

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE ONE

THE POSITION OF THE BOOK

Scripture Reading: Luke 24:44-49; Mark 16:15-16, 19-20; Matt.
28:18-20; Acts 1:1-2

With this message we begin the Life-study of the Acts of the Apostles. As we come to the book of Acts, we need to realize that both this book and the Gospel of Luke were written by the same person. Luke 1:3 says, "It seemed good to me also, having followed all things accurately from the first, to write to you a consecutive account, most excellent Theophilus." The first two verses of Acts indicate that this book is the continuation of Luke's Gospel: "The first account I made, O Theophilus, concerning all things which Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which He was taken up, having given command through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He chose."

AN EXTRACT OF THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Before we go further, let us review some of the things that were covered in the Life-study of Luke. In this Gospel we have the Man-Savior, and we see that our Redeemer, the Savior, is the God-man. Luke gives us a clear record not only of the Man-Savior's birth but also of His conception. Luke describes the Lord's conception, birth, youth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. Therefore, the Gospel of Luke has a broad span covering all the matters of the wonderful Person of the God-man from His conception to His ascension.

We may say that the Man-Savior's conception was His coming down not only from the heavens but also from God the Father. Likewise, His ascension was His going back not only to the heavens but also to the Father. The Man-Savior's conception was His coming down to earth, and

His ascension was His going up to the heavens. By this coming and going the Lord Jesus became a wonderful Being. Through His conception and birth He became a Person who is both divine and human, both God the Creator and man, a creature. According to Luke 2:13 and 14, the angels exulted at the birth of the Man-Savior for our salvation. The angels praised God and said, "Glory in the highest places to God, and on earth peace among men of His good pleasure."

As such a wonderful Person, the Lord Jesus lived on earth as a man with all the human virtues expressing the divine attributes. This was the way He lived and ministered. Whatever He lived, He ministered, and He ministered what He lived even unto death. The Man-Savior suffered death, walking into, through, and out of death. After making a tour of death and Hades, He came forth in resurrection. On the one hand, the Lord raised Himself up; on the other hand, He was raised up by God. Therefore, He entered into resurrection, and in resurrection He ascended to the heavens. Now this One, the glorified Man-Savior, is in the heavens. This is a brief extract of the crucial contents of the Gospel of Luke.

THE LORD'S MINISTRY IN HIS ASCENSION

The Lord's ascension was not the end of His activity. Rather, the Man-Savior's ascension was another initiation. As we pointed out in the Life-study of Luke, Christ's ascension was His inauguration, His initiation, into His heavenly ministry. The Lord's conception was His first initiation, and His ascension was another initiation. His conception was the initiation of His life and ministry on earth; His ascension was the initiation of His living and ministry in the heavens. Hence, Christ's ascension was not the termination of His activity; instead, it was His initiation into further activity--His ministry in the heavens.

The first book written by Luke, his Gospel, describes the Lord's first initiation and His life and ministry on earth. Now there is the need of the second book, the book of Acts, to tell us into what kind of living and ministry the Lord has

been initiated through His ascension. Therefore, Luke had the burden to write a second book to unveil the living and ministry of the ascended Christ. In Acts we see how the Lord lives and ministers in His ascension.

We would emphasize the fact that, according to the Gospel of Luke, the Lord lived on earth. That life and ministry were initiated by His conception and concluded by His resurrection. Then after His resurrection the Lord Jesus ascended to the heavens. This ascension was not a termination but another initiation. This initiation brought Him into a new realm, that is, into the heavens, where He now has another living with another ministry. This living and ministry are carried out not by the Jesus who was merely conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin and born in Bethlehem; it is carried out by the ascended Christ. The resurrected and ascended Christ is now living in the heavens and ministering there. The Lord's living and ministry in the heavens are the content of the book of Acts. May we all be impressed with this picture at the outset of this Life-study of Acts.

THE POSITION OF THE BOOK OF ACTS IN THE SCRIPTURES

My burden in this message is to point out the position of the book of Acts in the arrangement of the contents of the Scriptures. We need to ask this question: where does the book of Acts stand among all the books of the Bible? The book of Acts is between the four Gospels and the Epistles, which include the book of Revelation. Hence, the book of Acts is a dividing line. Before Acts, we have the four Gospels as the continuation of the Old Testament. After Acts we have the Epistles with the book of Revelation as a conclusion.

The book of Acts can be compared to the backbone in the human body. The backbone divides the human body into two parts, the right side and the left side. Many problems in the body are caused by weakness in the backbone. If a person's backbone is weak, he cannot be strong. We may say that the book of Acts is the backbone

of the New Testament dividing it into two parts: (1) the Gospels and (2) the Epistles with the book of Revelation.

When some hear us say that the book of Acts is the dividing line and "backbone" of the New Testament, they may say, "In the past you divided the books of the New Testament in a different way. Now you are arranging the New Testament books in another way." We should not be bothered by this, since there are many different ways of dividing, or arranging, the books of the Bible. We should not be limited to one way. The present way of dividing the New Testament books emphasizes the crucial importance of the book of Acts in the New Testament.

The four Gospels speak of the Lord Jesus on earth. But where is Christ in the book of Acts? In this book Christ is in the heavens. Acts does not unveil to us a Christ on earth; it reveals a Christ who is in the heavens. Concerning the Lord's ascension, we do well to consider the following stanzas from *Hymns*, #132:

Lo! in heaven Jesus sitting,
Christ the Lord is there enthroned;
As the man by God exalted,
With God's glory He is crowned.
He hath put on human nature,
Died according to God's plan,
Resurrected with a body,
And ascended as a man.
God in Him on earth was humbled,
God with man was domiciled;
Man in Him in heav'n exalted,
Man with God is reconciled.
Lo! a man is now in heaven
As the Lord of all enthroned;
This is Jesus Christ our Savior,
With God's glory ever crowned!

How wonderful that Christ is now in heaven as the Lord of all enthroned! In Him God on earth was humbled, but now, also in Him, man is exalted in heaven. This is the Christ revealed in the book of Acts, the book that stands between the Gospels and the Epistles.

THE REVELATION OF CHRIST IN THE GOSPELS

In the Gospels we have the unveiling of a wonderful Person. This Person is the eternal God, the One called by the name Jehovah in the Old Testament. He is the Creator of the entire universe and of man. In Genesis 3:15 He prophesied that one day He would become a seed of woman. That promise went unfulfilled until the expiration of the first four thousand years of human history. Then the Lord Jesus came as the seed of the woman. He came as the very God conceived in the womb of a human virgin. We all need to realize this, and we have emphasized this in the Life-study of Luke.

The almighty God, the eternal Jehovah, the Creator of the universe, was conceived in the womb of a virgin and was born of that virgin to be a Person with two natures--the divine nature and the human nature. This means that He was born as the God-man, the One who is both the complete God and a perfect man. In Him we see God with His divine nature and attributes. In Him we also see man in the human nature and with all the human virtues. Therefore, in this one Person we can see both the complete God and a perfect man.

As the God-man, the Lord Jesus lived a life that was the life of a man. However, this man lived by God and with God. We may even say that He lived God; He expressed God in His humanity. In the book of Luke we see a man living on earth full of the human virtues, yet He expressed the divine nature with the divine attributes. With this One God was expressed in a human being, for the life He lived was the mingling of divinity and humanity. His life was a blending of God with man.

No one before the Lord Jesus had ever lived such a life. This kind of life had never been in existence. Therefore, the Lord's life was unique. In this life we see the blending, the mingling, of God and man. The Lord Jesus lived this kind of life, and in this life He ministered. Actually, His ministry was simply His living. His living was His ministry to accomplish what had been prophesied and typified concerning Him in the Old Testament.

Having lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years, the Lord Jesus knew that it was necessary for Him to go to Mount Moriah and accomplish His all-inclusive death. The Lord did not die an ordinary death; on the contrary, He died an extraordinary death. This extraordinary death was all-inclusive, and it accomplished everything God required to clear up the universe, terminate the old creation, and bring the old creation with Him into His tomb. Therefore, the entire universe was buried with Christ in the tomb.

After terminating the old creation, the Lord, on the one hand, rested in the tomb. On the other hand, while He was resting in His fleshly body, He was working in His spirit in Hades (1 Pet. 3:18-20). In Hades He proclaimed God's victory over His enemy, Satan. Then, after accomplishing in full God's purpose through His all-inclusive death, Christ walked out of death and rose up from the tomb. In this way He became the resurrected Savior and Redeemer. Furthermore, in His resurrection He became the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). As we have pointed out in the past, the Lord has shown us from the Word that this life-giving Spirit is the ultimate consummation of the Triune God reaching His redeemed people. In His resurrection Christ became such a One.

In John 20 we see that in His resurrection Christ as the life-giving Spirit, the ultimate consummation of the Triune God reaching His redeemed people, came back to His disciples in an excellent and mysterious way to breathe Himself into them. The Lord breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). These disciples were the representatives of the Lord's Body. Into these representatives He entered as the life-giving Spirit.

On another occasion the resurrected Christ told the disciples, "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you, stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Then "He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came about that while He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:50-51). Before His ascension to the heavens, the Lord

charged His disciples, who had already received Him as the life-giving Spirit within them as life essentially, to wait until, after His ascension, He would pour Himself out upon them as the all-inclusive Spirit economically.

ON THE THRONE ECONOMICALLY AND IN THE BELIEVERS ESSENTIALLY

In a brief way we have presented the complete revelation of Christ in the four Gospels. We need to see such a view in our spirit. We need to see that Jesus Christ was prophesied and typified in the Old Testament, that He was conceived in the womb of a virgin, that He was born of a virgin to become the God-man, that He lived a life of expressing the divine attributes in His human virtues, that He passed through death and entered into resurrection, becoming the reaching Spirit, and that in resurrection He breathed Himself into His disciples as the life-giving Spirit. Then, having charged them to wait for Him to pour Himself out upon them economically as the Spirit from the throne of God, He ascended to the heavens.

We have seen that the Lord Jesus was conceived, that He was born and lived on earth, that He died and resurrected, and that now in His ascension He is in the heavens. It is impossible to describe this wonderful One with a few sentences. We need a great many words to portray the One who is now on the throne in the heavens.

Different terms are needed to describe the ascended God-man. He is the eternal God, Jehovah, and He is the almighty Creator of the entire universe. One day He was conceived in a virgin's womb and born of her to become the God-man. Then He lived on earth a life that was the mingling of God with man. After accomplishing eternal redemption, He came forth out of death, and in resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit. In His resurrection He breathed Himself into His disciples essentially. Then economically He ascended into the heavens. Therefore, economically the Lord Jesus is now in the heavens as the glorified One, and essentially He is in

His disciples as their life. Hallelujah for the One who is both within His disciples essentially and on the throne in the heavens economically! May we all have such a view of our wonderful Savior.

Where is Christ today? The way to answer this question is to say, "Essentially Christ is in us, and economically He is on the throne in the heavens. Our Savior is the essential One and also the economical One."

Many of today's Christians do not realize that our Savior is both the essential One and the economical One. As the essential One, He dwells within us. But as the economical One, He is sitting in heaven. We have quoted the line of the hymn that says, "Lo! in heaven Jesus sitting." The Lord Jesus is sitting in heaven not essentially but economically. Simultaneously, He is within us essentially. How wonderful! This is the revelation that precedes the book of Acts.

We need to see this revelation as we come to Acts. This means that as we study Acts we need to have the view of the Lord Jesus as the One who is on the throne economically and within us essentially.

Following Acts we have the Epistles. If we would understand the Epistles, we must have a thorough study of the book of Acts. If we do not have the proper understanding of Acts, we shall not be able to understand the Epistles adequately. Many readers of the New Testament do not have the right understanding of the Epistles, because they do not have a clear vision concerning Acts. Therefore, we look to the Lord to open this book to us and give us a clear view of what is revealed in it.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE TWO

THE SUBJECT OF THE BOOK

Scripture Reading: Luke 24:44-49; Mark 16:15-16, 19-20; Matt.
28:18-20; Acts 1:1-2

In the foregoing message we pointed out that the book of Acts may be considered the dividing line, or the "backbone," of the New Testament. This book divides the four Gospels from the Epistles, which include the book of Revelation. The Gospels present a completed Redeemer and His accomplished redemption. In Acts we have the propagation of the completed Redeemer and His accomplished redemption for the producing of the churches. Then in the Epistles we have the edifying of the believers and the building up of the churches.

THE PROPAGATION OF THE RESURRECTED CHRIST

Having seen the position of the book of Acts, let us now go on to see the subject of this book. The subject of Acts is the propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension, by the Spirit, through the disciples, for the producing of the churches--the kingdom of God. Acts is concerned with the propagation of the resurrected Christ. Christ is carrying out this propagation in His ascension, by the Spirit, and through the disciples. The purpose of Christ's propagation is the producing of the churches--the kingdom of God.

In Acts there is not a single verse that can be taken as a summary of the entire book. The best way to present a summary, or extract, of Acts is to describe its subject. Therefore, once again I would point out that the subject of the book of Acts concerns the propagation of the resurrected Christ. It is of great value for us to have such a phrase as "the propagation of the resurrected Christ." I do not know of any book on Acts that uses the word

"propagation." Nevertheless, the subject of Acts is the propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension, by the Spirit, through the disciples, for the producing of the churches--the kingdom of God.

The propagation in Acts is not the propagation of Jesus. In Acts we do not have the propagation merely of the One who lived in the home of a carpenter in Nazareth. Rather, in Acts we see the propagation of the resurrected One, the propagation of the resurrected Christ.

CHRIST'S ACTIVITY IN HIS ASCENSION

The propagation of the resurrected Christ is carried out by Christ in His ascension. The Lord Jesus lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years, but now He is in ascension. In His ascension the Lord is very active. We should never think that the ascended Christ is sitting passively on the throne, observing the pitiful situation on earth and feeling disappointed about it. No, in His ascension Christ is active in a very positive way. As the ascended One, He is now doing many things.

The case of the stoning of Stephen is an illustration of Christ's activity in His ascension. Speaking of Stephen, Acts 7:55 and 56 say, "Being full of the Holy Spirit, looking intently into heaven, he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." As the Lord was looking at the situation on earth in His ascension, He stood up. Perhaps He was saying, "You persecutors may stone Stephen and put him to death. But I will gain one of you--Saul of Tarsus--and make him much stronger than Stephen. What can you do about this? You do your stoning, and I do My observing. Wait for a period of time, and you will be defeated." Stephen's case illustrates that the resurrected Christ is very active in His ascension.

The fact that Christ is now in ascension means not only that He is in the heavens; it also means that He has power and authority. In His ascension Christ has all the power and all the authority in the universe. According to

Matthew 28:18, the resurrected Christ said to His disciples, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Therefore, with such authority and power in His ascension the Lord is very active. What is He doing? The Lord, as the ascended One, is carrying out His universal and eternal propagation.

Who can explain why the earth today is filled with Christians? Why are there so many believers in the world? Great men have tried to gain control of the earth, but they have failed. Hitler, for example, tried to do this, but eventually he lost everything. Napoleon, after he had been defeated, reportedly looked up to the heavens and confessed that Jesus had beaten him. Napoleon admitted that even though the Lord Jesus did not fight, He gained everything. The point here is that the whole earth is in the hands of the undefeatable One, and this One is carrying out His propagation.

As the ascended Christ is carrying out His propagation, His main work is not fighting. Instead of fighting, the ascended Lord's work is mainly propagating Himself throughout the earth. In the Lord's recovery we have people of different colors: black, white, brown, yellow, and red. We all are part of Christ's propagation. We have been produced by the resurrected Christ in His ascension.

PRODUCING THE CHURCHES--THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Propagation is a matter of production. To propagate, therefore, is to produce. The propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension produces the churches. The churches are the produce of the resurrected Christ in His ascension. Hence, the churches are the produce of Christ's propagation. The first mention of the word "church" in Acts is in 5:11. Thereafter, this book speaks of the church many times (8:1, 3; 9:31; 11:22, 26; 12:1, 5; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3, 4, 22, 41; 16:5; 18:22; 20:17, 28).

The churches produced by the resurrected Christ in His ascension are the kingdom of God. Concerning the kingdom, we should not follow the teachings of those who claim that the kingdom of God is not present today. According to such

teachings, the kingdom has been suspended and will come after the church age. In the book of Acts we see that the churches and the kingdom of God go together. In fact, the churches actually are the kingdom of God. In Acts the kingdom of God is first mentioned in 1:3, and then in a number of other verses (8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

By now we should be impressed with the subject of the book of Acts, a book that stands as the backbone of the New Testament. Acts unveils Christ in His ascension propagating Himself to produce the churches, which are the kingdom of God on earth today. Following the book of Acts, we have the Epistles. The Epistles, as the continuation of Acts, edify the saints so that the churches may be fully built up as the Body of Christ. The consummation of this edifying and building up will be the New Jerusalem. If we see the place occupied by the book of Acts in the New Testament, we shall realize that this book, the backbone of the New Testament, stands in a crucial position.

A WORK IN ASCENSION

We have emphasized the fact that the subject of Acts is the propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension, by the Spirit, through the disciples, for the producing of the churches--the kingdom of God. We have seen something concerning the propagation of the resurrected Christ (2:24; 3:15; 5:30; 13:33). Now we need to see that this propagation is carried out by the Lord from the throne in the heavens. This means that His work of propagation is in ascension. However, much of today's so-called Christian work is not a work in ascension. We hope that the work in the Lord's recovery will be in His ascension. The ascension is the nature and the sphere of the Lord's work on earth. Therefore, the work of the Lord today should have a heavenly nature and should be in a heavenly sphere.

It is in His ascension that Christ is propagating Himself. We know that His ascension came after His death and resurrection. Christ's work in His ascension takes place in the nature of His resurrection. Therefore, this

work is not natural; it does not have anything of the natural man. Rather, it is of the divine life in resurrection, and it is carried out in the atmosphere and condition of His ascension. Where are we working today? We all should be able to say that we are working in Christ's ascension.

BY THE SPIRIT

The propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension is by the Spirit. His propagation is not by any gimmick or human technique. But consider the situation among Christians today concerning the propagation of Christ. Where is the propagation by the Spirit? In many instances, there is very little of the Spirit but much use of human methods and techniques. For example, some even use rock music in their preaching of the gospel. We need to realize that the propagation of the resurrected Christ is by the Spirit, in particular, the economical Spirit. In the book of Acts we see the economical Spirit for the carrying out of Christ's propagation.

THROUGH THE DISCIPLES

Christ's propagation is through the disciples. Who are the disciples? As we shall see, the disciples are not merely preachers, and in Acts they are not called preachers. Rather, the disciples are witnesses. The Lord's disciples in Acts are witnesses of a wonderful Person, the One who was conceived of God the Spirit, who was born of a human virgin, who lived on earth and ministered, who entered into death and conquered it, and who came out of the tomb in resurrection, becoming the life-giving Spirit. This resurrected One has ascended into the heavens, where He is sitting on the throne. As He is sitting there, He is very active and aggressive in doing the work of propagation. The disciples are witnesses of such a One. This was the reason the Lord said concerning them, "You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the remotest part of the earth" (1:8).

FOR THE PRODUCING OF THE CHURCHES

Through His witnesses the resurrected Christ in His

ascension propagates Himself for the producing of the churches. This indicates that the churches should not be raised up and established merely by human hands. Every local church should be produced by Christ's propagation. Every local church must be born of Christ, brought forth by Christ's propagation in His divine and resurrected life.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The churches produced by Christ's propagation are the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a sphere of life produced by the propagation of Christ. Actually the kingdom is the expansion of this resurrected, propagating One. The resurrected Christ, who is propagating Himself in His ascension, by the Spirit, and through the disciples, is the reality of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is His expansion.

We may use the kingdom of man, the human kingdom, for an illustration of the kingdom of God as the expansion of Christ. In the beginning, there was just one man, Adam. Then Adam began to expand, to increase. The kingdom of man was a couple, and then this couple brought forth children. In this way the kingdom of man expanded from one man to a family. Now the entire human race is part of the kingdom of man. The kingdom of man is simply mankind as the expansion of the man, Adam. From this we see that the kingdom of man is man's expansion.

What is the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is the expansion of God, whose embodiment is Christ. This expansion of Christ is the churches. The churches are the expansion of Christ as the One who came to sow Himself as the seed of the kingdom of God. This is revealed in the four Gospels. In the Gospels Christ was the seed of the kingdom. In the book of Acts we have the propagation of this seed to produce the churches as the kingdom of God.

Can you say how many chapters are in the book of Acts? Perhaps you would say that Acts has twenty-eight chapters. This, of course, is correct. However, it is also true to say that the book of Acts is still being written because the propagation of the resurrected Christ is still taking place.

By now Acts may have thousands of chapters. Even today a portion of a chapter may have been written. This writing is the propagation of the resurrected Christ, and this propagation is the expansion of Christ to be the kingdom of God. We in the churches are the propagation of Christ and the expansion of Christ, and we are enlarging the kingdom of God.

I hope that we all shall be able to say from memory the subject of the book of Acts: the propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension, by the Spirit, through the disciples, for the producing of the churches--the kingdom of God. Here three words are synonyms: propagation, churches, and kingdom. The kingdom is the churches, and the churches are the propagation of Christ.

The more we are impressed with the subject of Acts, the more we shall say, "Lord, we worship You as the resurrected One and the ascended One. We praise You for Your propagation. We thank You. Lord, that we are Your propagation today. We thank You that we are with You in the heavens and that the churches are the kingdom of God." Let us declare to the whole universe that the Lord Jesus is now in the heavens, and that as the exalted One He is now propagating Himself on earth through us as His witnesses.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE THREE

INTRODUCTION AND THE PREPARATION

(1)

Scripture Reading: Acts 1:1-26

The book of Acts has three main sections: the introduction (1:1-2), the preparation (1:3-26), and the propagation (2:1--28:31). The introduction is very brief, consisting of only two verses, and the preparation covers the remainder of chapter one. The section concerned with the propagation covers chapter two through twenty-eight. This section may be the longest section in all of the sixty-six books of the Bible. In this message we shall consider the introduction of Acts, and then go on to consider the preparation. In the introduction this book is presented to us. As we shall see, the preparation involves something both on the Lord's side and on the side of His disciples.

