye among the elders as they hugged Paul and kissed him good-bye. They were especially sad that they would not see him again. So they walked him to his ship and gave last farewells (Ch. 20:36-21:1).

Paul Returns to Jerusalem

The ship sailed south from Miletus, around the tip of the mainland and past the island

of Cos, a six-hour journey (JFB, p. 1124).

The next day the ship passed between the island of Rhodes and the mainland of Asia. This island was some 50 miles south-east of Cos.

From Rhodes the ship sailed 70 miles due east to Patara where Paul and his companions disembarked.

Patara was a seaport on the southwest shore of the province of Lycia, not far from the left bank of the Xanthus River. The coast around Patara was “very mountainous and bold.” The city served as the seaport for the city of Xanthus, 10 miles upriver (“Patara,” Smith, p. 495). Patara also was the seat of the oracle of Apollo.

Paul and his party found another ship bound for Phoenicia and gained passage on it. The ship sailed by the southern coast of Cyprus—Paul could see it off the port side—and on to the city of Tyre. This leg of the journey was nearly 400 miles long. At Tyre the ship unloaded its cargo (Acts 21:3).

Tyre was a celebrated commercial city Phoenicia. Part of the city was built on an island, separated from the mainland by a strait half a mile wide. The island was the market of Tyre and “sat like a peddler spreading out his wares at a city gate.” The mainland was dressed with gardens and surrounded by strong fortresses (Stirling, p. 16).

Paul stayed with some brethren in Tyre for a week. By the power of the Holy Spirit, they told Paul not to go to Jerusalem. But when it came time to leave, Paul left. The brethren—including wives and children—went with Paul and his companions outside the city and prayed together on the beach. Then Paul and his party boarded the ship and the brethren went home (Acts 21:4-6).

Paul’s ship sailed 30 miles south down the Syrian coast and put in at Ptolemais. This city, now called Acre, has been called “The Key to Syria” because of its good approaches by land and sea. It stood in a commanding position on an outcrop of rock where a river

entered into a bay (Stirling, p. 16).

Paul’s party disembarked from the ship and stayed for a day with the brethren in that city (Acts 21:7).

The following day the group left Ptolemais and sailed 65 miles south to Caesarea. It had been about 20 years since Paul had first visited Caesarea. It was shortly after his conversion and return from Damascus that the brethren took Paul to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus (Acts 9:30).

Philip had preached the Gospel throughout Judea until he reached this magnificent port city (Acts 8:40). There he set up his headquarters and became known as Philip the Evangelist (Acts 21:8).

Paul and his companions stayed with Philip on this journey to Jerusalem. Philip had four unmarried daughters who were prophetesses.

The apostle’s party had been with Philip a few days when a prophet named Agabus arrived from Judea. He took Paul’s belt and tied up his own hands and feet with it. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Agabus then prophesied: “The owner of this belt will be tied up this way by the Jews in Jerusalem, and they will hand him over to the Gentiles.”

When the people heard this, they begged Paul not to go.

“What are you doing, crying like this and breaking my heart?” responded Paul. “I am ready not only to be tied up in Jerusalem but even to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus.” His companions could not dissuade him so they gave up and said, “May the Lord’s will be done.”

After spending some more time in Caesarea, the travelers got ready and left for Jerusalem. Some brethren from Caesarea went along and took them to house of the man they would stay with. His name was Mnason. He was a believer from the early days of the church (Acts 21:8-16).

Thus, with an ominous warning from Agabus, Paul’s third journey was completed.