INTRODUCTION

By Luke

Acts 1:1 and 2 say, "The first account I made, O Theophilus, concerning all things which Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which He was taken up, having given command through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He chose." In verse 1 "I" refers to Luke, the writer of the book of Acts. The early church recognized Luke as the author both of the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:3) and Acts. Luke's authorship is evident from the style of composition of the two books. Luke was a Gentile (Col. 4:14), and probably an Asiatic Greek, and a physician. Starting in Troas, he joined Paul in his ministry and accompanied him in his last three ministry journeys (Acts

16:10-17; 20:5--21:18; 27:1--28:15). He was a faithful companion of Paul until his martyrdom (Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11).

To Theophilus

Both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were written to a person named Theophilus. This name in Greek means "loved by God," or "friend of God." Theophilus was probably a Gentile believer who occupied some official position under the Roman Empire.

The Continuation of the Gospel of Luke

Acts is the continuation of the Gospel of Luke. This can be proved by comparing 1:1-2 with Luke 1:1-4. The words "first account" in Acts 1:1 refer to the Gospel of Luke as a "consecutive account" (Luke 1:3) written to Theophilus by Luke.

Acts 1:2 says that the Lord Jesus gave "command through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He chose." The resurrected Christ has become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), yet still in resurrection He did things through the Holy Spirit (John 20:22).

THE PREPARATION

The Lord's Training of His Disciples

As we have pointed out, 1:3-26 is concerned with preparation, a preparation both on the Lord's side and the side of the disciples. In this section of Acts we see Christ's preparation of the disciples in His resurrection (vv. 3-8). He speaks to them things concerning the kingdom of God (v. 3) and charges them to wait for the baptism in the Holy Spirit (vv. 4-8). After Christ's ascension in verses 9 through 11, we have the disciples' preparation (vv. 12-26). The disciples persevered in prayer (vv. 12-14) and then chose Matthias (vv. 15-26).

Before the Lord went to the heavens to carry out His propagation in His ascension, He did something further to

prepare His disciples. Although they had been with Him for three and a half years, they still had not yet been fully prepared. From this we see that we can not do a quick work to perfect the saints in the Lord's recovery.

We may say that the three and a half years the Lord Jesus spent with His disciples were nearly the equivalent of a college education, which usually lasts four years. Perhaps you are wondering about the last half year of the "college course" for the Lord's disciples. This last half year took place after His resurrection.

Throughout the centuries, people have learned that in order for a person to be educated properly, he needs to pass through kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school, high school, and four years of college. All the years from kindergarten through high school are a preparation for the college years. We may apply this principle to the Bible and find in the Scriptures various levels of spiritual education. In the Old Testament we go from "kindergarten" in Genesis to "high school" in the Psalms and the Prophets. In between, we have the "elementary school" beginning in Exodus, and "junior high" in the historical books. Coming to the New Testament, we may say that the Gospels are on a "college" level and that the Epistles are on the level of "graduate school."

The Lord Jesus spent three and a half years with the disciples to give them a "college education." Although Peter, Andrew, James, and John were fishermen, the Lord's calling uplifted them and made them "college students." Gamaliel, however, remained in the Old Testament "high school." As both "professor" and "chancellor," the Lord Jesus first spent three and a half years with His "students." The remainder of their "education" was completed in His resurrection. This means that the Lord was able to carry out three and a half years of education with His disciples when He was in the flesh. Then in His resurrection He completed their training.

Our Need of Heavenly Enlightenment

We need to read the Bible again and again. This means

that we need to know the written Word and be filled with it. Then we need to pray, "Lord, show me what You intend to speak in all the books of the New Testament." If you pray like this, light will gradually come.

In order to have a more accurate understanding of the words in the New Testament, it is helpful to learn Greek. However, we should not think that to know the Bible it is sufficient to have an excellent knowledge of Greek. Someone may have a thorough knowledge of every word in the Greek New Testament, but still be spiritually blind and not know anything of what is revealed in the New Testament. Even if we have the knowledge of Greek, we still need heavenly enlightenment in order to see the divine revelation in the New Testament.

Today we are fighting against spiritual blindness. Many have doctoral degrees in Greek, but, spiritually speaking, they are utterly blind. They know the Greek New Testament in the way of scholarship, but they do not know what the Lord is speaking in the New Testament. No matter how many degrees we may have or how great our scholarship may be, we still need to humble ourselves and say, "Lord, I do not know anything. I am nothing, Lord. Show me Your revelation." If you pray like this, the Lord's revelation will come to you.

The Case of Peter

In the Gospels the Lord Jesus spent three and a half years with His disciples. During those years He was very patient with them. We may say that the Lord was "playing heavenly music" to His disciples; however, they were not able to appreciate it. We see this especially in the case of Peter.

Full of patience and sympathy, the Lord Jesus did what He could with Peter. In Matthew 16 Peter received a heavenly vision and declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). The Lord answered and said to him, "You are blessed, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in

the heavens" (v. 17). After the Lord spoke about the church and the kingdom, He went on to "show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised on the third day" (v. 21). But Peter began to rebuke Him saying, "God be merciful to You, Lord; this shall by no means happen to You!" (v. 22). The Lord then turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men" (v. 23).

We may feel sympathy for Peter as we read the account in Matthew 16. Although Peter was pitiful, the Lord Jesus did not let him go. Peter was not a "dropout" from the Lord's "college." As the chancellor of this college, the Lord Jesus patiently kept Peter with Him.

The Lord Jesus was patient even when Peter denied Him. On the night the Lord Jesus was betrayed, Peter said to Him, "If all shall be stumbled in You, I will never be stumbled" (Matt. 26:33). The Lord said to him, "Truly I say to you, that this night, before a cock crows, you will deny Me three times" (v. 34). Later Peter did deny the Lord three times. Nevertheless, the Lord was not disappointed, for Peter's experience was part of the "college course."

Eventually, Peter received the understanding of the heavenly music the Lord Jesus was "playing." He received this understanding, not during the three and a half years he was with the Lord, but after the Lord had been transfigured from the flesh into the Spirit. When He was in the flesh, He was not altogether successful in teaching Peter, because He was not able to enter into him. He had, of course, a way to correct and adjust Peter, but no way to regenerate and recreate him and dwell in him. In other words, with Peter and the other disciples, the Lord Jesus did not have a way in His flesh to propagate Himself. For the Lord to propagate Himself is for Him to impart Himself into others as life.

The Resurrected Christ Breathing Himself into the Disciples

The Lord Jesus knew when He was taking His disciples through their "college course" that it was necessary for

Him to enter into them. Of course, as long as He was in the flesh, He was unable to be in the disciples. Therefore, in the Gospel of John He indicated to them that it was expedient for them that He die and then be resurrected. In resurrection He would then be able to enter into the disciples as life and remain in them as their person and thereby propagate Himself.

After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus came back to the disciples as the life-giving Spirit and breathed Himself into them (John 20:22). Instead of teaching the disciples or giving them a lecture, He breathed Himself into them. That was the initiation of the last part of their four-year "college course." The Lord's breathing of Himself into the disciples was His propagation of Himself in them as life.

Appearing to the Disciples for a Period of Forty Days

After the Lord breathed Himself into the disciples, He stayed with them economically for forty days. Concerning this, Acts 1:3 says, "To whom also He presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs, through a period of forty days, appearing to them and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God." The Lord's presenting Himself alive was for the purpose of training the disciples to practice and enjoy His invisible presence. In the Gospel of John there is no word or hint indicating that the Lord left the disciples after breathing Himself into them. Actually He stayed with them, although they were unconscious of His presence. The Lord's further appearing to them was His manifestation. Before His death the Lord's presence was visible in the flesh. After His resurrection, His presence was invisible in the Spirit. His manifestations, or appearings, after His resurrection were to train the disciples to realize, enjoy, and practice His invisible presence, which is more available, prevailing, precious, rich, and real than His visible presence. The Lord's invisible presence is just the

Spirit in His resurrection, whom He breathed into the disciples and who would be with them all the time.

After the Lord breathed Himself into the disciples, He never left them essentially. However, economically He would appear and then disappear. The Lord appeared and disappeared economically in order to train the disciples, to finish the last half year of their education. Regarding this, we should not speak of His going and coming but of His appearing and disappearing.

For a period of forty days the Lord Jesus appeared to the disciples. In the Bible forty days are a period of trial and testing. We know from the Old Testament that forty days were a time of testing and suffering (Deut. 9:9, 18; 1 Kings 19:8). When the Lord Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil, He fasted forty days and forty nights (Matt. 4:1-2). Also, the children of Israel were tested, educated, by God in the wilderness for forty years. Forty, therefore, is the number of testing, proving, trying, educating. In Acts 1 the Lord appeared and disappeared during a period of forty days in order to test and train His disciples.

From the time He breathed Himself as the Spirit into the disciples on the day of His resurrection, the resurrected Christ dwelt in them. His appearing spoken of in Acts 1:3 does not mean that He ever left the disciples. It simply means that He made His presence visible to them, training them to realize and enjoy continually His invisible presence.

The disciples had become accustomed to the visible presence of Christ. For three and a half years He had been with them visibly in the flesh. They saw Him, touched Him, and ate with Him. One of them even reclined on His bosom (John 13:23). Suddenly His visible presence was taken away. Then the Lord came back to the disciples to breathe Himself into them. From that time onward the Lord's presence with the disciples became invisible. It was no longer a physical presence but a spiritual presence.

Although the Lord's spiritual presence is invisible, it is more real and vital than His visible presence. The Lord's

visible presence involved the elements of space and time. But with His invisible presence there is neither the element of space nor the element of time. His invisible presence is everywhere. Wherever we are, the Lord's invisible presence is with us. Actually, His invisible presence is not merely with us--it is within us. When the Lord was with the disciples in the flesh, His presence with them was outward and visible. But after He breathed Himself into them as the life-giving Spirit, His presence became inward and invisible.

Because the disciples were not used to the Lord's invisible presence, the Lord stayed with them economically for forty days, appearing and disappearing. In this way He trained them to practice and enjoy His invisible presence.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FOUR

INTRODUCTION AND THE PREPARATION

(2)

Scripture Reading: Acts 1:1-26

We have seen that 1:1-2 is the introduction to the book of Acts. Then in 1:3-26 we have the preparation both on the Lord's side and on the side of His disciples. In this message we shall continue to consider Christ's preparation of the disciples in His resurrection.

SPEAKING TO THE DISCIPLES CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Acts 1:3 says, "To whom also He presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs, through a period of forty days, appearing to them and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God." Here we see that for a period of forty days the Lord spoke to the disciples concerning the kingdom of God. What did the Lord say about the kingdom during that time? Luke does not tell us. Instead of giving us a full record of what the Lord taught the disciples concerning the kingdom, Luke simply says that He spoke to them about the kingdom of God for forty days.

Although we are not told in Acts what the Lord spoke concerning the kingdom, we may infer what He said by considering other portions of the Word. In the Gospels the Lord Jesus taught the disciples a lot concerning the kingdom. I doubt that during the forty days after His resurrection, He gave the disciples something new concerning the kingdom. Rather, I believe that the Lord repeated what He taught them in the Gospels. When the Lord spoke regarding the kingdom in the Gospels, the disciples were not able to understand what the Lord as

their "professor" was teaching them. Therefore, I believe that the Lord Jesus repeated His teaching in the forty days between His resurrection and His ascension.

If we want to know, at least by way of inference, what the Lord taught the disciples concerning the kingdom in those forty days, we need to read again all He said about the kingdom in the Gospels. It is likely that the teaching during those forty days was the same as that recorded in the Gospels.

The Need for Spiritual Insight

When the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples about the kingdom before His death and resurrection, He was not yet in them, for He was still in the flesh. Because the Lord was not in the disciples at that time, they did not have the spiritual insight to understand the kingdom of God.

Knowing the kingdom of God requires spiritual perception, spiritual insight. Without spiritual insight, it is impossible for us to know the kingdom of God. Those who are lacking in spiritual perception may think that to enter into the kingdom of God is to go to heaven. In general, this is the natural concept of fallen mankind concerning God's kingdom.

In the Gospels the disciples did not have the insight to understand the kingdom of God. But in John 20 they received the wonderful Person of the resurrected Christ into them as the life-giving Spirit. As a result, in Acts 1 they were very different. On the one hand, they were the same people; on the other hand, they were different because Christ, the life-giving Spirit, was now within them as their life and person. Because they had the life-giving Spirit within them, they were able to understand the Lord's speaking concerning the kingdom of God.

A Kingdom of the Divine Life

At this point we need to ask an important question: What is the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is not a material kingdom visible to human sight; the kingdom of

God is a kingdom of the divine life. The kingdom of God is the spreading of Christ as life into His believers to form a realm in which God rules in His life. The fact that the kingdom is mentioned in 1:3 indicates that it will be the main subject of the apostles' preaching in their coming commission after Pentecost (8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

The kingdom of God is the ruling, the reigning, of God with all its blessing and enjoyment. It is the goal of the gospel of God and of Jesus Christ. To enter into this kingdom people need to repent of their sins and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:15) so that their sins may be forgiven and that they may be regenerated by God to have the divine life, which matches the divine nature of this kingdom (John 3:3, 5).

All the believers in Christ can share the kingdom in the church age for their enjoyment of God in His righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). It will become the kingdom of Christ and of God for the overcoming believers to inherit and enjoy in the coming kingdom age (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5), so that they may reign with Christ one thousand years (Rev. 20:4, 6). Then, as the eternal kingdom, it will be an eternal blessing of God's eternal life for all of God's redeemed to enjoy in the new heaven and new earth for eternity (Rev. 21:1-4; 22:1-5, 14, 17).

The kingdom of God is the reality of the church brought forth by the resurrection life of Christ through the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). Regeneration is its entrance (John 3:5), and the growth of the divine life within the believers is its development (2 Pet. 1:3-11).

The kingdom of God is the Savior Himself (Luke 17:21) as the seed of life sown into His believers, God's chosen people (Mark 4:3, 26), and developing into a realm which God may rule as His kingdom in His divine life. We have seen that the entrance into the kingdom is regeneration and that the development of the kingdom is the believer's growth in the divine life. The kingdom of God is the church life today, in which the faithful believers live (Rom.

14:17), and it will develop into the coming kingdom as an inheritance reward (Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5) to the overcoming saints in the millennium. Eventually, it will consummate in the New Jerusalem as the eternal kingdom of God and the eternal realm of the eternal blessing of God's eternal life for all God's redeemed to enjoy in the new heaven and new earth for eternity.

We have pointed out that the kingdom of God is a kingdom of the divine life. We may use the human kingdom as an illustration. Just as mankind is a kingdom of the human life, so the kingdom of God is a kingdom of the divine life. If we were not human beings, we could not understand the kingdom of human life. Dogs, for example, cannot understand the human kingdom, because they do not have a human life. But if a dog could receive the human life, it would then be able to understand the human kingdom. In a similar way, we know the kingdom of God by the divine life because God's kingdom is a kingdom of the divine life.

The Spreading of Christ as Life

As those who have received the divine life, we not only know what the kingdom of God is; we become parts of this kingdom. If a dog could be born of the human life and thereby become a human being, this human being would automatically become a part of the human kingdom. Do you not have the divine life? Yes, you have the divine life, and because you have this life you are part of the kingdom of God. Although we can understand these matters, it is impossible to explain them to unregenerated people.

The kingdom of God is the spreading of Christ as life to His believers. This spreading is the propagation of Christ as life to His believers to form a realm in which God rules in His life. In His preparation of the disciples, the Lord Jesus must have helped them to have the proper realization concerning the kingdom of God. The disciples must have begun to see that they were part of the propagation, the spreading, of Christ, and thereby were part of the kingdom of God.

CHARGING THE DISCIPLES TO WAIT FOR THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER

In Acts 1:4-8 the Lord Jesus charged the disciples to wait for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Verse 4 says, "And meeting together with them, He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father which, He said, You heard from Me." The promise here and in Luke 24:49 is different from the promise in John 14:17. The promise in Acts 1:4 and Luke 24:49 is the promise of Joel 2:28-29, fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4, 16-18), for the outpouring as the power from on high for the believers' ministry economically. This is different from the Spirit of life, who was breathed into the disciples (John 20:22) by the resurrected Savior on the day of resurrection for His indwelling so that He might be life to them essentially. The promise of the Lord in John 14:17 was fulfilled on the day of His resurrection, when the Spirit was breathed into the disciples as the breath of life. However, the promise of the Father in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4 was fulfilled forty days later, on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit as the mighty wind blew upon the disciples.

It is important that we differentiate the promise given by the Lord in John 14:17 from that given by the Father in Joel 2:28 and 29. Many Bible readers mix these two promises together. The promise given by God the Father in Joel 2 and then mentioned by the Lord Jesus in Luke 24 and Acts 1 has nothing to do with the promise given by the Lord in John 14. In Acts 1:4 the Lord Jesus seems to be saying, "I have told you about the promise of My Father. Now you must wait in Jerusalem for the fulfillment of this promise."

In Acts 1:5 the Lord went on to say, "For John indeed baptized in water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now." This was to be accomplished in two sections. First, the Jewish believers were baptized in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (2:4). Second, the Gentile believers were baptized in the house of Cornelius (10:44-47; 11:15-17). In these two sections all genuine believers in Christ have been baptized

in the Holy Spirit into one Body once for all universally (1 Cor. 12:13).

THE DISCIPLES' QUESTION CONCERNING THE RESTORATION OF THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

Verse 6 says, "So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, Lord, are You at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?" The kingdom of Israel, for which the apostles and other devout Jews were looking, was a material kingdom. This kingdom differs from God's kingdom of life, which Christ is building up through the preaching of His gospel.

In asking the question recorded in verse 6, the disciples apparently were forgetting the divine life that was within them. Their concept was related to the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. This traditional concept was in the minds of all Jews. Peter, John, James, and the other disciples had the concept that the kingdom of Israel would be restored. Day by day they were hoping for the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. However, in 1:3 we are told that the Lord spoke to them not about the kingdom of Israel but about the kingdom of God.

Although the Lord spoke to His disciples concerning the kingdom of God over a period of forty days, they may have been concerned more for the kingdom of Israel than for the kingdom of God. Their hearts may have been occupied with the kingdom of Israel. The Lord also spoke to them about the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Both the kingdom of God and the baptism in the Holy Spirit are matters relating to the New Testament economy. However, as indicated by their question in verse 6, the disciples even then may not have had a proper understanding of these things.

In response to the question raised by the disciples, the Lord Jesus said, "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father has placed in His own authority" (v. 7). Here the Lord seems to be saying, "Leave the restoration of the kingdom of Israel to God's

sovereignty. Forget about the kingdom of Israel, and receive My word concerning the kingdom of God and the baptism in the Holy Spirit."

THE HOLY SPIRIT UPON US

In 1:8 the Lord went on to say, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the remotest part of the earth." To receive power is to be baptized in the Holy Spirit (v. 5) for the fulfillment of the promise of the Father (v. 4).

To have the Holy Spirit upon us is different from having the Holy Spirit in us (John 14:17). The Holy Spirit was breathed into the disciples on the day of the Lord's resurrection to be the Spirit of life to them essentially. The same Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost to be the Spirit of power economically. As for the Spirit of life, we need to breathe Him in as the breath. As for the Spirit of power, we need to put Him on as the uniform, typified by the mantle of Elijah (2 Kings 2:9, 13-15). The former as the water of life requires our drinking (John 7:37-39); the latter as the water for baptism requires our being immersed. These are the two aspects of the one Spirit for our experience (1 Cor. 12:13). The indwelling of the Spirit of life is essential for our life and living; the outpouring of the Spirit of power is economical for our ministry and work.

WITNESSES OF CHRIST

Literally, the Greek word for "witnesses" in Acts 1:8 means "martyrs." Witnesses are those who bear a living testimony of the resurrected and ascended Christ in life. They differ from preachers who merely preach doctrines in letters.

In His incarnation Christ carried out His ministry on the earth, as recorded in the Gospels, by Himself to sow Himself as the seed of the kingdom of God only in the Jewish land. In His ascension He carries out His ministry in the heavens, as recorded in Acts, through these

witnesses, these martyrs, in His resurrection life and with His ascension power and authority to spread Himself as the development of the kingdom of God from Jerusalem, as a start, unto the remotest part of the earth, as the consummation of His ministry in the New Testament. All the apostles and disciples in Acts were His martyrs, His witnesses, of this kind.

THE DISCIPLES' NEED OF A DISPENSATIONAL TRANSFER

In verse 8 the Lord was indicating to His disciples that they should care for the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them and then be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and unto the remotest part of the earth. The disciples, however, were occupied with the traditional concept concerning Israel, Moses, and keeping the law. Here, in a brief way, the Lord was telling them that they needed a great transfer, a dispensational transfer. He seemed to be telling them, "You disciples need to be transferred dispensationally. You need to be transferred economically from the Old Testament to the New Testament, from the kingdom of Israel to the kingdom of God, which is the church. Forget Israel and take care of the church. You also need a transfer from the law to Christ, that is, to Me. Instead of Moses and the law, you have Me. You should no longer be keepers of the law; now you should be living witnesses of Me, living witnesses of the resurrected Christ. I am the One speaking to you, not Moses. Is the law with you in such a living way as I am? I am here as the living One, the resurrected One. You were with Me for three and a half years. Then you saw My death and My burial. You even saw My empty tomb, and then you saw Me in resurrection. Right now I am here with you in resurrection. Forget about Moses and the law. Do not be keepers of the law--be My living witnesses."

The disciples may have had difficulty understanding their need of a dispensational transfer. Many Christians have a problem with this today. When they read this portion of the Word, they do not see the matter of the

economical transfer. Many of us also need such a transfer. Although you may have been saved for years, have you ever considered how to be a living witness of Christ? I doubt that many believers have thought about this. Instead, many try to keep the commandments in the New Testament. They desire to be commandment keepers as the lawkeepers, but they may not have the concept that they should be witnesses of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, they need a dispensational transfer.

Although we are New Testament people, we still may have an Old Testament concept. We need to be transferred out of the Old Testament concept into the New Testament economy. This means that we need a transfer out of the law and into Christ. We need a transfer from being lawkeepers to being Jesus-witnesses. I hope that the Spirit of revelation will show you that you need such a transfer. The Lord's word indicating the need of a dispensational transfer was also part of His preparation of His disciples.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FIVE

INTRODUCTION AND THE PREPARATION

(3)

Scripture Reading: Acts 1:1-26

Acts 1:3-26 is a section concerned with preparation. As we have seen, in 1:3-8 we have Christ's preparation of the disciples in His resurrection. Now we shall go on to consider Christ's ascension (vv. 9-11) and the disciples' preparation (vv. 12-26).

CHRIST'S ASCENSION

Acts 1:9 says, "And when He had said these things, while they were looking, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him up out of their sight." Luke's Gospel ends with the Lord's ascension into heaven (Luke 24:51), and his Acts begins with it. His Gospel is a narrative of the ministry of the incarnated Jesus on earth. His Acts is a record of the succeeding ministry of the resurrected and ascended Christ in heaven carried out through His believers on earth. In the Gospels, the Lord's ministry on earth, carried out by Himself, only sowed Himself as the seed of the kingdom of God into His believers, with no church built up yet. In Acts, the Lord's ministry in heaven, carried out through His believers in His resurrection and ascension, spreads Him as the development of the kingdom of God for the building up of the church (Matt. 16:18) throughout the entire world to constitute His Body, His fullness (Eph. 1:23), to express Him, even the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19) for God's expression.

Acts 1:10 and 11 say, "And as they were looking intently into heaven as He went, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them, who also said, Men, Galileans,

why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you beheld Him going into heaven." The Lord's ascension points to His coming back. Between His ascension and His coming back there is the dispensation of grace so that He as the pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), may apply His all-inclusive redemption to God's chosen people for their full salvation, that He may produce and build up the church, as His Body, for the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

The vision of Christ's ascension into heaven strengthened the disciples' faith in Him and in what He had done for them through His death and resurrection. It broadened their view of God's heavenly economy, which had brought them into cooperation with Christ's ministry in the heavens for the carrying out of God's New Testament economy on the earth.

After the Lord Jesus had spoken to His disciples for a period of forty days concerning the kingdom of God, He was taken up from them visibly. He ascended physically right before their eyes. We may say that this too was part of the Lord's "education" of the disciples.

The disciples must have been deeply impressed and very excited when they witnessed Christ's ascension. As they were watching Him ascend, they certainly were not weeping. On the contrary, they must have been happy, realizing that they were seeing something marvelous.

As the disciples were looking intently into heaven, two men in white clothing stood beside them. These two men, who were actually angels, asked the disciples why they were standing looking into heaven. Then they went on to say that the very Jesus who was taken up from them into heaven would come in the same way as they had seen Him going into heaven. This indicates that just as the Lord Jesus ascended physically, He will also come back physically. Christ ascended into heaven by way of a cloud, visible to human sight, and He will come back on a cloud (Matt. 24:30). Furthermore, He ascended from the top of Mount Olivet (Acts 1:12), and He will come back to the

same mount (Zech. 14:4). We definitely believe that in His coming back the Lord Jesus will set His feet on Mount Olivet.

THE DISCIPLES' PREPARATION

Returning to Jerusalem

After witnessing the Lord's ascension, the disciples "returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away" (v. 12). The disciples returned to Jerusalem to keep the Lord's words in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4, so that they might receive the Spirit of power economically as promised by the Father. They were all Galileans (v. 11). For them to stay in Jerusalem, especially under the threatening of the Jewish leaders, meant that they were risking their lives.

Verse 12 says that Jerusalem was a Sabbath day's journey away from Mount Olivet. According to Jewish tradition, a Sabbath day's journey equaled approximately three-quarters of a mile.

Persevering in Prayer

Acts 1:13 and 14 say, "And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room where they were residing, both Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. These all were persevering with one accord in prayer, together with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." Mary is mentioned here for the last time in the New Testament.

Before the Lord's death, the disciples had no interest in prayer for spiritual things (Luke 22:40, 45-46). Rather, they contended among themselves as to which was considered to be greater (Luke 22:24). But now, after the Lord's resurrection and ascension, their spiritual condition radically changed. They did not contend among themselves, but were burdened to pray perseveringly with one accord, even before the day of Pentecost, when they would receive the outpoured Spirit of power economically (Acts 2). This is a strong sign and proof that they had

received the indwelling Spirit of life essentially on the day of the Lord's resurrection (John 20:22). This is also evidence that they had been strengthened in God's New Testament economy by the vision of the Lord's ascension.

We are told in 1:14 that the disciples, together with the women, Mary, and the Lord's brothers, persevered with one accord in prayer. The Greek words rendered "with one accord" may also be translated "with one mind."

The disciples might have prayed to be clothed with the Spirit of power, the promise of the Father, for which the Lord had charged them to remain in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4), and for the commission given to them by the Lord in Luke 24:47 and 48 and Acts 1:8 to bear His testimony to the remotest part of the earth.

God wanted to pour out His Spirit for the carrying out of His New Testament economy, and He had promised to do this. Yet He needed His chosen people to pray for it. As God in heaven, He needs men on earth to cooperate with Him for the carrying out of His plan. The one hundred twenty disciples praying for ten days met this need of God.

The disciples must have been very happy and excited as they gathered together to pray in the upper room. We may infer that, as they persevered in prayer, they prayed for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. I believe that during those ten days they prayed for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The resurrected Christ had come back to the disciples and had breathed Himself into them as the life-giving Spirit to be their life and person. Then for a period of forty days spent with the disciples the resurrected Christ kept appearing and disappearing. During those days He taught them concerning the kingdom of God. Then He ascended to the heavens in a visible way. By that time the Lord had completed the education and preparation of His disciples. His ascension marked the completion of the disciples' "four year course" in the "divine university."

As one who had completed this course, Peter was now another person. As we shall see, in Acts 1 he was able to

understand and interpret the prophecy in the Old Testament concerning Judas and to teach others according to the Scripture. Was Peter like this in the Gospels? Certainly not. But in Acts 1 Peter is very different from what he was in the Gospels, because the resurrected Christ had come into him to be his life and person.

It was a great matter for the one hundred and twenty to pray in one accord for ten days. They were able to pray in one accord for such a long time because they had Christ within them as their life and person. Furthermore, they were Galileans staying in Jerusalem, and they were under the threatening of the Jews, who were persecuting the followers of Jesus. Nevertheless, they were not afraid of the Jews' threatening, but stayed in Jerusalem and prayed in one accord. This certainly could not have been done by human effort. This was possible because the one hundred and twenty had experienced a change not so much economically as essentially. They had been transferred essentially from the old being into the new being. As a result of this transfer, they had Christ as their life and person and could pray in one accord and not be afraid of persecution.

Choosing Matthias

To Replace Judas as One of the Twelve Apostles

Acts 1:15 and 16 say, "And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers (and there was a crowd of persons gathered together, about a hundred and twenty) and said, Men, brothers, the Scripture must be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke before through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who seized Jesus." Before the Lord's death Peter often spoke nonsensically (Matt. 16:22-23; 17:24-26; 26:33-35), but after the Lord's resurrection he could expound the Old Testament prophecies properly in their right significance in verses 16 through 20. This also is proof that the disciples, before they received the Spirit of power economically on the day of Pentecost, had received the Spirit of life essentially on the day of the Lord's resurrection.

In 1:16 Peter used the expression, "men, brothers." This expression is more dignified and solemn than simply "brothers" (see 1:11; 2:22, 29; 3:12).

Speaking of Judas, Peter goes on to say in verse 17, "For he was numbered among us, and was allotted his portion of this ministry." This ministry, mentioned also in verse 25, is the ministry to bear the testimony of Jesus (v. 8). Though the apostles were twelve in number, their ministry was uniquely one--this ministry, a corporate ministry in the principle of the Body of Christ. All the apostles carried out the same ministry to bear the testimony not of any religion, doctrine, or practice, but uniquely of the incarnated, resurrected, and ascended Jesus Christ, the Lord of all.

To Be a Witness of Christ's Resurrection

After speaking further regarding the death of Judas and the prophecies concerning him, Peter went on to say, "It is necessary therefore that of the men who accompanied us in all the time in which the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when He was taken up from us, one of these should become a witness of His resurrection with us" (vv. 21-22). The Lord's resurrection is the focus of the apostles' testimony. It refers back to His incarnation, humanity, human living on earth, and God-ordained death (2:23), and points forward to His ascension, ministry and administration in heaven, and coming back. Thus the apostles' testimony of Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, is all-inclusive, as depicted in the whole book of Acts. They preached and ministered the all-inclusive Christ as revealed in the entire Scripture.

According to verse 23, two were proposed as replacements of Judas--Joseph who was called Barsabbas (who was surnamed Justus), and Matthias. The apostles then "prayed and said, You Lord, Knower of the hearts of all, show which one of these two You have chosen to take the place of this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place" (vv. 24-25). The

Greek words translated "Knower of the hearts of all" literally mean "Heart-knower of all." In verse 25 the Greek words translated "turned aside" may also be rendered "fell away."

After praying, "they gave lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (v. 26). Here we see that the apostles, after the Lord's ascension and before the day of Pentecost, were in a transitional period, as shown by their realization in seeking the Lord's guidance. They had received the indwelling Spirit on the day of the Lord's resurrection, and they were trained by the Lord to practice His invisible presence for forty days before His ascension (v. 3). Yet it was still difficult for them to drop the old traditional way of seeking God's leading by casting lots (Lev. 16:8; Josh. 14:2; 1 Sam. 14:41; Neh. 10:34; 11:1; Prov. 16:33). They were still not accustomed to the leading and guidance of the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8:14) as the Apostle Paul was later in 16:6-8. They were still in the initial stage of God's New Testament economy before the day of Pentecost.

In the New Testament economy there is no need to cast lots in order to have the Lord's guidance. The proper way is to follow the indwelling Christ, to follow the inner anointing. Although Christ had left the apostles economically, He was within them essentially. If in Acts 1 they had been accustomed to the essential presence of Christ within them, they would not have gone back to the old way of casting lots. The fact that they continued to follow the old way was a sign that even though they had the Lord within them essentially, they were used to the old habits.

Through the casting of lots, Matthias was chosen, and then he was added to the eleven to make the number complete. With the selection of Matthias, we have the completion of the disciples' preparation for the coming propagation.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SIX

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(1)

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:1-13

Having covered the introduction (1:1-2) and the preparation (1:3-26), we come now to the third section of the book of Acts, a very long portion that goes from 2:1 through 28:31. This section is concerned with propagation. We have seen that the subject of Acts is the propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension, by the Spirit, through the disciples, for the producing of the churches--the kingdom of God. The propagation of the resurrected Christ begins in Jerusalem and then spreads to Judea, Samaria, and the entire world. In chapter two we have the beginning of the propagation in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria through the ministry of Peter's company.

TWO COMPANIES OF MINISTRY

In Acts there are two companies of ministry: Peter's company and Paul's company. In chapters two through twelve we see the ministry carried out by Peter and his co-workers. Then in chapters thirteen through twenty-eight we see the ministry carried out by Paul and his co-workers. Both companies carried out the propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension.

THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The first thing that took place in this propagation was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This outpouring was the baptism in the Holy Spirit carried out by the heavenly Head upon His Body.

Concerning this matter of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, there are a number of different teachings. Throughout the centuries, these teachings have caused confusion among Christians. Therefore, regarding the baptism in the Holy Spirit we need to come back to the pure Word, set aside other teachings, and pay attention to the revelation in the holy Word of God.

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

The Fiftieth Day from the Lord's Resurrection

Acts 2:1 says, "And when the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled, they were all together in the same place." The word "Pentecost" means fiftieth. It was the fiftieth day from the Lord's resurrection, seven weeks in between, counting from the second day (the first day of the week-- Luke 23:54--24:1) after the Passover on which the Lord was crucified (John 19:14). It was the fulfillment of the feast of Weeks (Deut. 16:10), which was also called the feast of Harvest (Exo. 23:16), counting from the day of offering a sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath (Lev. 23:10-11, 15-16). The offering of a sheaf of the firstfruits was a type of the resurrected Christ offered to God on the day of His resurrection (John 20:17), which was the day after the Sabbath (John 20:1). From that day to the day of Pentecost was exactly fifty days.

The feast of Harvest typifies the enjoyment of the rich produce brought in by the resurrected Christ. This rich produce is the all-inclusive Spirit of the processed Triune God given by Him to His chosen people as the blessing of the gospel (Gal. 3:14) so that they may enjoy the all-inclusive Christ (the very embodiment of the Triune God) as their good land. This signifies that the believers, through receiving the bountiful Spirit on the day of Pentecost, not only have entered into the good land, but also have participated in the bountiful riches of the all-inclusive Christ (Eph. 3:8) in His resurrection and ascension as God's full allotment in His New Testament economy.

We have seen that Pentecost was the fiftieth day from the Lord's resurrection. The Lord's resurrection was three days after His death. However, these were not three full days as we count days. Regarding these three days, a small part of a day was counted as a whole day. This means that the first of the three days, a Friday, was the day on which the Lord Jesus was crucified. The Lord was on the cross from nine o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon. Then, in the evening, He was taken down from the cross and buried. According to the Jewish way of reckoning days, the remaining part of that day was counted as a whole day. Hence; the three days were counted from the last part of the first day. Furthermore, according to the Jewish way of counting days, a day began not in the morning but in the evening. For example, Genesis 1:5 says, "And the evening and the morning were the first day."

If we count part of a day as a whole day, then from the Friday evening when the Lord Jesus was buried to the morning of His resurrection would be three days. The last part of Friday is one day; the whole of Saturday is the second day; and part of what is today called Sunday is the third day. However, the actual time the Lord was in the tomb may be less than forty hours. In the early part of the third day, perhaps less than forty hours after He died, the Lord Jesus was resurrected.

The day of the Lord's resurrection, the Lord's Day, was the first day after the Sabbath. The Jewish Sabbath, of course, was on Saturday. The Lord was resurrected on the first day of the week, which was the day after the Sabbath. If we count from the second day after the Passover on which the Lord was crucified, Pentecost was the fiftieth day from His resurrection. Therefore, there were seven weeks in between the Lord's resurrection and Pentecost, which also was on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week.

The Fulfillment of the Feast of Harvest

Pentecost was the fulfillment of the feast of Weeks, and this feast was also called the feast of Harvest (Exo. 23:16).

Pentecost is very closely related to the harvest, to the reaping of the rich produce of the good land. Pentecost was fifty days after the offering of a sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest. Concerning the sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest, Leviticus 23:10 and 11 say, "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it." Then the people were to count seven Sabbaths from the day of the offering of the sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest: "And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days" (Lev. 23:15-16). According to Leviticus 23, a sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest was offered to the Lord as a wave offering on the morrow after the Sabbath. That sheaf of the firstfruits was a type of Christ as the firstfruit in resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). In the Old Testament, when the harvest was ripe, a sheaf of the firstfruits of that harvest was offered to God. This sheaf is a type of the resurrected Christ offered to God on the day of His resurrection.

The offering of Christ as the firstfruit in resurrection involves His secret ascension to the Father. When Mary wanted to touch Him, He said to her, "Do not touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God" (John 20:17). On the day of His resurrection the Lord ascended to the Father. This was a secret ascension, forty days prior to His public ascension in the sight of His disciples. On the day of resurrection, early in the morning, He ascended to satisfy the Father. The freshness of His resurrection was first for the Father's enjoyment, as the firstfruit of the harvest was brought first to God in type.

Many Christians do not realize that Christ secretly ascended to the Father early in the morning on the day of His resurrection. Of course, He ascended openly forty days later. On the day of His resurrection the Lord went to the heavens to offer Himself as the firstfruit of God's harvest for the satisfaction of God the Father. That was a secret ascension. The day of Pentecost was fifty days later.

The Enjoyment of the Riches of the Resurrected Christ

As we have pointed out, the feast of Pentecost was the fulfillment of the feast of Weeks, which was also called the feast of Harvest. The feast of Harvest typifies the enjoyment of the rich produce brought in by the resurrected Christ. Not many readers of the Bible pay adequate attention to the fact that Pentecost actually refers to the harvest and that the harvest typifies the enjoyment of all the riches of the resurrected Christ. This rich produce is actually the all-inclusive Spirit.

Do you know what happened on the day of Pentecost? On that day there was the outpouring of the all-inclusive Spirit. This Spirit is the rich produce of the processed Triune God given by Him to His chosen people as the blessing of the gospel. Concerning this, Galatians 3:14 says, "In order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the nations in Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." This indicates that the unique blessing of the gospel is not heaven or even the forgiveness of sins; the unique blessing of the gospel is the Spirit, even the all-inclusive Spirit of the processed Triune God. This Spirit as the blessing of the gospel is given to us so that we may enjoy the all-inclusive Christ, who is the embodiment of the Triune God, as our good land.

In typology we have both the feast of Passover and the feast of Pentecost, called the feast of Weeks and also the feast of Harvest. The feast of Harvest typifies the enjoyment of Christ in His resurrection, whereas the Passover typifies Christ as the Lamb of God in His

crucifixion. The Passover, therefore, refers to the crucifixion of Christ. Christ's crucifixion has become a feast, called the feast of Passover. In this feast we enjoy Christ in His crucifixion as the redeeming Lamb. Three days after His crucifixion, Christ rose up from among the dead. Fifty days later, the ascended Christ poured Himself out upon His believers as the all-inclusive Spirit, that is, as the ultimate consummation of the Triune God. That pouring out of the Spirit is the enjoyment of the harvest.

In the Old Testament we have the Passover, the offering of a sheaf of the firstfruit of the harvest, and then the feast of Harvest, Pentecost. On the Passover Christ was crucified for our redemption so that we might enjoy Him. Then, three days later, on the day of His resurrection, He offered Himself to God as the firstfruit. The reason He did not want Mary to touch Him was that He was going to the Father to offer Himself in the freshness of His resurrection for the Father's enjoyment. On the day of His resurrection the Lord went to the heavens and also appeared to the disciples in the evening. After revealing Himself to the disciples, He breathed Himself into them as the life-giving Spirit.

On the day of Christ's resurrection there was the fulfillment of the type of the firstfruit of the harvest. Then fifty days later, on the day of Pentecost, there was the enjoyment of the harvest of the rich produce of the good land. That was a type of Christ becoming the full enjoyment to His redeemed people as the life-giving Spirit poured out upon them from the heavens. Through the outpouring of the Spirit, God's people may enjoy the all-inclusive Christ as their good land. Their receiving of the bountiful Spirit on the day of Pentecost indicates not only that they have entered into the good land, but also that they participate in the bountiful riches of the all-inclusive Christ in His resurrection and ascension as God's full allotment in His New Testament economy.

Exodus 23:19a says, "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God." We have seen that the sheaf of the firstfruit typifies

Christ in His resurrection. As the firstfruit, Christ is new and fresh. On the morning of His resurrection, He intended to go directly to the Father and present Himself to the Father as the firstfruit. However, He was detained by Mary, who enjoyed Him as the "sheaf" in resurrection. Even before God the Father enjoyed the resurrected Christ, Mary had some enjoyment of Him in this way.

Enjoying Christ as the Firstfruit and as the Harvest

We need to be impressed with the fact that regarding Christ's ascension there is a secret aspect and also an open aspect. Christ's secret ascension took place on the morning of the day of His resurrection. His open ascension took place forty days later, when He ascended in the sight of His disciples from Mount Olivet. Christ's secret ascension was for the presenting of Himself to the Father as the firstfruit in His resurrection. Later on the same day He came back to the disciples and breathed Himself into them. In this way they participated in the enjoyment of Christ as the sheaf of the firstfruit of the harvest.

After enjoying Christ as the firstfruit, the disciples went on to enjoy Him as the harvest on the day of Pentecost. To enjoy the essential Spirit is to have the enjoyment as the sheaf of the firstfruit. But to enjoy the economical Spirit is to have the enjoyment of Christ as the harvest in an open, public way.

We should not neglect the enjoyment of Christ as the harvest. Some may want to be like Mary, who met with the Lord on the morning of His resurrection, or at least like the disciples, who met with Him in the evening. We all need the full enjoyment of Christ as the feast of Harvest.

The enjoyment of Christ did not become full until He, as the Head of the church, poured Himself out upon His Body as the economical Spirit. Through this outpouring on the day of Pentecost, the enjoyment of Christ became full. This full enjoyment of Christ as the harvest is actually the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit as the consummation of the

processed Triune God reaching us. Furthermore, as mentioned in Galatians 3:14, this Spirit is the blessing of the gospel.

In Philippians 1:19 Paul speaks of the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The supply we receive as the firstfruit of the harvest is fresh, but it is not bountiful. Only when we have the harvest do we have the bountiful supply. This means that not until the Spirit was poured out economically upon the Body of Christ did the Lord's people have the full enjoyment of Christ. When the economical Spirit was poured out upon the Body of Christ on the day of Pentecost, the enjoyment of Christ became bountiful. Now the supply is the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and this Spirit is the blessing of the gospel. The blessing of the gospel is actually the Triune God processed to become the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit reaching all the believers. This is the bountiful enjoyment of Christ in His ascension.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SEVEN

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(2)

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:1-13

In 2:1-13 we see the Jewish believers' baptism in the Holy Spirit. Verses 1 through 4 are concerned with the economical filling of the Holy Spirit. In this message we shall pay particular attention to these four verses.

THE ESSENTIAL SPIRIT AND THE ECONOMICAL SPIRIT

Acts 2:1 and 2 say, "And when the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled, they were all together in the same place. And suddenly there came a noise out of heaven like a rushing violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting." In the Lord's resurrection, the Spirit of resurrection life is likened to breath, breathed into the disciples (John 20:22) for their spiritual being and living essentially. In the Lord's ascension, the Spirit of ascension power, poured upon the disciples, is symbolized here by the wind for the disciples' ministry and move economically. The essential Spirit of resurrection life is for the believers to live Christ; the economical Spirit of ascension power is for them to carry out His commission.

We need to see clearly the difference between the breathing in John 20 and the blowing in Acts 2. The breathing in John 20 is for the imparting of the life-giving Spirit into the disciples essentially for their spiritual being and for their spiritual living. But the blowing in Acts 2 is for the pouring out of the economical Spirit of

power upon the believers, who have already received the essential Spirit into them. The pouring out of the Spirit of power is not for the believers spiritual being or living; rather, the outpouring of the Spirit of power is for the believers' ministry and move. Therefore, the essential aspect of the Spirit is for living, and the economical aspect is for ministry. It is important for us to differentiate these two aspects of the Spirit, for then we shall understand the Gospels and Acts in the right way. Otherwise, we shall be confused.

Many years ago, a certain highly respected minister said that the breathing in John 20 was not a fact but was merely a performance that indicated that the fact was yet to come in Acts 2. According to his understanding, after the performance in John 20, it was necessary for the disciples to wait fifty days to receive the fact. In the view of this minister, both John 20 and Acts 2 refer to the same thing, the difference being that one describes a performance and the other describes a fact. This concept is altogether wrong. As we have pointed out, there is a difference between the breathing in John 20 and the blowing in Acts 2. Breathing is for life, but blowing is for power.

In the Gospel of John the Spirit of life in resurrection is likened to water for us to drink. John 4:14 says, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a spring of water welling up into eternal life." John 7:37-39 says, "Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were about to receive." In Luke 24:49 the economical Spirit is likened to clothing that we put on: "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you, stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Water is for life inwardly, and clothing is for work outwardly.

Let us use a policeman as an illustration of the difference between the essential Spirit for life inwardly and the economical Spirit for power outwardly. A policeman does not put on his uniform in order to quench his thirst. Thirst cannot be quenched by putting on a uniform. A policeman clothes himself with a uniform when he is about to go on duty, that is, when he is ready to work as a policeman. Suppose a policeman drank something to quench his thirst and then went to work without his uniform. If he did this, no one would pay attention to him as he tried to give orders on the street. No matter how much he may drink to quench his thirst, a policeman still must put on his uniform when he is about to work as a policeman. If he is clothed in his uniform, others will respect him. Through this illustration we can see the difference between drinking and being clothed. Drinking is inward, but being clothed is an outward matter.

It is a serious mistake to say, as did that minister years ago, that the breathing in John 20 is a performance and the blowing in Acts 2 is a fact. This kind of interpretation comes from the shortage of proper knowledge and leads to confusion. The proper knowledge we need requires not only the study of the Scriptures but also heavenly enlightenment along with adequate experience. It is not accurate to say that in John 20 Peter did not receive the Spirit of life into him. The Lord's breathing in that chapter was certainly not a performance. According to John 20:22, the Lord Jesus "breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit." This is not a performance--it is an accomplished fact. Here we have the fact of the breathing of the life-giving Spirit into the disciples on the day of Christ's resurrection.

The divine breath in John 20:22 is the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is the ultimate consummation of the processed Triune God reaching His redeemed people. In particular, this reaching took place in John 20.

THE TRIUNE GOD BECOMING THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT

The New Testament reveals that the Triune God

became incarnate. The Triune God was manifested in the flesh. This means that the One who was incarnated was the complete God, the Triune God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, not merely the Son. To say that the complete God was manifested in the flesh means that the complete God was incarnated. The Triune God became a man, lived on earth, ministered, entered into death, conquering and subduing death, and came forth from death in resurrection. In resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit. Therefore, the Triune God, who became incarnated, who lived on earth, and who entered into death and came out of death in resurrection, has become the life-giving Spirit.

John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh," and 1 Corinthians 15:45b says, "The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit." The "flesh" in John 1:14 is "the last Adam" in 1 Corinthians 15:45. Now the last Adam has become the life-giving Spirit, and this Spirit is the transfiguration of the incarnated Christ.

We need to realize who it was who became incarnate. The incarnated One was the Triune God to be a man as the last Adam, and this last Adam in resurrection has become the life-giving Spirit. Therefore, on the day of His resurrection, He appeared to His disciples, breathed upon them, and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Who is this Spirit? This Spirit is the ultimate consummation of the processed Triune God reaching His redeemed people.

We all need to see the vision of the Triune God becoming the last Adam, and the last Adam becoming the life-giving Spirit as the consummation of the processed Triune God reaching us. Concerning this, we do not care for councils, creeds, or traditional theology. We care only for the pure Word of God. The Word reveals that the Triune God became the last Adam, and this last Adam became the life-giving Spirit. Praise the Lord that the processed Triune God has reached us as the life-giving Spirit! On the day of the Lord's resurrection, the processed Triune God as the life-giving Spirit was breathed into the disciples.

CLOTHED WITH POWER FROM ON HIGH

Fifty days later, on the day of Pentecost, something further happened. On that day the ascended Christ poured Himself out as the Spirit economically upon the disciples to be their power, authority, and uniform. A policeman in uniform has authority. No matter how powerful your car may be, you still must obey the policeman's authority. His uniform is a sign of his authority. On the day of Pentecost the one hundred and twenty were clothed with the economical Spirit as their heavenly uniform.

In Luke 24:49 the Lord told the disciples to wait until they were clothed with power from on high. When they were clothed with power on the day of Pentecost, Peter stood up to speak with authority and power, and the people were subdued. Peter could speak with authority because he was clothed with a heavenly uniform.

We should not take any inaccurate teachings concerning the Holy Spirit in John 20 and Acts 2. We praise the Lord for the breathing of the Spirit in John 20 and for the blowing of the Spirit in Acts 2. The breathing is for life, and the blowing is for move. Furthermore, the breathing gives us inner strength, and the blowing gives us outer authority. Through the breathing and the blowing we are fully equipped.

AN ACCOMPLISHED FACT

Just as the crucifixion is an accomplished fact, so the breathing of the Spirit of life and the blowing of the Spirit of power are also accomplished facts. We should simply believe the report and take the facts. Where is the report? The report is in the Bible. What are the facts? The facts are that the Lord has breathed the Spirit of life into His believers and has blown His Spirit of power upon them.

When some hear about believing the report and taking the facts concerning the essential and economical aspects of the Spirit, they may say, "I don't feel that the Spirit of life has been breathed into me, and I don't feel that the Spirit of power is upon me." If someone said this to me, I would reply, "Do you not believe that the Lord Jesus died

for you? Certainly you do, even without feeling anything. You believe it because the Bible tells you so. Likewise, you need to believe that the Lord Jesus has breathed Himself as the Spirit of life into the disciples, including you. You also need to believe that the Lord Jesus has blown Himself as the Spirit of power upon us all."

Let us all believe the facts of Christ's breathing and blowing, just as we believe the fact of His crucifixion. Do we have the Spirit of life essentially? Yes, we have the Spirit of life. How do we know? We know it because the Bible tells us so. Do we also have the Spirit of power upon us economically? Yes, we have the Spirit of power upon us. How do we know? We know this as a fact because the Bible tells us so. Praise the Lord for His crucifixion, His breathing, and His blowing! Praise Him that we know these facts because the Bible tells us so!

THE OUTWARD FILLING OF THE OUTPOURED SPIRIT

Acts 2:2 says that the wind filled the house where the one hundred twenty were sitting. The Greek word for "filled" here is *pleroo*, a word that means to fill inwardly, as the wind filled the house.

Verses 3 and 4 say, "And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which were divided and sat on each one of them; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in different tongues, even as the Spirit gave them to speak out." The Greek word for "filled" in verse 4 is *pletho* (also used in 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9; and Luke 1:15, 41, 67). This Greek word means to fill outwardly. According to its usage in Acts, *pleroo* denotes to fill a vessel within, as the wind filled the house inwardly in verse 2; and *pletho* denotes to fill the persons outwardly, as the Spirit filled the disciples outwardly in this verse. The disciples were filled (*pleroo*) inwardly and essentially with the Spirit (13:52) for their Christian living, and they were filled (*pletho*) outwardly and economically with the Spirit for their Christian ministry. The inward filling Spirit, the essential Spirit, is in the disciples (John 14:17; Rom. 8:11),

whereas the outward filling Spirit, the economical Spirit, is upon them (Acts 1:8; 2:17).

Every believer in Christ should experience both aspects of the Holy Spirit. Even Christ as a man experienced the same thing. He was born of the Holy Spirit essentially (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18, 20) for His being and living, and He was anointed with the Holy Spirit economically (Matt. 3:16; Luke 4:18) for His ministry and move. The essential Spirit was within Him, and the economical Spirit was upon Him.

THE JEWISH BELIEVERS' BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

The outward filling of the poured-out Spirit was the ascended Head's baptizing His Body into the Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, the Jewish believers, the first part of His Body, were baptized; and in the house of Cornelius, the Gentile believers, the second part of His Body, were baptized in the same way (10:44-47). By these two steps He baptized once for all His entire Body into the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), who is the application and realization of Himself. It was to baptize His Body into Himself that He baptized it into the Spirit. This was the accomplishment of the baptism in the Holy Spirit promised by Christ, the Head of the Body, in Acts 1:5.

I encourage you to study carefully this matter of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In 2:1-13 we see the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples economically. That was the step of baptizing the Jewish believers in the Holy Spirit. Later, in the house of Cornelius, Christ baptized the Gentile believers in the Holy Spirit. Through these two steps Christ, the Head, has baptized His entire Body in the Holy Spirit once for all.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE EIGHT

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(3)

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:1-13

In this message we shall consider the matter of speaking in tongues. The fulfillment of Joel's prophecy on the day of Pentecost implies tongue-speaking.

A SYMBOL OF SPEAKING

Acts 2:3 says, "And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which were divided and sat on each one of them." Here "tongues" are a symbol of speaking, symbolizing that God's economical Spirit of power is mostly for speaking. He is the speaking Spirit.

Verse 3 says that tongues as of fire sat on each of the one hundred and twenty. In this verse "fire" symbolizes burning power for purging and motivating in God's economical move. The fact that the verb "sat" is singular indicates that one tongue sat on each one of them.

ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 2:4 says, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in different tongues, even as the Spirit gave them to speak out." Here "all" modifies only "filled" in the first clause, not "began to speak" in the second clause. The word "all" cannot be used as evidence that all the disciples who were filled with the Holy Spirit began to speak in tongues.

Not All Speaking in Tongues

We need to read verse 4 carefully, paying attention to the punctuation. Notice that there is a comma after "Holy Spirit." This verse says, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in different tongues, even as the Spirit gave them to speak out." The comma after "Holy Spirit" may help us to see that "all" does not modify both "filled" and "began to speak." Here we have two predicates: "were filled" and "began to speak." We need to have the discernment to know whether the modifier "all" modifies both predicates or only the first predicate. If it modifies both predicates, then verse 4 is saying that all spoke in tongues. But if it modifies only the first predicate, then this verse is saying that all were filled with the Holy Spirit, but not all spoke in tongues. If Luke's meaning is that all spoke in tongues, he should have used the word "all" a second time, before the word "began."

According to grammar, verse 4 is not saying that all were filled with the Holy Spirit and that all began to speak in different tongues. For example, suppose we said, "All the saints came into the meeting, and they began to pray." Does this mean that everyone prayed? No, this is not the meaning. Likewise, verse 4 is not saying that all those who were filled with the Holy Spirit spoke in tongues.

Those who promote today's tongue-speaking may insist that "all" in 2:4 modifies the second predicate as well as the first. Then they may go on to use this verse as a basis for claiming that on the day of Pentecost each of the one hundred and twenty spoke in tongues. However, after spending much time in studying this verse, I have the assurance to say that "all" does not modify the second predicate. On the contrary, this word indicates only that all of the one hundred and twenty were filled with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, verse 4 does not indicate that they all spoke in tongues.

An Understandable Language

The "tongues" spoken in 2:4 were dialects (vv. 6,8). The disciples were Galileans (v. 7), yet they spoke the different

foreign dialects of the attendants who came from various parts of the world. This is strong proof that tongue-speaking must be an understandable language, not merely a voice or sound uttered by the tongue. The Greek word rendered "speak out" in verse 4 is "a peculiar word, and purposely chosen to denote the clear, loud utterance" (Vincent).

We have pointed out that the tongues in verse 4 were dialects. Concerning this, verses 6 through 8 say, "Now there were Jews dwelling in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together and were confounded, because each one heard them speaking in his own dialect. And they were all amazed and marveled, saying, Look, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own dialect in which we were born?" The Jews in verse 5 were devout Jews who came from their dispersion to Jerusalem to keep the feast of Pentecost. Verse 10 speaks of proselytes, Gentiles who were converted to Judaism (6:5; 13:43). The word "dialect" in verses 6 and 8 is synonymous with "tongues" in verse 4.

According to verse 11, the people exclaimed, "We hear them speaking in our own tongues the great things of God." The Greek word for "tongues" here is *glossa*. In this chapter *glossa* is used for two things: the speaking organ (v. 3) and dialects (vv. 4, 11), referring to the dialects in verses 6 and 8. This evidence affords no ground to say that tongue-speaking may be merely a voice or sound uttered by the tongue, the speaking organ. Rather, tongue-speaking must be a dialect, because what the disciples spoke in tongues were all different dialects. In this sense, tongues and dialects are synonyms, interchangeably used in these verses.

Those who promote tongue-speaking may insist that it is not necessary for the tongue that is spoken to be an understandable human language. They may claim that to speak in tongues is simply to utter some kind of sound. Promoters of tongue-speaking need to say this because much of today's so-called tongues are not dialects but

meaningless sounds. However, the tongues spoken on the day of Pentecost were a miracle caused by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Galileans who spoke in tongues on the day of Pentecost did not speak with a Galilean accent. "Each one heard them speaking in his own dialect." Although the tongues spoken on the day of Pentecost were dialects, it is not likely that you will hear any dialects spoken by today's tongue-speakers in meetings held for that purpose.

One day, in 1936, I had a talk with a leading Pentecostal missionary concerning these verses in Acts 2. Holding my Greek-English Interlinear New Testament in my hand, I pointed out to him that here *glossa* is used in two ways: to denote the tongue, the speaking organ, and to denote a dialect. He was not able to answer me, but instead patted me on the head and said, "Your head is too big."

Although I myself had practiced so-called tongue-speaking and had led others to do so, I dropped this practice after speaking with that missionary. I came to realize that much of what is called tongue-speaking is not the miraculous speaking of a dialect, but something humanly manufactured. The point we are emphasizing here is that the tongues spoken on the day of Pentecost were genuine dialects and not merely sounds uttered by the tongue.

SOME CASES RELATED TO TONGUE-SPEAKING

During the summer training in 1963, I asked a brother to read to the trainees an article from a certain charismatic magazine. The writer of that article said that he had contacted two hundred people who claimed to speak in tongues. Without exception, all of those two hundred doubted that the tongues they spoke were genuine. Then I asked the trainees if Peter and the others on the day of Pentecost had any doubt whether the tongues spoken by them were genuine. Certainly Peter and the others had no such doubts. However, the two hundred tongue-speakers mentioned in that magazine article had doubts because the tongues they spoke were not genuine.

Earlier in 1963 I was invited to speak at a certain

Christian group in San Diego. This group strongly emphasized tongue-speaking. In one of the meetings a woman gave a short word in tongues. Then a young man gave a long interpretation of that word. After the meeting, I asked the leader of the group if he thought that the interpretation of the woman's word in tongues was genuine. He told me that he doubted that the interpretation was genuine. Then I asked him why he engaged in such practices, since we have a rich Christ to minister to others. I said, "Brother, we have the all-inclusive Christ. Isn't it sufficient for us to preach Him?" He had nothing to say in response to my question.

While we were visiting there in San Diego, another leader in the group told us that he had been given the ability to speak Chinese. One day he uttered certain peculiar sounds, believing that he was speaking the Chinese language. I and another Chinese-speaking brother pointed out to him that we could not understand a word he said, even though I spoke Mandarin, the other brother spoke Cantonese, and we both had some understanding of other Chinese dialects. Nevertheless, this one who claimed that he could speak Chinese proceeded to utter some different sounds. We also had to tell him that we could not recognize those sounds as words in the Chinese language. When he heard this, he was disappointed. In his self-deception he thought that he was able to speak Chinese. But the Chinese he thought he was speaking was actually a self-made language. Such incidents are common in today's Pentecostalism.

Recently I learned of an article, written by a linguist, which points out that from ancient times until the present certain peoples have experienced utterances called "ecstatic phenomena." Since much of today's so-called tongue-speaking is not a genuine language, it also may be considered an ecstatic phenomenon.

Let me give you two further examples of tongue-speaking that is not genuine. In a meeting a woman gives a word in tongues. The interpretation goes like this: "My people, the time is short. I am

coming back quickly. Be watchful and pray." Then in another meeting on the same day the same woman gives another word in tongues. This second word in tongues is almost identical to the first. However, this time the interpretation goes, "My people, you are very loose and careless. I warn you that if you do not change, I will vomit you out of my mouth." Although the tongue-speaking in each case is almost exactly the same, the interpretation is very different. To be sure, these are not instances of genuine tongue-speaking.

Another case I would mention took place in Taiwan a few years ago. A Pentecostal group rented a large stadium for some meetings. That stadium can seat twelve thousand people, but only two or three thousand attended the meetings. As a result, this Pentecostal group did not have the funds to pay for the rental of the stadium. In a meeting of those people, someone spoke in tongues, and then the interpretation was given. The one who gave the interpretation said that the Lord wanted a certain woman among them, who was very wealthy, to pay the rent. Then this very woman spoke in tongues and interpreted what she had spoken. In her interpretation she claimed that the Lord had told her not to pay the rent. This is a further illustration that much of today's tongue-speaking is not genuine.

Some of those involved in so-called tongue-speaking have also given prophecies that have been proved false. For example, in 1963 and 1964 there were newspaper reports about Pentecostal prophecies which said that an earthquake would strike the city of Los Angeles and that the city would fall into the ocean. However, the date of the predicted earthquake passed, and nothing happened. To be sure, this lack of fulfillment is sufficient to prove that those prophecies were false.

Those who claim to speak in tongues should consider their experience. In particular, they need to check if what they utter when speaking in tongues is a dialect, an understandable language. If they are honest, many will admit that when they speak in tongues, they do not speak a dialect. But as we have pointed out from chapter two of Acts, what was spoken by those

who were filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was a recognizable dialect. Genuine tongue-speaking, therefore, is not merely a voice or a sound. Genuine tongue-speaking is a dialect.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE NINE

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(4)

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:14-47; Matt. 16:19

In 2:1-13 we have the baptism of the Jewish believers in the Holy Spirit. Then in 2:14-47 we have Peter's first message to the Jews. In this part of chapter two we see Christ and the church. First, Peter spoke Christ. Then toward the end of the chapter we have a word concerning the church life.

PETER'S FIRST USE OF THE KEYS TO OPEN THE DOOR OF THE KINGDOM FOR THE JEWS

Peter's first message to the Jews was his first use of the keys to open the door of the kingdom for the Jews. After Peter saw the vision concerning the Lord Jesus being the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16), the Lord said to him, "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, and whatever you bind on the earth shall be what has been bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on the earth shall be what has been loosed in the heavens" (v. 19). According to history, the keys have been two. Peter used one key to open the door for the Jewish believers to enter the kingdom on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38-42). Later, he used the other key to open the door for the Gentile believers to enter the kingdom in the house of Cornelius (10:34-48). Therefore, on the day of Pentecost, Peter used the first of these two keys.

EXPLAINING THE ECONOMICAL FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Men of Flesh

Acts 2:14 says, "But Peter, standing together with the eleven, lifted up his voice and spoke forth to them: Men, Jews, and all those dwelling in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words." Here the word "eleven" indicates that Matthias, who was chosen in 1:26, was recognized as one among the twelve apostles.

In verse 15 Peter went on to say, "For these men are not drunk as you suppose, for it is the third hour of the day." The third hour of the day was nine o'clock in the morning.

Verses 16 through 18 continue: "But this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: And it shall be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; and upon My slaves, both men and women, I will pour out of My Spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy." The last days mentioned in verse 17 denote the closing period of the present age (2 Pet. 3:3; Jude 18), which began from Christ's first coming (1 Pet. 1:20) and will last until Christ's second coming (see note 1² in 2 Tim. 3).

The pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh differs from the breathing of the Spirit into the disciples out of the mouth of Christ after His resurrection (John 20:22). The pouring out of God's Spirit was from the heavens after Christ's ascension. The former is the essential aspect of the Spirit breathed into the disciples as life for their living; the latter is the economical aspect of the Spirit poured upon them as power for their work. The same Spirit was both within them essentially and upon them economically.

The pouring out of the Spirit after Christ's ascension was the descension of the resurrected and ascended Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit to carry out His heavenly ministry on earth to build up His church (Matt. 16:18) as His Body (Eph. 1:23) for God's New Testament economy.

"Upon" in verse 17 is economically different from the essential "in" in John 14:17. "In" is related to the intrinsic essence for life; "upon" is related to the outward element for power.

Acts 2:17 says that the Spirit was to be poured out upon all flesh. The words "all flesh" denote all fallen human beings, without distinction of sex, age, or status.

Verse 17 also speaks of prophecies, visions, and dreams. Prophecies, visions, and dreams are not related to the inner life but to outward things.

We have seen that the economical filling of the Holy Spirit is actually the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This outpouring is different from the breathing of the Holy Spirit. We also need to see that the Holy Spirit poured out on the day of Pentecost is actually the resurrected and ascended Christ Himself.

The Holy Spirit Poured Out So That We May Call on the Name of the Lord to Be Saved

Acts 2:19-20 says, "And I will show wonders in the heaven above, and signs on the earth below--blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and notable day." Literally, the Greek word translated "show" in verse 19 means give. Verses 19 and 20 in Joel's prophecy are not related to the things which occurred on the day of Pentecost, but to the calamities of the judgment day of the Lord in the future. For a detailed consideration of the day of the Lord, I would refer you to note 12³ in 2 Peter 3.

In 2:21 Peter goes on to say, "And it shall be that everyone, whoever calls on the name of the Lord, shall be saved." Calling on the name of the Lord is not a new practice in the New Testament. It began with Enosh, the third generation of mankind, in Genesis 4:26. It was continued by Job (Job. 12:4; 27:10), Abraham (Gen. 12:8; 13:4; 21:33), Isaac (Gen. 26:25), Moses and the children of

Israel (Deut. 4:7), Samson (Judg. 15:18; 16:28), Samuel (1 Sam. 12:18; Psa. 99:6), David (2 Sam. 22:4, 7; 1 Chron. 16:8; 21:26; Psa. 14:4; 17:6; 18:3, 6; 31:17; 55:16; 86:5, 7; 105:1; 116:4, 13, 17; 118:5; 145:18), the psalmist Asaph (Psa. 80:18), the psalmist Heman (Psa. 88:9), Elijah (1 Kings 18:24), Isaiah (Isa. 12:4), Jeremiah (Lam. 3:55, 57), and others (Psa. 99:6). All these practiced calling on the name of the Lord in the Old Testament age. Isaiah also charged God's seekers to call upon Him (Isa. 55:6). Even the Gentiles knew that the prophets of Israel used to call on the name of God (Jonah 1:6; 2 Kings 5:11). The Gentile raised up by God from the north also called upon His name (Isa. 41:25). It is God's commandment (Psa. 50:15; Jer. 29:12) and desire (Psa. 91:15; Zeph. 3:9; Zech. 13:9) that His people call on Him. It is the joyful way to drink from the fountain of God's salvation (Isa. 12:3-4), and the enjoyable way to delight oneself in God (Job 27:10), that is, to enjoy Him. Hence, God's people must call upon Him daily (Psa. 88:9). It is such a jubilant practice that Joel prophesied (Joel 2:32) for the New Testament jubilee.

In the New Testament calling on the name of the Lord is mentioned first by Peter, in Acts 2:21, on the day of Pentecost as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. This fulfillment is related to God's outpouring of the all-inclusive Spirit economically upon His chosen people so that they may participate in His New Testament jubilee. Joel's prophecy and its fulfillment for God's New Testament jubilee have two aspects: on God's side, He poured out His Spirit in the ascension of the resurrected Christ; on our side, we call on the name of the ascended Lord who has accomplished all, attained unto all, and obtained all. It is vitally necessary for us, the believers in Christ, to participate in and enjoy the all-inclusive Christ with all He has accomplished, attained, and obtained (1 Cor. 1:2). It is a major practice in God's New Testament economy that we may enjoy the processed Triune God for our full salvation (Rom. 10:10-13). The early believers practiced this everywhere (1 Cor. 1:2), and it became a popular sign of Christ's believers toward the unbelievers, especially the persecutors (Acts 9:14, 21). When Stephen

suffered persecution, he practiced this (7:59), and his practice surely impressed Saul, one of his persecutors (7:58-60; 22:20). Then the unbelieving Saul persecuted these callers (9:14, 21) by taking their calling as a sign. Immediately after Saul was caught by the Lord, Ananias, who brought him into the fellowship of the Body of Christ, charged him to be baptized, calling on the name of the Lord, to show others that he also had become such a caller. By his word to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:22, he indicated that in the early days all the Lord's seekers practiced such calling. Undoubtedly he was one who practiced this, since he charged his young co-worker Timothy to do the same, that he might enjoy the Lord as he did.

The Greek word for "call upon" is *epikaleo*, composed of *epi*, upon, and *kaleo*, call by name, that is, to call out audibly, even loudly, as Stephen did (Acts 7:59-60).

Acts 2:21 speaks of calling on the name of the Lord. The name denotes the person. Jesus is the name of the Lord, and the Spirit is His Person. When we call, "Lord Jesus," we receive the Spirit.

According to the context, 2:21 is the conclusion of the quotation of Joel's prophecy, which began in verse 17. The fact that verse 21 is the conclusion of the quotation indicates that the issue of God's pouring out of His Spirit upon all flesh is their salvation through calling on the name of the Lord. God's outpouring of His Spirit is the application of the Lord's salvation unto His chosen people. To be saved is to receive this Spirit, which is the blessing of the gospel in God's New Testament economy (Gal. 3:2,5, 14). This Spirit is the Lord Himself as the breath (John 20:22) and the living water (John 4:10, 14) to us. To breathe Him in as our breath and drink Him as our living water, we need to call upon Him. Lamentations 3:55-56 indicates that calling upon the Lord is breathing, and Isaiah 12:3 and 4 indicate that calling upon the Lord is drinking. After we believe in the Lord, we need to call upon Him so that we may not only be saved but also enjoy His riches (Rom. 10:12-13). His riches are enjoyed through our calling upon Him by exercising our spirit. This is the real worship of God (John 4:24).

As we consider verse 21 in its context, we see that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh, that is, upon all human beings, is for the purpose that people will call upon the name of the Lord and be saved. This is the reason Paul says that if one is to be saved, he needs to call on the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:12-13).

In Romans 10 Paul speaks of two matters--being justified and being saved. Being justified is somewhat of an inward matter, and being saved is somewhat of an outward matter. Paul says that in order to be justified we need to believe in our heart unto righteousness. If we believe in our heart that the Lord Jesus died for us and that God raised Him from the dead, we shall be justified in the presence of God. However, in order to be saved, we still need to call upon the name of the Lord.

When we preach the gospel and help others to be saved, we need to encourage them to call on the name of the Lord and say, "O Lord Jesus!" From experience we know that the stronger a person calls on the name of the Lord Jesus, the stronger will be his experience of salvation.

Let us suppose that someone who has heard the preaching of the gospel and who wants to be saved prays softly and weakly, "Lord Jesus, You love me, and You died for me. I believe in You." It may be difficult to recognize that one who prays in such a weak manner is saved. However, suppose someone strongly calls on the name of the Lord Jesus and says, "Lord Jesus! O Lord Jesus! I'm a sinner, Lord, but You died for me! O Lord Jesus, I love You!" No doubt, anyone who prays like this, calling strongly on the name of the Lord, is saved. He may even be beside himself with joy in the Lord for His salvation.

According to Acts 7:59, when Stephen was being stoned, "he was calling upon the Lord and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Saul of Tarsus approved of this killing, and joined in the great persecution against the church in Jerusalem. According to 9:14, Saul had authority from the chief priest to bind all who called on the name of the Lord Jesus. His intention in going to Damascus was to arrest all those who called on the Lord's name. This

indicates that in the early days calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus was a sign of being a follower of the Lord. This calling must have been audible so that others could hear. Thus, it became a sign. At the time of Saul, the believers were those who called on the name of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord appeared to Saul on the way to Damascus, and Saul said, "Who are You, Lord?" (9:5). Later Ananias came to Saul and said to him, "Rise up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (22:16). Here Ananias seemed to be saying, "Brother Saul, you persecuted the saints for calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. They regard you as a persecutor, one who arrested the believers because they called on the name of the Lord. Now you have repented and have turned to the Lord. But how can those who consider you a persecutor recognize that you are now a brother? The only way for them to recognize you is that you call on the name of the Lord. So arise and be baptized by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. While you are being baptized and calling on the name of the Lord Jesus, the saints will be very happy to hear that you also call on this name."

Today many believers do not have the practice of calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. Some who follow only traditional practices criticize those who call on the Lord's name. As we have indicated, calling on the name of the Lord is not a new practice; it is not something invented by us. According to the Bible, calling on the name of the Lord was first practiced in Genesis 4.

As Promised by God in the Book of Joel

We have seen that in 2:14-21 Peter, in his first message to the Jews, explains the economical filling of the Holy Spirit. This economical filling of the Holy Spirit was promised by God in Joel 2:28-29, 32.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE TEN

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(5)

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:14-47

In Peter's first message to the Jews (2:14-47) we see four matters: the explaining of the economical filling of the Holy Spirit (vv. 14-21), the witnessing of the Man Jesus in His work, death, resurrection, and ascension (vv. 22-36), the instructing and entreating of the Spirit-moved ones (vv. 37-41), and the beginning of the church life (vv. 42-47). In the foregoing message we covered Peter's explanation of the economical filling of the Holy Spirit. Let us now go on to consider his witness concerning the Lord Jesus.

WITNESSING OF THE MAN JESUS IN HIS WORK, DEATH, RESURRECTION, AND ASCENSION

His Work--God's Demonstration of Him

In 2:22 Peter says, "Men, Israelites, hear these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man demonstrated by God to you by works of power and wonders and signs, which God did through Him in your midst, even as you yourselves know." The first message of the apostles' preaching of the gospel is focused on a Man whom Luke in his Gospel presented to his readers from His conception through His birth, youth, life on earth, death, and resurrection, to His ascension. Now Luke's succeeding narrative goes on to tell us that this Man was preached by the apostles as the God-ordained Savior.

The Greek word translated "demonstrated" in verse 22

literally means to point out, to exhibit, to show forth, in the sense of proving by demonstration, thus bringing about an approval. This indicates that the Lord's work was God's demonstration of Him, His exhibition of Him. While Christ was living and ministering, whatever He did was an exhibition of the fact that His work was done by God. In the four Gospels we have the exhibition of a wonderful Person, the God-man. The Gospels exhibit this God-man as the One who was fully tested, proved, and approved. Peter's thought in verse 22 is that Jesus was fully tested, proved, and approved by God.

His Death according to God's Determined Counsel and Foreknowledge

In 2:23 we see that the Lord's death was according to God's determined counsel and foreknowledge: "This man, delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you, through the hand of lawless men, nailed to the cross and killed." This determined counsel must be a counsel held by the Trinity before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8). This indicates that the Lord's crucifixion was not an accident in human history, but a purposeful fulfillment of the divine counsel determined by the Triune God.

Christ's death was also according to the foreknowledge of God. Christ was foreordained, prepared, by God to be His redeeming Lamb (John 1:29) for His elect according to His foreknowledge before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20). This was done according to God's eternal purpose and plan, not accidentally. Hence, in the eternal view of God, from the foundation of the world, that is, the fall of man as a part of the world, Christ was slain (Rev. 13:8).

We have seen that the divine Trinity held a counsel concerning the death of Christ. In that counsel it was determined that the second of the Trinity would become a man and die on the cross. Therefore, the Lord's crucifixion, which was according to the foreknowledge of the Triune God, was the result of a determination made

by the Trinity in an eternal counsel. Therefore, instead of being an accident, the Lord's crucifixion took place according to the eternal determination of the Triune God.

Acts 2:23 says that through the hand of lawless men the Lord Jesus was nailed to the cross and killed. These lawless men included Judas Iscariot (Luke 22:3-6), chief priests, officers of the temple, elders (Luke 22:52-53), the high priest and the Jewish Sanhedrin (Luke 22:54, 66-71), Pilate, Herod, and the Roman soldiers (Luke 23:1-25)--mainly the Jewish religionists with their deputies and the Gentile politicians with their subordinates. This indicates that Jesus was killed by all mankind.

Acts 2:23 says that the Lord Jesus was nailed to the cross. The Jewish death penalty was by stoning (Lev. 20:2, 27; 24:23; Deut. 13:10; 17:5). Crucifixion was a heathen practice (Ezra 6:11), adopted by the Romans for the execution of slaves and heinous criminals only. The crucifixion of the Lord Jesus was not only a fulfillment of the Old Testament (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13; Num. 21:8-9), but also of the Lord's own word concerning the mode of His death (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32), which could not have been fulfilled by stoning. It was of God's sovereignty that not long before the Lord Jesus was put to death the Roman Empire made the law that criminals sentenced to death were to be crucified. It was by this kind of death that the Lord was executed.

His Resurrection--God's Approval of Him to Be the Messiah

In 2:24-32 Peter speaks concerning the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. His resurrection was God's approval of Him to be the Messiah. Through the resurrection of Christ God was declaring that the resurrected Christ was the real Messiah, the One anointed and appointed by God to carry out His eternal commission.

Acts 2:24 says, "Whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, since it was not possible for Him to be held by it." Here and in verse 32 Peter says that God raised up Jesus. In 10:40 and 41 he says the same thing again but

adds, "He rose from the dead." Regarding the Lord as a man, the New Testament tells us that God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 8:11). Considering Him as God, it tells us that He Himself rose from the dead (Rom. 14:9). In the same principle, regarding Him as a man, the New Testament tells us that He was killed by men (Mark 9:31). But considering Him as God, it tells us that He laid down His life of Himself (John 10:18). This also proves His dual status--human and divine.

Acts 2:24 says that it was not possible for the Lord to be held by death. The Lord is both God and resurrection (John 1:1; 11:25), possessing the indestructible life (Heb. 7:16). Because He is such an ever-living One, death is not able to hold Him. He delivered Himself to death, but death had no way to detain Him; rather, death was defeated by Him, and He rose up from it.

Acts 2:25 says, "For David says in regard to Him, I saw the Lord continually before me, because He is on my right hand, that I should not be shaken." The words "I saw" introduce a declaration of Christ in His resurrection. Here "Lord" refers to God. When Christ is held by God (as in Isa. 41:13; 42:6), God is on His right hand. But when He is exalted by God, He is sitting on the right hand of God (Acts 2:33; Psa. 110:1; Eph. 1:20-21).

Acts 2:26 continues, "Therefore my heart was made glad and my tongue exulted; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope." This is a quotation from Psalm 16:9 in the Septuagint. But in the original Hebrew text the word for tongue is "glory," which is a synonym of soul, according to Genesis 49:6 and Psalm 7:5. In His trust in God, Christ's heart was made glad, and His soul exulted while He was in Hades (Acts 2:27).

The Greek word translated "rest" may also be rendered dwell, reside, pitch its tent. After Christ died on the cross, while His soul exulted in Hades, His flesh (body) rested in the tomb in hope, trusting in God.

Acts 2:27 goes on to say, "Because You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You permit Your Holy One to see corruption." Hades, like Sheol in the Old Testament

(Gen. 37:35; Psa. 6:5), is the place where the souls and spirits of the dead are kept (Luke 16:22-23). Here in Acts 2:27 "corruption" refers to corruption of the body in the tomb.

Acts 2:28 continues, "You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of gladness with Your presence." Here the ways of life are the ways to get out of death into resurrection. The Greek word for "presence" also means countenance. Christ was resurrected into God's presence, especially in His ascension (2:34; Heb. 1:3).

In 2:29 through 31 Peter says, "Men, brothers, let me speak to you plainly concerning the patriarch David, that he both deceased and was buried, and his tomb is among us until this day. Therefore, being a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his loins he would seat One upon his throne, he, seeing this beforehand, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption." The Greek word rendered "fruit" in verse 30 is *karpos*, used for Christ only in the sense of offspring here and in Luke 1:42. It is used for the fruit of the tree of life in Revelation 22:2. Christ is the branch of Jehovah (Isa. 4:2) and of David (Jer. 23:5), and the fruit of Mary and of David, that we may eat of Him as the tree of life.

Acts 2:30 speaks of Christ as the One who would sit upon David's throne. This was also declared to Mary by the angel at the conceiving of Christ (Luke 1:32-33).

In Acts 2:32 Peter gives a concluding word concerning Christ's resurrection: "This Jesus God raised up, of which we all are witnesses." The Greek word for "which" here may also be rendered "whom." The apostles were witnesses of the resurrected Christ, not in word only, but also by their life and action. Especially they bore witness of His resurrection (4:33), which is the crucial focus in carrying out God's New Testament economy.

His Ascension--God's Exaltation of Him

Christ's ascension was God's exaltation of Him. In exalting Christ, God made Him both Lord and Christ. The

pouring out of the Holy Spirit is a proof that God has exalted the Lord Jesus and has made Him both Lord and Christ.

Acts 2:33 says, "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, He poured out this which you both see and hear." This is not the promise given by the Lord in John 14:16-17 and 15:26, but the promise given by the Father in Joel 2:28, quoted by Peter in Acts 2:17, and referred to by the Lord in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4, concerning the Holy Spirit. The exalted Christ's receiving of the promise of the Holy Spirit is actually the receiving of the Holy Spirit Himself. Christ was conceived of the Spirit essentially for His being in humanity (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18, 20), and He was anointed with the Spirit economically for His ministry among men (Matt. 3:16; Luke 4:18). After His resurrection and ascension, He still needed to receive the Spirit economically again so that He might pour Himself out upon His Body to carry out on earth His heavenly ministry for the accomplishment of God's New Testament economy.

In Acts 2:34 and 35 Peter continues, "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." This proves that up to the time of Pentecost David still had not ascended into the heavens. This annuls the inaccurate teaching based upon Ephesians 4:8-10 that when Christ resurrected He brought Paradise, with all the Old Testament saints, from Hades into the heavens.

In verse 34 David is quoted as saying, "The Lord said to my Lord..." The first "Lord" refers to God, and the second, to Christ, whom David called "my Lord"(Matt. 22:44-45).

Acts 2:34 speaks of the Lord Jesus sitting at God's right hand. Here "right hand" denotes the position of glory, honor, and power (Exo. 15:6; 1 Kings 2:19; Mark 14:62).

According to 2:35, the Lord is to sit at God's right hand until His enemies are made a footstool for His feet. This

indicates that after Christ's ascension God still works to defeat Christ's enemies so that He may come back to reign in the universal kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:25; Rev. 11:15).

In 2:36 Peter concludes, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified." In this verse "you" is emphatic.

As God, the Lord was the Lord all the time (Luke 1:43; John 11:21; 20:28). But as man, He was made the Lord in His ascension after He brought His humanity into God in His resurrection. And as God's sent and anointed One, He was Christ from the time He was born (Luke 2:11; Matt. 1:16; John 1:41; Matt. 16:16). But as such a One, He was also officially made the very Christ of God in His ascension. The Lord was made Lord, as the Lord of all (Acts 10:36), to possess all; and He was made Christ, as God's Anointed (Heb. 1:9), to carry out God's commission.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE ELEVEN

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(6)

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:14-47

THE PROPAGATION OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH LIFE

In 2:22-36 Peter witnesses of the Man Jesus in His work, death, resurrection, and ascension. In verse 36 Peter declares, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified." Jesus was made the Lord to possess all, and He was made the Christ to carry out God's commission. As God, the Lord Jesus was already the Lord, and in His divinity there was no need for Him to be made Lord. Nevertheless, in His ascension He, as a man, was made the Lord of all by God. God made Jesus the Lord of all to possess all things, including us.

The Lord Jesus was also Christ, even from eternity. Furthermore, He was born as the Christ (Luke 2:11). However, in His ascension He was officially made the Christ of God. This means that in His ascension God inaugurated Him officially into the office of the Christ. God had already appointed Him, but in His ascension He still inaugurated Him into His office as the Christ to carry out God's commission. May we all be impressed with the fact that in 2:36 "Lord" refers to possession, and "Christ" refers to commission.

The record in 2:14-47 emphasizes Peter's speaking concerning Christ. Peter spoke of Christ, and he even spoke forth Christ. This is the first case of the speaking of

Christ by the believers. In his speaking, Peter presents to us the Man Jesus and witnesses to us concerning Him. In particular, Peter speaks of the Lord Jesus in His work, death, resurrection, and ascension.

In his speaking concerning Christ in chapters two through five of Acts, Peter does not refer to Him as the Son of God. Peter's emphasis here is not on the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. Rather, in these chapters Peter stresses that the Lord Jesus is a man. The reason for this emphasis is that the Jews crucified Christ as a man, regarding Him merely as a despised man, a Nazarene, a person of low estate. Therefore, Peter said that the One regarded by the Jews as a lowly Nazarene was approved by God in all that He did.

As we shall see, Peter's speaking of Christ produced the propagation of Christ. On the day of Pentecost this propagation included the three thousand souls who were saved. Such a propagation was the result, the issue, of Peter's speaking concerning Christ. From this we see that the speaking of Christ surely leads to the propagation of Christ in those who believe in Him. Furthermore, the believers as Christ's propagation become the church. Therefore, in chapter two we see that the speaking of Christ produced a church in Jerusalem. In this chapter we have both the propagation of Christ and the church life.

INSTRUCTING AND ENTREATING THE SPIRIT-MOVED ONES

Concerning Repentance

After Peter spoke concerning the Lord Jesus in His work, death, resurrection, and ascension, he instructed and entreated the Spirit-moved ones to repent, to be baptized, and to be saved (vv. 37-41). Acts 2:37 and 38 say, "And when they heard this, they were pierced in the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, What should we do, men, brothers? And Peter said to them, Repent and be baptized, each one of you, upon the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Here Peter first told the

people to repent. To repent is to have a change of mind issuing in regret, to have a turn in purpose. Literally, the Greek word for repent means to think differently afterward, that is, to have a change of mind. To repent is to have a change of mind with regret for the past and a turn for the future. On the negative side, to repent before God is to repent not only of sins and wrongdoings, but also to repent of the world and its corruption that usurp and corrupt people whom God made for Himself, and to repent of our God-forsaking life in the past. On the positive side, to repent is to turn to God in every way and in every thing for the fulfilling of His purpose in making men. Therefore, it is a repentance unto God (20:21).

Concerning Baptism upon the Name of Jesus Christ

Peter also instructed the Spirit-moved ones to be baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ. To baptize people is to immerse them, to bury them in water, signifying death. The command that a repentant one be baptized indicates that such a one is good only for burial. Baptism, therefore, signifies the termination of the old person so that a new beginning may be realized in resurrection by Christ as the Life-giver. Baptism in the Bible implies death and resurrection. To be baptized into the water is to be put into death and buried. To be raised up from the water means to be resurrected from death.

In Matthew 28:19 the resurrected Christ charged the disciples to go and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of baptism is to bring repentant people out of their old state into a new one by terminating their old life and germinating them with the new life of Christ. After the Lord Jesus accomplished His ministry on earth, passed through the process of death and resurrection, and became the life-giving Spirit, He charged His disciples to baptize the disciplined people into the Triune God. This baptism has two aspects: the visible aspect by water and the invisible aspect by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-41; 10:44-48). The visible aspect is the expression, the testimony, of

the invisible aspect, whereas the invisible aspect is the reality of the visible aspect. Without the invisible aspect by the Spirit, the visible aspect by water is vain; and without the visible aspect by water, the invisible aspect by the Spirit is abstract and impractical. Therefore, both are needed.

Not long after the Lord Jesus charged the disciples to carry out this baptism, He baptized them and the entire church in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:4) and in the house of Cornelius (11:15-17). Then, based on this, the disciples baptized the new converts, not only visibly into water but also invisibly into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3-4), into Christ Himself (Gal. 3:27), into the Triune God (Matt. 28:19), and into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The water, signifying the death of Christ with His burial, may be considered a tomb to terminate the history of the baptized ones. Because the death of Christ is included in Christ and because Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God, who is one with the Body of Christ, to baptize new believers into the death of Christ, into Christ Himself, into the Triune God, and into the Body of Christ is to do just one thing: on the negative side, to terminate their old life, and on the positive side to germinate them with new life, the eternal life of the Triune God, for the Body of Christ. Hence, the baptism ordained by the Lord Jesus is to baptize people out of their life into the Body life.

In Mark 16:16 the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." To believe is to receive the Lord (John 1:12) not only for forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43) but also for regeneration (1 Pet. 1:21, 23), so that those who believe may become the children of God (John 1:12-13) and the members of Christ (Eph. 5:30) in an organic union with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19). To be baptized is to affirm this by being buried to terminate the old creation through the death of Christ and by being raised up to be the new creation of God through Christ's resurrection. Such a baptism is much more advanced than the baptism of repentance by John (Mark 1:4; Acts 19:3-5).

To believe and to be so baptized are two parts of one complete step for receiving the full salvation of God. To be baptized without believing is merely an empty ritual; to believe without being baptized is to be saved only inwardly without an outward affirmation of the inward salvation. These two should go together. Moreover, water baptism should be accompanied by Spirit baptism, even as the children of Israel were baptized in the sea (water) and in the cloud (Spirit--1 Cor. 10:2; 12:13).

In Acts 2:38 Peter speaks of being baptized "upon the name of Jesus Christ." The name denotes the person. Here Peter tells the people to be baptized upon the Lord's name.

The New Testament uses three different prepositions to describe the relationship of baptism to the Lord. The first of these prepositions is *en*, in (Acts 10:48). To be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ is to be baptized in the sphere of the name of Jesus Christ, within which is the reality of the baptism. The second preposition is *eis*, into (Matt. 28:19; Acts 8:16; 19:5; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). To be baptized into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, or into the name of Jesus Christ, is to be baptized into a spiritual union with the all-inclusive Christ, who is the embodiment of the Triune God. To be baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus is to be baptized into the Person of the Lord, to be identified with the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ, to be put into an organic union with the living Lord. The third preposition used to describe the relationship of baptism to the Lord is *epi*, upon or on, used in Acts 2:38. To be baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ is to be baptized upon the ground of what the name of Jesus Christ stands for. It stands for all that the Person of Jesus Christ is and all that He has accomplished, both of which constitute the belief (the faith) of God's New Testament economy. It is on this ground that the believers in Christ are baptized.

The Forgiveness of Sins

According to Acts 2:38, baptism upon the name of Jesus Christ was for the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of

sins is based upon the redemption of Christ accomplished through His death (10:43; Eph. 1:7; 1 Cor. 15:3). It is the initial and basic blessing of God's full salvation. Based upon it, the blessing of God's full salvation goes forth and consummates in the receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Receiving the Gift of the Holy Spirit

In 2:38 Peter tells the people to repent, be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, and they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not any gift distributed by the Spirit, as mentioned in Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:4, and 1 Peter 4:10; rather, it is the gift which is the Holy Spirit Himself, given by God to the believers in Christ as the unique gift that produces all the gifts mentioned in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and 1 Peter 4.

The Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38 is the all-inclusive Spirit of the processed Triune God in His New Testament economy, both essential for life and economical for power, given to the believers at the time of their believing in Christ (Eph. 1:13; Gal. 3:2) as the all-inclusive blessing of God's full gospel (Gal. 3:14), so that they may enjoy all the riches of the Triune God (2 Cor. 13:14).

The apostles preached and ministered Christ. But when their hearers repented and believed in Him, they received the wonderful Spirit of the Triune God. This implies that this Spirit is just the resurrected and ascended Christ Himself. The receiving of the Spirit here is both essential and economical, in a general and all-inclusive sense, differing from the receiving of the Spirit in Acts 8:15-17 and 19:2-6, which is particularly the receiving of the Spirit falling upon the believers economically.

The Promise to the Jews and the Gentiles

In 2:39 Peter went on to say, "For to you is the promise and to your children, and to all those who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." In this verse "you" refers to the Jews, and the "promise" denotes the Holy Spirit. Those who are far off are the Gentiles,

included in "all flesh" (v. 17). Those whom the Lord our God calls to Himself are the ones chosen and predestinated by God in eternity (Eph. 1:4-5) and called by Him in the New Testament age (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2).

Being Saved from This Crooked Generation

Acts 2:40 says, "And with many other words he solemnly testified and entreated them, saying, Be saved from this crooked generation!" Here we are told that Peter testified and entreated. To testify needs experiences of seeing, participation, and enjoyment. It is different from mere teaching.

Peter entreated the people saying, "Be saved from this crooked generation!" Here "be" is active, and "saved" is passive; hence, we may say "be saved" is in the "active-passive" voice. It is to be done by God, but man needs to be active to receive what God intends to do. At the time of Pentecost, everything concerning God's full salvation was prepared, and the Holy Spirit was poured out as the application and full blessing of God's salvation ready for man to receive. In this matter God is waiting for man, and man needs to take the initiative. Although we cannot save ourselves, we must be willing to be saved by God. God is willing and prepared to save us; nevertheless, we need to be saved; that is, we need to take the initiative to receive God's salvation.

In 2:40 Peter entreated the people to be saved from this crooked generation. Peter, at the conclusion of his message, does not say, "Be saved from God's condemnation," or, "Be saved from eternal perdition." Instead, he says, "Be saved from this crooked generation!" This crooked generation refers to the perverted Jews in this age who rejected God's Christ (v. 36) and were considered by God as the present evil age (Gal. 1:4). For the crooked Jews to be saved from their present evil age requires a genuine repentance of their crookedness toward God and a real turn to God. This indicates that they need to turn to God not only from their sins but also from their generation, their Jewish society, including their Jewish

religion. The result of such a salvation is not an entrance into heaven; it is an entrance into a new generation--the church. Thus, the saved ones will be separated from Jewish society unto the church. To be saved this way implies to be saved from God's condemnation and eternal perdition unto God's eternal purpose and His pleasure (Eph. 3:11; 1:9).

Acts 2:41 says, "Those, then, who welcomed his word were baptized, and there were added in that day about three thousand souls." These ones were baptized by water (10:47-48). In this verse "souls" denote persons created by God (Gen. 2:7).

According to 2:41, about three thousand souls received Peter's word and were baptized. This, no doubt, was a good response to Peter's speaking concerning Christ. However, those who received the word and were baptized were only a small percentage of the ones in Jerusalem at that time. Of the many thousands of Jews in the city, only three thousand were saved on the day of Pentecost. This indicates that the Jewish people were still very stubborn. A great many Jews lived in Jerusalem, and a large number had come to the city for the celebration of the feast of Pentecost. Therefore, comparatively speaking, the number who were saved on the day of Pentecost was not great. In this we see the stubbornness of that crooked generation. It is not surprising, then, that Peter said, "Be saved from this crooked generation!"

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE TWELVE

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(7)

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:14-47

In 2:14-47, which records Peter's first message to the Jews, Peter explains the economical filling of the Holy Spirit (vv. 14-21), witnesses of the Man Jesus in His work, death, resurrection, and ascension (vv. 22-36), and instructs and entreats the Spirit-moved ones (vv. 37-41). Then in 2:42-47 we have a description of the beginning of the church life. In this message we shall consider the beginning of the church life as presented in these verses.

THE BELIEVERS CONTINUING STEADFASTLY IN FOUR THINGS

Acts 2:42 says, "And they were continuing steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles, in the breaking of bread and the prayers." Here we see that the first group of believers produced through the apostles' preaching and ministering of Christ on the day of Pentecost continued steadfastly in four things: teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. Teaching is the unveiling of God's New Testament economy concerning Christ and the church. Fellowship is the communion and communication between the believers in their communion and communication with God the Father and Christ the Son. Breaking of bread is the remembrance of the Lord in His accomplishment of God's full redemption. Prayer is cooperation with the Lord in heaven for the carrying out of God's New Testament economy on earth.

The first two matters, teaching and fellowship, conjoined by "and" to be one group, are of the apostles, but breaking of bread and prayers are not of the apostles. This indicates that besides the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, the believers in Christ should not have any other teaching and fellowship. In God's New Testament economy there is only one kind of teaching revealed and recognized by God--the teaching of the apostles. Likewise, there is only one kind of fellowship which is of God and acceptable to Him--the fellowship of the apostles, which is with the Father and the Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3) and which is the unique fellowship of the unique church, the Body of Christ.

The last two matters, the breaking of bread and prayer, conjoined also by "and" to be another group, are practices of the believers' Christian life. These practices are not related directly to God's economy for the keeping of the oneness of the church, the Body of Christ. Hence, they are not of the apostles, who brought in God's New Testament revelation and His fellowship among all the believers in Christ.

The Teaching of the Apostles

We have seen that the new believers continued steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles. The only proper teaching in the New Testament is the apostles' teaching. Any teaching other than the apostles' teaching is not scriptural or orthodox. The orthodox teaching is that of the apostles recorded in the twenty-seven books of the New Testament from Matthew through Revelation. Therefore, Paul said to Timothy, "Even as I urged you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach differently" (1 Tim. 1:3). To teach differently is to teach differently from the teaching of the apostles. If we have different teachings, we shall be divided into different groups. But if we have only the teaching of the apostles, we shall be one.

The Fellowship of the Apostles

Just as the teaching of the apostles is unique, so the

fellowship of the apostles also is unique. From this we see that all Christians should have one fellowship, the unique fellowship, which is the fellowship of the apostles. This fellowship is mentioned in 1 John 1:3: "That which we have seen and heard we report also to you, that you also may have fellowship with us, and indeed the fellowship which is ours is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." The Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia*, meaning joint participation, common participation. It is the issue of eternal life, and it is actually the flow of eternal life within all the believers who have received and possess the divine life. It is illustrated by the flow of the water of life in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1). Hence, as indicated by Acts 2:42, all genuine believers are in this fellowship. It is carried on by the Spirit in our regenerated spirit. Therefore, it is called "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor. 13:14) and "fellowship of [our] spirit" (Phil. 2:1). It is in this fellowship of eternal life that we, the believers, participate in all that the Father and the Son are and have done for us; that is, we enjoy the love of the Father and the grace of the Son by virtue of the fellowship of the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14).

Such a fellowship was first the apostles' portion in enjoying the Father and the Son through the Spirit. For this reason it is called the fellowship of the apostles and "the fellowship which is ours [the apostles']" in 1 John 1:3, a fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. This fellowship is a divine mystery.

The word "fellowship" used in Acts 2:42 and 1 John 1:3 indicates the putting away of private interest and the joining with others for a certain common purpose. Hence, to have fellowship with the apostles, to be in the fellowship of the apostles, and to have fellowship with the Triune God in the apostles' fellowship, is to put away our private interests and join with the apostles and the Triune God for the carrying out of God's purpose. Our participation in the apostles' enjoyment of the Triune God is our joining with them and with the Triune God for His divine purpose, which is common to God, the apostles, and all the believers.

Among Christians today there are not only different teachings but also different fellowships. Let me illustrate from my experience with the Southern Baptist denomination. Because my mother was a Southern Baptist, I attended Southern Baptist schools. Whenever a communion service was about to be held, the announcement was made that only those who had been baptized by that denomination could participate in the communion service. This means that this denomination had its own fellowship, and that fellowship was not the fellowship of the apostles.

The fellowship of the apostles is open, receiving all kinds of genuine believers in Christ. For example, this fellowship receives believers who have been immersed and believers who have been sprinkled. Furthermore, those in this fellowship do not require that believers be immersed only by them. However, certain sects insist that only their baptism is valid. They may insist that a believer be baptized again if he wants to join their group. This is an illustration of a fellowship that is different from the fellowship of the apostles.

Do you know how to determine whether or not a particular Christian group is a sect? One way to determine this is to check whether or not that group receives all real believers in Christ. For example, suppose a brother in the Lord who is a Roman Catholic priest attends our Lord's table meeting. We certainly would receive him because he is our brother in Christ. However, any group that does not receive all true believers is a sect and is not practicing the fellowship of the apostles.

In certain places believers of one racial group are not received by Christians who are of a different race. Are those who reject believers because of their race in the fellowship of the apostles? Certainly not. Their fellowship is the fellowship of a particular race, not the fellowship of the apostles. The fellowship of the apostles surely includes believers of every race and nationality. We have an illustration of this in Acts 13:1, where we see that among the prophets and teachers in the church in Antioch were those of different races and nationalities.

Those who do not receive believers whose nationality differs from theirs are not practicing the fellowship of the apostles. Suppose certain brothers in the United States are not willing to receive brothers from Germany. They say, "These Germans are too strong. We simply cannot accept them." If such were the case, those American brothers would be a sect. They would not have the fellowship of the apostles but some kind of so-called American style of fellowship. Let us also suppose that the German brothers react and say, "Since you Americans will not accept us, we will not accept you." The result is that there are two so-called fellowships, a German fellowship and an American fellowship. The New Testament, however, knows only of one fellowship--the fellowship of the apostles.

The signs believers post in front of their meeting places often indicate that they are not in the fellowship of the apostles. For instance, in China I saw a sign that identified a particular place as an "American Presbyterian Church." Not long ago I saw a sign in southern California identifying a certain group as a "Taiwan Chinese Church." How strange that in China there was an American Presbyterian Church, and in California, a Taiwan Chinese Church. Such groups are not practicing the oneness of the Body of Christ.

According to Acts 2:42, in the first church life there was only one fellowship, and that fellowship was of the apostles. The apostles' fellowship included all genuine believers. In the church life in the Lord's recovery we follow and practice the fellowship of the apostles.

Teaching and Fellowship, Breaking of Bread and Prayers

The grammatical construction of 2:42 is significant. Here we see that the new believers continued steadfastly in two groups of things: first, in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles; second, in the breaking of bread and the prayers. In each group of two there is the conjunction "and." This conjunction joins the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles; it is used again to join the

breaking of bread and the prayers. However, this conjunction is not used to join these two groups. In other words, these four matters--the teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers--are not one group of four items. Rather, according to the grammatical structure, teaching and fellowship are one group, and breaking of bread and prayers are another group.

We can see from the grammatical construction of this verse that the teaching and the fellowship are of the apostles, but the breaking of bread and the prayers are not of the apostles. The teaching and the fellowship belonged to the apostles, but not the breaking of bread and the prayers. This implies that although we can pray at any place and at any time, we cannot have more than one kind of fellowship. There is only one fellowship, the unique fellowship, the fellowship of the apostles. Likewise, although we can break bread at any time and at any place, we cannot have a teaching different from that of the apostles. On the contrary, as believers we should have only one teaching, the unique teaching, the teaching of the apostles.

WONDERS AND SIGNS TAKING PLACE THROUGH THE APOSTLES

Acts 2:43 says, "And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles." Wonders and signs are not part of God's central testimony of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. Neither are they part of God's full salvation. Rather, wonders and signs are only evidences that what the apostles preached and ministered and how they acted were absolutely of God, not of man (Heb. 2:3-4).

THE BELIEVERS HAVING ALL THINGS COMMON

Acts 2:44 and 45 go on to say, "And all those who believed were together and had all things common; and they sold their possessions and properties and divided them among all according as anyone had need." We read of the same in 4:32. Having all things common is not a

sign of love; it is a sign of Christ's dynamic salvation that saved the believers from greediness and selfishness. This was practiced only for a short time at the initiation of God's New Testament economy. It did not continue for the long run as a practice of legality in the church life during Paul's ministry, as proved by his words in 2 Corinthians 9 and other places.

Acts 2:45 says that the believers sold their possessions and properties and divided them according to need. This also is an evidence of the Lord's dynamic salvation, which caused the believers to overcome their earthly possessions, which occupy, possess, and usurp fallen mankind (Matt. 19:21-24; Luke 12:13-19, 33-34; 14:33; 16:13-14; 1 Tim. 6:17). Although the dynamic salvation of God caused the believers to forget about earthly possessions, having all things common did not become a formal practice in the church life.

THE BELIEVERS CONTINUING WITH ONE ACCORD IN THE TEMPLE AND BREAKING BREAD FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE

Acts 2:46-47a says, "And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they took their food with exultation and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people." In the initiation of God's New Testament economy, the early believers and even the first group of apostles were not clear that God had forsaken Judaism with its practices and facilities, including the temple (Matt. 23:38--"your house," referring to the God-forsaken temple). Hence, they still went, according to their tradition and habit, to the temple for their New Testament meeting.

According to 2:46, day by day the believers broke bread from house to house. The early believers remembered the Lord by breaking bread daily in their houses. This shows their love and enthusiasm toward the Lord.

The Greek words rendered "from house to house" also mean "at home," in contrast with "in the temple." The

Christian way of meeting together is fitting to God's New Testament economy, differing from the Judaic way of meeting in the synagogues (6:9). The Christian way of meeting in homes became a continual and general practice in the churches (cf. Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2).

In 2:46 we see that the believers "took their food with exultation and simplicity of heart." The Greek word for "simplicity" also means singleness. Here it describes the heart being simple, single, and plain, having one love and desire and one goal in seeking the Lord. These early believers were simple, single, sincere, and pure in heart.

According to 2:47a, the believers in the early church life praised God and had favor with all the people. They lived a life that expressed God's attributes in human virtues, as Jesus the Man-Savior did (Luke 2:52).

THE LORD ADDING TOGETHER THOSE WHO WERE BEING SAVED FROM DAY TO DAY

Acts 2:47b says, "And the Lord added together those who were being saved from day to day." For the Lord to add together those who were being saved means that He added them together to the church. The Lord added the saved ones together, and their togetherness was the church. This indicates that from the very beginning of their Christian life the early believers were brought into the corporate church life, not living individualistically as Christians separated from one another. We thank the Lord for this picture of the first church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE THIRTEEN

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(8)

Scripture Reading: Acts 3:1-26

In 3:1-26 we have Peter's second message to the Jews. Verses 1 through 10 describe the healing of a lame man, and verses 11 through 26 record the actual message given by Peter.

THE HEALING OF A LAME MAN

Acts 3:1 says, "Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour." We have pointed out that in the initiation of God's New Testament economy, the early believers and even the first group of apostles were not clear that God had forsaken Judaism with its practices and facilities, including the temple. For this reason, according to their tradition and habit, they still went to the temple.

The early believers were not clear concerning God's New Testament economy with respect to the Judaic temple. Not even the early apostles had a clear vision concerning God's abandonment of the Judaic things. Hence, even after God's pouring out the Spirit upon them on the day of Pentecost to initiate a new dispensation, they still did not separate themselves from the Judaic temple. At the initial stage God tolerated their ignorance in this matter. But this led to a mixture of the church with Judaism, a mixture that was not condemned by the early church in Jerusalem (see 21:20-26). Eventually the temple was destroyed by Titus with his Roman army in A.D. 70,

as prophesied by the Lord in Matthew 23:38 and 24:2. That destruction cleared up the religious mixture.

When Peter and John, who were about to go into the temple, saw a certain man who was lame from his mother's womb, they gazed at him and said, "Look at us!" (3:2-4). The man "paid attention to them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, Silver and gold I do not possess, but what I have, this I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene--walk! And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and his feet and ankles were instantly made strong" (vv. 5-7). Peter did not possess silver and gold, but St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome was constructed with a superabundance of gold. He did not have silver and gold, but he had the name, the Person, of Jesus Christ. He was poor in silver and gold, but he was rich in Christ. The Roman Church is filled with gold, but not with the Person of Christ. She is rich in gold but poor in Christ.

In speaking to the lame man, Peter told him to walk in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene. "Nazarene" indicates the One despised by the Jewish leaders (John 1:45-46; Acts 22:8; 24:5).

PETER'S MESSAGE

Turning the People's Attention from Miracles to the Person of the Lord Jesus

Peter and John did a miracle, and the people paid their attention to it. But in his speaking Peter turned the attention of the people from the miracle to a Person, to the Lord Jesus. Although Peter and John had performed a miracle, Peter did not talk about the miracle. Instead, he used the miracle as a basis to turn his audience to Christ. He turned the people's attention from the healing to the Healer.

Peter's message was based on the miracle of the healing of the lame man. However, it was not Peter's burden to talk about divine healing. Rather, his burden was to propagate Christ. He was burdened to speak forth Christ, to speak out Christ.

Peter's burden was to speak Christ directly into others so they may become Christ's propagation to be His living members in order that Christ may have a Body on earth. Pentecost is for the propagation of Christ, not for miracles, wonders, signs, and divine healing. All those things are minor. Even though a lame man was healed through Peter and John, Peter's emphasis was not on healing but on the name of the Lord Jesus. First, Peter said to the lame man, "In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene--walk!" Then in his message he went on to say, "By faith in His name, His name has made this man strong, whom you behold and know" (v. 16). Therefore, Peter did not preach divine healing or miracles; he preached the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although Peter turned the attention of the people from the healing to the Healer, today Christians who emphasize healing often direct people's attention from the Healer to healing, even a false healing. Many of the so-called healings in Pentecostal meetings are not genuine. After the lame man was healed, "he stood and walked and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God" (v. 8). This was a genuine healing. Nevertheless, Peter directed the people to the Healer, to the Lord Jesus. We also should turn our attention away from healing to the Healer.

Testifying of Jesus in His Death and Resurrection

The God of Resurrection Glorifying His Servant Jesus

When all the people, greatly amazed, ran to Peter, John, and the lame man, Peter said to them, "Men, Israelites, why are you marveling at this man? Or why are you gazing at us, as though by our own power or godliness we have made him to walk? The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him" (vv. 12-13). Some manuscripts add "the God of" before Isaac and Jacob. Why in verse 13 did Peter speak of God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Why did he not

speak simply of God? This title refers to the Triune God, Jehovah, the great **I AM** (Exo. 3:14-15). According to the Lord's word in Matthew 22, this divine title implies resurrection: "Concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (vv. 31-32). Peter referred to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because this indicates that He is the God of resurrection.

Peter told the people that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob "glorified His Servant Jesus." God glorified the Lord Jesus through His resurrection and in His ascension (Luke 24:26; Heb. 2:9; Eph. 1:20-22; Phil. 2:9-11).

The Holy One

In 3:14 Peter said to the people, "But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a man who was a murderer to be granted to you." What does it mean to say that the Lord is the Holy One? In this verse "Holy" indicates that Jesus, the Nazarene, the One despised by the Jewish leaders, was absolutely for God and separated unto Him. Furthermore, He was absolutely one with God. According to the denotation of the word "holy" in the Bible, it signifies one who is absolutely unto God, who is absolutely for God, and who is absolutely one with God. In all of human history only the Lord Jesus is such a One. David was good, but at least in one instance he was for himself and not for God. However, throughout His entire life the Lord Jesus was absolutely separated unto God, for God, and one with God. There was never an instant when He was not absolutely for God and one with Him. Therefore, He is called the Holy One. He alone deserves the title "the Holy One."

The Righteous One

According to 3:14, Peter called the Lord Jesus not only the Holy One but also the Righteous One. To be righteous

is to be right with God and also with every one and with every thing. Only the Lord Jesus can be called the Righteous One, because only He is right with God and with everyone and with everything. In ourselves we are not right with God, with others, or even with things. For example, in anger we may kick a door or knock over a chair. This is to be wrong with the door or the chair. We, therefore, cannot be the Righteous One.

As the Righteous One, the Lord Jesus is the Right One. He was never wrong with God or with any one or with any thing. Consider the time He cleansed the temple: "He found in the temple those selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money-changers sitting there. And having made a whip of cords, He drove them all, both the sheep and the oxen, out of the temple, and He poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned the tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, Take these things away; do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise" (John 2:14-16). The Lord Jesus certainly was right in doing this. If He had not done it, He would have behaved like a politician. The Lord saw the sinful situation, and He was indignant. However, suppose He had said to Himself, "I should not do anything out of anger. If I do, there will be a record that I once did something when I was angry. I need to consider Myself and behave carefully." However, as the Righteous One, the Lord cleansed the temple in a righteous way. He was never wrong, for He was always the Righteous One.

In his second message to the Jews, Peter called the Healer the Servant, the Holy One, and the Righteous One. How was Peter, who was unlearned, able to give such a word? As we shall see, when those in the Sanhedrin perceived that Peter and John "were uneducated and unlearned men, they marveled, and they recognized them, that they had been together with Jesus" (4:13). Although Peter was uneducated and unlearned, he could give the message recorded in Acts 3 by the life-giving Spirit who was within him. Here the Spirit did not speak directly by Himself. Rather, according to the principle of incarnation,

the Spirit spoke through Peter, an uneducated person. Therefore, the points concerning the Lord Jesus are divine, but the speaking is still that of an uneducated fisherman. In Acts 3 the Spirit spoke through a fisherman. In his speaking Peter could declare that the Lord Jesus is the Holy One, the One absolutely separated unto God, for God, and one with God, and also the Righteous One, the One who is right with God, with everyone, and with everything.

The Author of Life

In 3:15 Peter went on to say, "And the Author of life you killed, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses." Here the Greek word rendered "Author" is *archegos*, meaning author, origin, originator, chief leader, captain. It denotes Christ as the origin or Originator of life, hence, the Author of life, in contrast to the murderer in the previous verse.

In this verse the King James Version has "the Prince of life." This is a poor rendering. In 3:15 *archegos* does not denote a prince; it denotes the very source, origin, even originator, of life, the Author of life. Here Peter is saying that the Healer is the source of life, the Originator of life; He is the Author, the Chief Leader, in life. Peter was indicating that the Healer is not merely a Healer--He is the source, origin, and Initiator of life.

What we have in chapter three of Acts is not merely a matter of healing. Here we see the imparting of life into others. This is to propagate Christ. For such a propagation, we need the Lord as the Author of life, as the source of life.

Many Christians, following traditional theology, read the Bible in a shallow way. This is the reason I encourage the saints to drop traditional theology and come back to the Bible. In the Bible there are many deep "mines" in which we need to dig. One of these deep mines is the Greek word *archegos* in 3:15.

We need to see where life is, where life comes from. The word "Author" in verse 15 indicates that life comes from this Healer, who is the Holy One and the Righteous One. This Healer has not only the power to heal; He Himself is the source, the origin of life, for He is the Author, the

Originator of life. When we have life, we also have healing. The reason people become sick is that they are weak in life. Medical doctors know that when we are weak in life, we may become ill. But if we are strong in life, the life will swallow up death.

Peter wanted the people to realize that the One they killed is the Author of life. He is not only the Healer--He is the Author of life. But although He was killed, God raised Him from the dead. As we have pointed out, regarding the Lord as a man, the New Testament says that God raised Him from the dead. But considering Him as God, it tells us that He Himself rose from the dead (Rom. 14:9). Furthermore, the apostles were witnesses of the resurrected Christ, bearing witness of His resurrection, which is the crucial focus in the carrying out of God's New Testament economy.

In 3:16 Peter said, "And by faith in His name, His name has made this man strong, whom you behold and know; and the faith which is through Him has given him this perfect soundness before you all." The Greek words rendered "by faith in His name" literally mean "on the faith of His name," that is, on the ground of faith in His name. The name denotes the person. The person backs the name; hence, the name is powerful.

In verses 17 and 18 Peter goes on to say, "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as also your rulers did; but the things which God announced beforehand through the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled." The redeeming death of Christ was first determined by God in eternity (2:23) and announced beforehand through the prophets in the Old Testament time. This proves again that Christ's death was not an historical accident, but an act planned by God according to the purpose of His good pleasure and announced beforehand through the prophets.

The Prophet

In 3:22 and 23 Peter indicates that the Lord Jesus is

the Prophet: "Moses indeed said, A Prophet will the Lord your God raise up for you, from your brothers, like me; Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He may speak to you. And it shall be that every soul, whoever does not hear that Prophet, shall be utterly destroyed from among the people." Therefore, in this chapter we see that the Lord Jesus is the Servant, the Holy One, the Righteous One, the Author of life, and the Prophet.

Exhorting the Jews to Repent and Turn That They May Partake of and Enjoy the Ascended and Coming Christ

In 3:19-26 Peter exhorts the Jews to repent and turn so that they may partake of and enjoy the ascended and coming Christ. Here Peter seems to be saying, "You did something very foolish, but now you need to repent and turn so that you may partake of the ascended and coming Christ and enjoy Him. Christ is the Servant of God, the Holy One, the Righteous One, and the Author of life. He has accomplished everything, and He has attained and obtained all things. He is now in the heavens, but He will come back. This Christ is your portion. Repent, turn, and come to participate in Him and enjoy Him. If you come to Him you will enjoy Him." This was the emphasis of Peter's second speaking to the Jews.

Seasons of Refreshing

In 3:19 Peter said to the Jews, "Repent therefore and turn, that your sins may be wiped away, so that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." Literally the Greek word for "refreshing" means cooling, reviving; hence, relieving, refreshing. The seasons of refreshing denote a time of revival of all things with joy and rest. These seasons of refreshing refer to the times of the restoration of all things mentioned in 3:21. The times of restoration will be brought in by the coming of the Messiah in His glory, as taught and prophesied by the Savior in Matthew 19:28.

It seems that Peter's word in 3:19 skips over the

church age and goes directly from the time of Pentecost to the millennium. This may indicate that Peter did not have a clear vision concerning the church age in God's New Testament economy, as the entire New Testament reveals, that is, that before the seasons of refreshing, the church occupies a considerable period of time in God's dispensation

We have pointed out that the seasons of refreshing are times of cooling, reviving, relieving. Have you ever entered into such a season of refreshing? Have you experienced such a time of joy and rest? Actually, every proper conversion is a season of refreshing. Every genuine regeneration is a time of enjoyment. When we were saved, we had a time of enjoyment. During that time we had joy and peace. We enjoyed Christ Himself as our joy and peace. To some extent, we all have experienced this.

Actually, the season of refreshing is Christ Himself. When we have Him, we have Him as our refreshing. He is our enjoyment and peace.

The Restoration of All Things

In 3:20 and 21 Peter says, "And He may send Him who has been appointed for you, Christ Jesus, whom heaven must indeed receive until the times of restoration of all things, of which God spoke through the mouth of His holy prophets from of old." The times of restoration of all things are the times of restoration in the millennium, as prophesied in Isaiah 11:1-10 and 65:18-25, and referred to by Christ in Matthew 17:11 and 19:28. The times of restoration of all things will be brought in by His coming back.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FOURTEEN

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(9)

Scripture Reading: Acts 3:1-26

In our reading of the Bible we still may be influenced unconsciously by traditional theology. We need to drop the old traditional theology and come back to the Bible in a new, fresh way. If we read Acts 3 in this way, we shall see that the Lord is the Servant of God, the Holy One, the Righteous One, and the Author of life. We shall also pay attention to the seasons of refreshing spoken of in verse 19. As we have pointed out, in our experience Christ Himself is the season of refreshing, for He is our enjoyment, rest, and peace.

KNOWING THAT WE CAN ENJOY THE LORD

Have you ever heard that you can enjoy the Lord? Have you ever heard a speaker use the word "enjoy" with respect to your relationship with the Lord? Many believers have never heard that they can enjoy the Lord. In today's religion there is little enjoyment of the Lord, if any. However, by the Lord's mercy I can testify that for years I have been encouraging the Lord's people to enjoy Him.

In 1965 we had a conference in Los Angeles on eating Jesus. During that conference, we covered the matter of eating throughout the Bible: the tree of life, the Passover lamb with the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs, the manna, and the produce of the good land. We considered the Lord's word in John 6 concerning eating Him and the charge, given by Him when He established His table, to

eat His body. Furthermore, we considered the Lord's promise in Revelation 2:7 that the overcomers will eat of the tree of life. We also saw the promise in Revelation 22:14, the promise that those who wash their robes may have the right to the tree of life.

A certain preacher attended that conference. Afterward, he remarked that he had never heard about enjoying the Lord by eating Him. He wondered where I had learned all these things concerning eating the Lord and enjoying Him. I use this as an illustration of the need to realize that the Lord Jesus is enjoyable.

Some believers may not realize that Christ can be their enjoyment, because they are under the influence of traditional theological teaching in their reading of the Bible. Whenever they come to the Bible, they wear the "colored glasses" of tradition. We need to take off any such "glasses" and read the Bible according to its own color. If we do this, we shall pay attention to the Author of life and the seasons of refreshing in Acts 3.

ENJOYING SEASONS OF REFRESHING BY CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

If we enjoy Christ, we shall have a season of refreshing. We can enjoy a season of refreshing simply by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. Call "O Lord Jesus!" and you will be in a season of refreshing.

We need to enjoy seasons of refreshing in our married life. For example, a sister may become angry with her husband. As a result, she is bound like the bent-doubled and Satan-bound woman in Luke 13:10-17. Often a wife may be "bent-double" because she is bound by the anger she feels for her husband. How can a sister be released from such bondage? She can be released simply by calling, "O Lord Jesus!"

Whenever we are bound, we need to call on the Lord. Then we shall be able to say, "Amen, Lord Jesus! I am now in a season of refreshing." I encourage you to enjoy a season of refreshing by calling on the Lord's name.

Some who have a great deal of theological knowledge

may be unwilling to call on the name of the Lord. They may be afraid of "losing face." But we may need to lose our face in order to gain the Lord Jesus. What an enjoyment it is to call on His name! Sometimes I am beside myself with joy in the Lord when I call on Him and enjoy seasons of refreshing. Day by day, and throughout the day, we can enjoy seasons of refreshing simply by calling on the Lord.

Some criticize the practice of calling on the name of the Lord Jesus and claim that it is something we have invented. Calling on the Lord is a biblical practice; it certainly is not something invented by us. Calling on the name of the Lord is not a new practice in the New Testament. It began with Enosh, the third generation of mankind (Gen. 4:26) and was continued by many others (see note on 2:21 in the Recovery Version of Acts).

When some hear that calling on the Lord began with Enosh, they may claim that Enosh did not call the way we do today. To this I would reply, "How then, did Enosh call on the name of the Lord? Did he say, 'O Lord, have mercy on me. Lord, I am in a pitiful situation and have many problems. Lord, what can I do?'"

We cannot understand the way to call on the name of the Lord by reading only one verse. Rather, we need to consider this matter throughout the Scriptures. If we read the Old Testament from Genesis 4 to Isaiah 12, we shall find out the way to call on the Lord. Isaiah, in particular, indicates that we need to call on the Lord joyfully: "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the Lord, call upon His name, declare His doings among the people, make mention that His name is exalted" (Isa. 12:3-4). We draw water out of the wells of salvation by joyfully calling on the name of the Lord.

Suppose a certain brother has a number of problems. His wife is in the hospital, his older son has lost his job, and his younger son is not doing well in school. This brother should not say, "Lord, I need You to have mercy on me because I am in great need. Lord, my wife is in the hospital, my elder son lost his job, and my younger son is

failing in school. Lord, please help me." Instead of praying in this way, the brother should call on the Lord and say, "Lord Jesus, You are the Lord! You are sovereign. Lord Jesus, I thank You that You know about my situation. You know, Lord, that my wife is in the hospital, that my older son lost his job, and that my younger son is failing in school. O Lord Jesus!" This is to call on the Lord strongly and joyfully. Surely this is the way the saints in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament called on the name of the Lord.

The Greek word for "call" in 2:21 is *epikaleo*, composed of *epi*, upon and *kaleo*, call by name, that is, to call out audibly, even loudly, as Stephen did (7:59-60). From this we see that to call on the name of the Lord is to call on Him audibly. This is not a teaching or practice invented by us; it is a scriptural fact. If you study the lengthy note on calling in the Recovery Version, you will see how scriptural this practice is. Calling on the Lord is fully grounded on the revelation in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Furthermore, from experience we know that when we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, we enjoy a season of refreshing. Whenever we call on Him, we are in a season of refreshing. This is a fact in the Word and in our experience, and I encourage you to try it.

ASPECTS OF CHRIST AS THE HEALER

In 3:22 and 23 Peter points out that the Lord Jesus is a Prophet: "Moses indeed said, A Prophet will the Lord your God raise up for you, from your brothers, like me; Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He may speak to you. And it shall be that every soul, whoever does not hear that Prophet, shall be utterly destroyed from among the people." As the Prophet, Christ speaks for God, and He speaks forth God.

In 3:25 we see that the Lord Jesus is also the seed of Abraham: "You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God covenanted with your fathers, saying to Abraham, And in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." In this verse the "seed" refers to Christ

(Gal. 3:16). Here Peter seems to be saying, "The man Jesus, the Nazarene, the One despised by the Jewish leaders, is the seed of Abraham in whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed. Not only is He God's Servant, the Holy One, the Righteous One, the Author of life, and the Prophet--He is also the seed of Abraham, in whom the entire earth will be blessed."

The Healer in Acts 3 is marvelous. We should turn from the healing and pay attention to the Healer. We appreciate the healing, but we appreciate the Healer much more. This Healer is the One in whom all the families of the earth, all races, colors, and nationalities, will be blessed.

In our reading of chapter three of Acts we need to pay attention to all the points related to Christ as the Healer. He is the Servant of God and the Holy One, the One who was absolutely for God. As the Righteous One, He is right with God, with man, and with every thing in the heavens and on the earth. Furthermore, He is the Author of life. He is not only life--He is the Originator of life, the source and origin of life. He also brings in seasons of refreshing. When we contact Him, we are in a season of refreshing. This Healer is also the Prophet speaking for God and speaking forth God. Finally, He is the seed in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed.

We may read Acts 3 without paying attention to the aspects of Christ as the Healer revealed in this chapter. How is it possible for us to read this chapter without seeing these things? It is possible because of the influence of traditional theology. In our reading of Acts 3, this influence may keep us from seeing all the different matters related to Christ as the Healer. We need to see that the Healer is the Servant, the Holy One, the Righteous One, the Author of life, the Prophet, and the seed in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed. What a Healer He is! Instead of caring for healing, we need to enjoy the Healer. As long as we have the Healer, we shall have the seasons of refreshing.

GOD'S SENDING OF THE ASCENDED CHRIST

After presenting Christ as the Healer in a number of

different aspects, Peter utters a concluding word in verse 26: "To you first, God, having raised up His Servant, has sent Him to bless you in turning away each one of you from your wickedness." God has sent back the ascended Christ to the Jews first by pouring out His Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Hence, the Spirit God poured out is the very Christ God raised and exalted to the heavens. When the apostles preached and ministered this Christ, the Spirit was ministered to people.

At the time Peter was speaking the word recorded in verse 26, God's Servant had ascended to the heavens and was still there. Nevertheless, Peter told the people that God had sent Christ to bless them. What does this mean? Actually, God has received Christ into the heavens. But here Peter says that God has sent this ascended One to the people. In what way did God send the ascended Christ to the Jews? God sent Him by pouring out the Spirit. That was God's way of sending the ascended Christ to the people. This implies that the outpoured Spirit is actually the ascended Christ Himself. When the outpoured Spirit came to the people, that was Christ, the ascended One, sent by God to them. From this we see that the poured-out Spirit is identical to the ascended Christ. In God's economy for the experience of His people, the ascended Christ and the poured-out Spirit are one. In God's economy Christ and the Spirit are one for our enjoyment.

In presenting Christ to the people, Peter spoke of Him as God's Servant, the Holy One, the Righteous One, the Author of life, the Prophet, and the seed in whom we receive God's blessing. Then Peter concludes by saying, "To you first, God, having raised up His Servant, has sent Him to bless you...." Here Peter seems to be saying, "God has sent this One first to you to bless you. How did God send Him? He sent Him in the way of pouring out His Spirit to you in order to bless you. Now you need to receive this One. He is not far from you. Although He is in the heavens, economically He is among you as the poured-out Spirit to bless you. If you call on His name, you will receive His person--the Holy Spirit. The name is 'Jesus'

but the person is the Spirit. Call on the name of the Lord Jesus and receive the Spirit. Then you will have God's blessing." This is the way for us to receive the blessing God intends to give us by sending the ascended Christ back to us as the life-giving Spirit.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FIFTEEN

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(10)

Scripture Reading: Acts 4:1-31

In this message we shall consider 4:1-31. These verses describe the beginning of the persecution by the Jewish religionists. Acts 4:1-31 may be divided into six sections: arrest and inquiry by the Sanhedrin (vv. 1-7), Peter's testimony (vv. 8-12), the Sanhedrin's prohibition (vv. 13-18), Peter and John's reply (vv. 19-20), the Sanhedrin's release of Peter and John (vv. 21-22), and the church's praise and prayer (vv. 23-31). Let us consider 4:1-31 in a general way and then go on to consider verses 11 and 12 in detail.

ARREST AND INQUIRY BY THE SANHEDRIN

Verses 1 and 2 say, "And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed because of their teaching the people and announcing in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." The "captain" here is the captain of the temple guard. The Sadducees were a sect within Judaism (5:17). They did not believe in the resurrection, nor in angels, nor in spirits (Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:8). Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees were denounced by John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus as a brood of vipers (Matt. 3:7; 12:34; 23:33). The Lord warned His disciples against their doctrines (Matt. 16:6-12).

The Sadducees were greatly disturbed that Peter and John were teaching the people and announcing in Jesus

the resurrection from the dead. In 4:2 the preposition "in" denotes in the power of, and with the nature and character of.

Peter and John were placed in custody (v. 3). "And it came about on the next day that their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of high-priestly descent" (vv. 5-6). This was a gathering of the Jewish Sanhedrin (v. 15). It was this Sanhedrin composed of the Jewish leaders that became the strongest opponent of the Lord Jesus and His ministry in the four Gospels and condemned Him to death (Matt. 26:59). Now it was the same Sanhedrin with its constituents that began the persecution of the apostles and their ministry in Acts (5:21; 6:12; 22:30). This indicates that Judaism had fallen into the hand of God's enemy, Satan, the Devil, and was being used by him to frustrate and attempt to destroy God's move in His New Testament economy for the carrying out of His eternal purpose, which is to bring His kingdom to the earth by the establishing and building up of the churches through the preaching of the gospel of Christ.

In addition to Annas the high priest, 4:6 mentions Caiaphas, John, and Alexander. Caiaphas was a high priest (Luke 3:2). John and Alexander may have been kindred of the high priest. In any case, they must have been dignitaries among the Jews, since they are named with the leaders of the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 4:15).

Acts 4:7 says, "And having stood them in the midst, they inquired, By what power or in what name did you do this?" Their question refers to the healing of the lame man in chapter three. Literally, the Greek words rendered "by what power or in what name" mean "by what sort of power and in what kind of name."

PETER'S TESTIMONY

In 4:8-12 we have Peter's testimony. Verses 8 through 10 say, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, Rulers of the people and elders, if we today are

being examined regarding a good deed done to a sick man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, in this name this man stands before you well." In verse 8 Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit outwardly and economically. Then Peter told them that the lame man was healed "in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene." We have seen that the word "Nazarene" indicates the One despised by the Jewish leaders (John 1:45-46; Acts 22:8; 24:5). In verse 10 "you" is emphatic. Here Peter emphasizes the fact that they crucified the Lord Jesus, but God raised Him from the dead.

In verses 11 and 12 Peter went on to say, "This is the stone which was despised by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is no salvation in any other; for neither is there another name under heaven given among men in which we must be saved." Verse 11 is a quotation from Psalm 118:22. The Lord Jesus also quoted this verse in Matthew 21:42, where He was indicating that He is the stone for God's building (Isa. 28:16; Zech. 3:9; 1 Pet. 2:4), and the "builders" were the Jewish leaders, who were supposed to work on God's building. His word unveiled the Jewish leaders' rejection of Him and God's honoring of Him for the building of His habitation among His people on earth. By this word Peter learned to know the Lord as the precious stone held in honor by God, as he expounded concerning Him in his first Epistle (1 Pet. 2:4-7). Peter's quoting of this word indicates that he preached Christ not only as the Savior for the salvation of sinners, but also as the stone for God's building. It is such a Christ who is the unique salvation to sinners and in whose unique name under heaven, a name despised and rejected by the Jewish leaders but honored and exalted by God (Phil. 2:9-10), sinners must be saved (Acts 4:12).

In verse 11 the Greek word translated "despised" also means rejected (see Matt. 21:42). The stone despised, rejected, by the builders has become the cornerstone. Literally, the Greek words rendered "cornerstone" mean

head of the corner. Christ is not only the foundation stone (Isa. 28:16) and the topstone (Zech. 4:7) but also the cornerstone.

THE CHURCH'S PRAISE AND PRAYER

After the Sanhedrin's prohibition (vv. 13-18), Peter and John's reply (vv. 19-20), and the Sanhedrin's release of Peter and John (vv. 21-22), we have the church's praise and prayer (vv. 23-31). Verse 23 says, "And being released, they went to their own people and reported whatever the chief priests and the elders had said to them." Their own people were the church people, who were made distinct and separate from the Jews by calling on the name of Jesus (9:14).

Verses 24 through 26 continue, "And when they heard this, they lifted up their voice with one accord to God and said, O Lord, You who have made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all things in them, who through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, Why did the nations rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ." The Greek word rendered "Lord" in verse 24 is not *kurios*, the usual word for Lord, but *despotes*, which denotes the master of a slave, one who has absolute sovereign power, as in Luke 2:29; Jude 4; Revelation 6:10; 1 Timothy 6:1-2. Originally, the word rendered "rage" in verse 25 meant to snort like a horse; hence, to be haughty, insolent.

Verses 27 and 28 continue, "For truly in this city, there were gathered together against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You did anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the nations and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your counsel predestined to take place." The word "predestined" in verse 28 may remind us of the "determined counsel and foreknowledge of God" in 2:23. The crucifixion of the Lord Jesus was a purposeful fulfillment of the divine counsel determined by the Triune God.

According to 4:29-31, they prayed for boldness to speak the Lord's word. "And as they were beseeching, the place in which they were gathered was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God with boldness" (v. 31). Like Peter in verse 8, they were filled with the Holy Spirit outwardly and economically.

PETER AND JOHN BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

The crucial point in Acts 4 concerns Christ the Healer revealed in chapter three. The healing recorded in Acts 3 did not take place outside the holy city; it happened not only in the city but on the premises of the temple. Hence, many of those in the temple became involved in this case. However, the rulers and administrators in Judaism did not agree with any activity done in the name of the One they denied, condemned to death, and killed. But they could not deny the fact that the lame man had been healed, and he had been healed through the name of Jesus, not by human ability. Moreover, Peter and John were Galileans, not residents of Jerusalem. They came from the despised region of Galilee. Finally, there was great turmoil, and it was difficult for the Jewish leaders to handle the situation. The Jewish leaders could not go along with the Galilean fishermen nor agree with what they did in the name of the One they denied and crucified. Therefore, unable to keep silent, they came together and held a counsel.

Acts 4:16 says, "But having ordered them to go away outside the Sanhedrin, they conferred with one another." The Sanhedrin was a council composed of the chief priests, the elders, the lawyers, and the scribes. It was the highest court of the Jews (Luke 22:66; Acts 5:27, 34, 41). The Sanhedrin had the authority to decide matters without consulting a higher power.

In Acts 4 we see that the Sanhedrin handled the matter concerning Peter and John in a very cautious way. They conferred with one another and said, "What shall we do to these men? For that indeed a notable sign has occurred through them is manifest to all those dwelling in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may

not be spread further among the people, let us threaten them to speak no longer to any man in this name. And having called them, they charged them not to utter anything at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (vv. 16-18). After threatening them, "they released them, finding no way how they could punish them on account of the people, because they all were glorifying God for what had happened" (v. 21). Perhaps fearing that the people might stone them if they punished Peter and John, the Sanhedrin released them.

CHRIST AS THE STONE FOR GOD'S BUILDING

When Peter and John were asked by what power or in what name they healed the lame man, Peter took the opportunity to say more concerning Christ as the Healer. Chapter four, therefore, is actually the continuation of Peter's presentation of the Healer. In chapter three he presented this Healer in six aspects: God's Servant, the Holy One, the Righteous One, the Author of life, the Prophet, and the seed in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed. All these aspects of the Healer are for our benefit. But in chapter four Peter presents an aspect of the Healer that is especially for God; he presents Christ as the stone for God's building.

The Stone-Savior

Acts 4:12 says, "And there is no salvation in any other; for neither is there another name under heaven given among men in which we must be saved." This verse is often used in the preaching of the gospel. But have you ever heard it used in relation to verse 11? Acts 4:11 says, "This is the stone which was despised by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone." These verses indicate that the stone in verse 11 is the Savior. The stone despised by the builders has become the cornerstone, and there is no salvation in any other name. We can be saved only in the name of Jesus, and Jesus is the stone. This means that we have a Stone-Savior. In the four gospels we have the King-Savior in Matthew, the Slave-Savior in

Mark, the Man-Savior in Luke, and the God-Savior in John. Now in the book of Acts we have the Stone-Savior. Our Savior is not only the King, a Slave, a Man, and God--He is also a stone for God's building.

In 4:7 Peter and John were asked by what power or in what name they had healed the lame man. Then in verse 10 Peter said, "Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, in this name this man stands before you well." Here Peter speaks boldly concerning the name of Jesus Christ. Then in verse 11 he says that this name is the stone which was despised by the builders. Although Peter was uneducated and unlearned (v. 13) he could nevertheless declare that Jesus Christ is the stone despised by the builders. Who were the builders who despised this stone? These builders were the leaders in the Sanhedrin.

The Building of God's Eternal Habitation

In our reading of the book of Acts we may still be under the influence of traditional theology. Due to this influence, we may realize only that the name of Jesus is for salvation, that there is no other name given for us to be saved. We may not go on to consider the significance of the stone and the builders. In particular, we may not ask what these builders were building. What were they building? Some may think that they were building Judaism, that is, building a religion. However, it is not God's intention to build up Judaism or any kind of religion.

The Jewish leaders, the builders, did not know God's economy. Likewise, many believers today do not know what God's economy is. We have put out hundreds of Life-study Messages, and in these messages we have covered many things concerning God's economy. We have pointed out that God's economy is to build up His habitation in this universe. Heaven is not God's permanent habitation; rather, heaven is God's temporary residence. The Bible reveals clearly that God is not satisfied to stay forever in heaven.

The Mingling of God with Man

The Bible reveals to us that God has an economy. God's economy is a plan, an arrangement, an administration, to accomplish something. What God intends to accomplish in His economy is to build up His eternal habitation. What is God's eternal habitation? God's eternal habitation is the blending of Himself with man, the mingling of God with humanity. Neither heaven nor earth is God's habitation for His satisfaction. Nothing other than the mingling of God with man is qualified to be God's dwelling place. Although we see little concerning this in the Old Testament, it is revealed in full in the New Testament, in particular, in the Gospel of John.

John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." This word refers to the incarnation: the Word, which is God (John 1:1), became flesh and tabernacled among us. The word "tabernacled" in this verse is rich in its significance. It signifies that the incarnated One is the very mingling of God and man. This mingling is God's tabernacle, where God can dwell. Furthermore, in this tabernacle God's chosen people can serve God and stay with Him. Therefore, in John 1:14 we see the mingling of God with man in the incarnation to become God's tabernacle, His dwelling place.

In John 14:23 the Lord Jesus says, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him." Here we see that the Son and the Father will come to the one who loves the Lord Jesus and make an abode with that one.

Then in John 15:4 the Lord goes on to say, "Abide in Me and I in you." Here the Lord indicates that He may become our abode, our abiding place, and that we need to be His abode. The Lord seems to be saying, "Abide in Me so that I may abide in you. Be My abode so that I may be your abode." Here we have the mingling of God and man for a mutual dwelling place. Have you ever heard anything concerning this? There is not such a concept in traditional theological teachings.

A Building in Resurrection

In John 2:19 the Lord Jesus says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." According to John 2:21, "He spoke of the temple of His body." Here the Lord seems to be saying, "You Jewish leaders should be builders. However, eventually you will destroy this temple. But I will build it up in three days. In resurrection I shall build up what you have destroyed." This building in resurrection includes not only Jesus Christ Himself, but also all those who believe in Him. Ultimately, He and all the believers will be built together into the habitation of God, which in the New Testament is called the house of God, the church (1 Tim. 3:15).

Now we can see that God's economy is to build an eternal habitation for Himself and for His chosen people. This habitation is actually the mingling of God with His chosen people.

A Mutual Dwelling Place

The thought of having God as our habitation can be found in the Old Testament. For example, Deuteronomy 33:27 says, "The eternal God is thy dwelling-place" (A.S.V.). In Psalm 90:1 Moses says, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations." In these verses we see clearly that God is our habitation. However, in the Old Testament we cannot see a verse telling us that we, God's chosen people, are His habitation. But the New Testament reveals clearly that there is a universal building, and this building is the mutual building of God and His chosen people. Actually, this habitation is God as our dwelling place and we as God's dwelling place. This wonderful dwelling place is God's building.

God intended to use Moses, the kings, the prophets, and all the Jewish leaders to build this habitation. Therefore, the builders in Acts. 4:11 should refer to the builders of God's universal habitation.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SIXTEEN

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(11)

Scripture Reading: Acts 4:1-31

In chapter three of Acts Peter presents Christ, the Healer, as God's Servant, the Holy One, the Righteous One, the Author of life, the Prophet, and the seed in whom all families of the earth will be blessed. Because this Healer is the Author of life, whenever we call on Him we enjoy a season of refreshing. As the Prophet, He speaks God to us, and in Him as the seed of Abraham we are blessed. All these aspects of Christ as the wonderful Healer are for us. However, in Acts 3 we do not see that this Healer is for God's economy, God's purpose, God's building. But in chapter four Peter was given the opportunity to present this Healer in a further way, presenting Him as a stone for God's building. Concerning this, 4:11 and 12 say, "This is the stone which was despised by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is no salvation in any other; for neither is there another name under heaven given among men in which we must be saved." In this message we shall give a further word on Christ as the stone for God's building.

THE CORNERSTONE OF GOD'S HABITATION

God came in incarnation to be a stone for the building up of His universal habitation, but the Jewish leaders, who should have been the builders, despised this stone. However, God made Him the cornerstone. The more the Jewish leaders rejected Him, the more God used Him.

First, He was a stone only in a general way. But after the rejection by the Jewish leaders, God in resurrection made Him the cornerstone. At first He was a common stone. Then Jewish leaders rejected Him by killing Him. But God honored Him by raising Him up from among the dead and making Him a particular stone, the cornerstone, the very prominent stone that joins the walls of a building. Christ is the cornerstone of God's habitation.

PETER'S KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST AS THE STONE

In John 1 we see that Andrew brought his brother, Simon Peter, to the Lord Jesus. "Looking at him, Jesus said, You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas (which translated means a stone)" (v. 42). Later, in Caesarea Philippi, the Lord Jesus asked His disciples, "But you, who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:16). Peter took the lead to declare, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). In His response to Peter, the Lord said, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church" (v. 18). Here the name "Peter" means a stone, which is material for God's building. The Lord Jesus seemed to be saying, "You are Peter, a stone. I will build my church with stones."

No doubt, the Lord's word must have made a deep impression on Peter, even though it is not likely that he understood it at the time. However, after the life-giving Spirit had been breathed into him and after the economical Spirit had blown upon him, Peter became a man of Spirit, a man with the essential Spirit within him and the economical Spirit upon him. As such a man he surely began to understand the Lord's word concerning him being a stone. Peter might have said to himself, "I recall that when I first met the Lord, He said that He would give me a new name, a name that means stone. Later He called me 'Peter' and said that He would build His church upon a rock. Now I understand what the Lord was saying."

Having this understanding, Peter in Acts 4 could present the Lord Jesus as the stone despised by the builders but which has become the cornerstone. Later,

when he had become old, he wrote his first Epistle, in which he spoke of the Lord as the living stone and of the believers as living stones for God's building: "To whom coming, a living stone, having been rejected by men, but with God chosen, held in honor, you yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2:4-5a). According to Acts 3 and 4, Peter knew the Healer not only as God's Servant, the Holy One, the Righteous One, the Author of life, the Prophet, and the seed in whom all the earth would be blessed; he also knew Him as the stone for God's building.

I do not believe that throughout the centuries many have taught from the Word that Jesus Christ is a stone for God's building. He is not only the Servant, the Holy One, the Righteous One, the Author of life, the Prophet, and the seed; He is a stone for God's building. According to 4:12, this stone is the One in whom we can be saved. Hence, He is the Stone-Savior. As the Stone-Savior, He is solid, strong, and reliable. We can rely on Him and stand on Him. This stone is the rock, the foundation stone, and the cornerstone. In Zechariah 4:7 we see that He is even the topstone. Christ is the material for God's building. God's building is entirely of Christ.

SAVED IN THE NAME OF THE ALL-INCLUSIVE ONE

When some hear that we say according to the Scriptures that Christ is the cornerstone, the foundation stone, the topstone, and even all the stones in God's building, they may accuse us of teaching pantheism. This is a false accusation. Yes, we say that Christ is our food, air, water, light, door, clothing, and dwelling place, although this certainly is not pantheism. Is Christ not qualified to be our food and drink? Is He not qualified to be our air, clothing, door, and dwelling place? Is He not the foundation stone, the cornerstone, the topstone, and all the stones for God's building? Surely Christ is qualified to be all these things. However, today some detract from Christ's qualifications and falsely accuse as pantheists those who teach from the Bible that Christ is all-inclusive,

that He is all in all. The New Testament reveals that Christ is all in all (Col. 3:11), and we are the fullness of this One who is all in all (Eph. 1:23). How wonderful that we are Christ's fullness to express Him!

It is in the name of Jesus Christ, the all-inclusive One, that we are saved. Do you know why His name is so powerful? His name is powerful because He is the wonderful, all-inclusive One. We have been saved in the name of Jesus Christ, and He is the all-inclusive One. As the all-inclusive One, Christ is God, man, the Father, the Son, the Spirit, the rock, the foundation, the cornerstone, the topstone, the door, our food, our drink, our clothing, our life, our strength, our ability, our function, our walk, our living, our words, our breath, our sight, our hearing. Oh, it is impossible to exhaust all that Christ is to us!

Due to the influence of tradition, some say that we should not use new terms to express what Christ is. They claim that we should use only those terms used by the church fathers, the councils, and traditional teachings. This imposes a great restriction on God's people. We need to break through this restriction and use new terms when necessary to convey the all-inclusiveness of Christ. We should not trust in traditional theology, for it restricts us and even misleads us. We need to see in the Word all the aspects of Christ. In particular, our Christ has the aspect of being a stone for God's building. Hallelujah for this building stone!

THE STUMBLING STONE, THE SMITING STONE, THE PROPAGATING STONE, AND THE BUILDING STONE

Christ is not only the stone for God's building; He is also the stumbling stone and the smiting stone. Concerning Himself as the stumbling stone and smiting stone, the Lord Jesus said, "He who falls on this stone shall be broken to pieces, but on whomever it falls, it shall scatter him as chaff" (Matt. 21:44). To the believers, Christ is the foundation stone in whom we trust (Isa. 28:16). But to the unbelieving Jews, He is the stumbling stone (Isa. 8:14-15; Rom. 9:32-33), and to the nations He will be the

smiting stone. According to Daniel 2:34 and 35, Christ as the stone will smite the nations at His coming back.

For us as believers Christ is neither the stumbling stone nor the smiting stone--He is the building stone, even the propagating stone. For us, He has become the building stone. First, we became His propagation, and now He is building us up together into God's dwelling place. He is both the Builder and the material for God's building. He is the Stone-Savior. In God's economy He is building His eternal habitation. For the Jews and the nations respectively, He is the stumbling stone and the smiting stone. But to us He is the propagating stone and the building stone.

FROM A CLAY-MAN TO A STONE-CITY

In the Bible stone is a major item. In Genesis God created a man of clay (Gen. 2:7). Hence, the first man was a clay-man. Then God Himself came to be a man, and this man was a stone-man. At the end of the Bible, in the book of Revelation, we have a stone-city, a city built of stone. Therefore, the Bible begins with a clay-man, continues with a stone-man, and consummates in a stone-city. This is God's economy.

THE REVELATION IN THE BIBLE CONCERNING THE STONE

It is not an easy matter to study the Bible. We need certain skills if we are to properly study the Word of God. Those who lack the necessary skills may in their reading of the book of Acts pay attention to such things as signs, wonders, and Peter's shadow (5:15). They may not pay attention to the stone rejected by the builders. We, however, need to see the importance of Christ as the building stone.

In the Old Testament

At the beginning of the Bible we have the tree of life, a river, and a stone. According to Genesis 2, after God created man, He placed him in front of the tree of life (vv.

8-9). We are also told that a "river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads" (v. 10). In relation to the river Genesis 2 speaks of gold, bdellium, and onyx stone (v. 12). This is the first mention of stone in the Bible.

In the Old Testament we read of stone again and again. For example, onyx stones were on the shoulder of the ephod worn by the high priest, and twelve stones were set into the high priest's breastplate (Exo. 28:8-12, 21). On these stones were engraved the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. This implies that God's chosen people should become stones in His sight.

In the Old Testament we also read of the cleft rock out from which flowed the water of life (Exo. 17:5-6). In 1 Corinthians Paul tells us that this rock was Christ: "They drank of a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4).

Isaiah 8:14 and 15 speak of a rock for stumbling. But Isaiah 28:16 says, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation." To His opposers Christ is the rock that stumbles them, but to us He is the foundation stone and the cornerstone. Furthermore, Zechariah speaks of Christ as the topstone: "He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it" (Zech. 4:7).

In the New Testament

We read much more concerning the stone in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus called Peter a stone, and indicated that He Himself is the rock (John 1:42; Matt. 16:18). Christ will build His church upon this rock with the believers as stones. In 1 Corinthians 3:11 Paul says that Christ is the unique foundation that has been laid, and we should build upon this foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones. Then in 1 Peter 2:4-5 we see that the Lord Jesus is the living stone and that we also as living stones are being built up a spiritual house. Then in the book of Revelation the Lord says that the overcomers will

receive a white stone to signify that they have become precious stones in His sight (Rev. 2:17). Furthermore, in Revelation 4 God sitting on the throne has the appearance of jasper and sardius: "He Who was sitting was like in appearance to a jasper stone and a sardius" (v. 3). Eventually, we have the New Jerusalem, a city whose light is "like a most precious stone, as a jasper stone" (Rev. 21:11), a great and high wall of jasper (vv. 12, 18), and twelve foundations consisting of precious stones. If we consider this city, we shall see that it consists of gold, pearl, and precious stones. This is the clear revelation concerning the stone in the Bible.

Many of those who teach the Bible have not seen that stone is a major item in the Scriptures. Have you ever heard that the Lord Jesus is the Stone-Savior? Have you ever been told that God has the appearance of jasper? According to Revelation 4, we may say that our God is the jasper-God. If some say that such a term is not found in the Bible, we can point out that the Bible does not use the expression "Triune God," but the fact that God is Triune--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit--surely is in the Word. Likewise, the Bible does not use the term "jasper-God," but it definitely reveals that God has the appearance of jasper. Is He not, then, in a very real sense a jasper-God?

Once again I would encourage you not to put your trust in traditional theology. With such theology there is too much restriction, blindness, and covering concerning many matters in the Bible. We have seen only a small portion of what is in the Word. God's revelation in the Scriptures is inexhaustible. When we are in eternity, we may say, "Oh, how little we have seen!"

In our study of the Bible we should not be careless. Rather, we need to follow the governing principles of the Scriptures. If we follow these principles, we shall be kept from making mistakes. Although we should not be restricted by traditional theology, we still need to be directed by the governing principles in interpreting the Bible. (Perhaps on another occasion we shall consider what these principles are.) In the Bible there is a line concerning stone from Genesis 2 through Revelation 22.

In Genesis 2 we have the onyx stone at the beginning, and then in Revelation 21 and 22 we have the jasper city as the consummation. The appearance, the wall, and the first foundation of this city are all of jasper. How much truth, therefore, is indicated and implied by Peter's referring to Christ as the stone rejected by the builders but made by God the cornerstone in resurrection!

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SEVENTEEN

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(12)

Scripture Reading: Acts 4:32--5:12

In 4:32--5:11 we have the continuation of the church life, and in 5:17-42, the continuation of the persecution by the Jewish religionists. Concerning the continuation of the church life, there is a positive scene in 4:32-37 and a negative scene in 5:1-11. In this message we shall consider the church life as seen in 4:32--5:11.

THE CONTINUATION OF THE CHURCH LIFE

The Positive Scene Having All Things Common

Acts 4:32 says, "And the multitude of those who believed was of one heart and soul; and not one said that any of his possessions was his own, but all things were common to them." As in 2:44, having all things common was a sign not of love but of Christ's dynamic salvation that saved the believers from greed and selfishness. This was practiced for a short time at the initiation of God's New Testament economy; it did not continue for the long run as a practice of legality in the church life during Paul's ministry.

Witnesses of the Resurrected Christ

Verse 33 says, "And with great power the apostles gave testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all." The apostles were witnesses of

the resurrected Christ not in word only, but also by their life and action. In particular, they bore witness of His resurrection.

Great Grace upon All the Believers

According to 4:33, great grace was upon all the believers. The law makes demands upon man according to what God is, but grace supplies man with what God is to meet what God demands. Actually, grace is God Himself enjoyed by man. Grace is the resurrected Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) to bring the processed God in resurrection into us to be our life and life supply so that we may live in resurrection. Therefore, grace is the Triune God becoming life and everything to us.

Acts 4:34 and 35 say, "For neither was anyone among them in need; for as many as were owners of lands or of houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the things which were sold and placed them at the feet of the apostles; and it was distributed to each according as anyone had need." As in 2:45, the selling of lands and houses was an evidence of the Lord's dynamic salvation. This salvation caused the believers to overcome their earthly possessions, which occupy, possess, and usurp fallen mankind (Matt. 19:21-24; Luke 12:13-19, 33-34; 14:33; 16:13-14; 1 Tim. 6:17).

The Example of Barnabas

In 4:36 and 37 Luke gives a positive example of one who sold his land and placed the proceeds at the feet of the apostles: "And Joseph, who was surnamed Barnabas by the apostles, which is translated son of encouragement, a Levite, a Cyprian by birth, possessing a field, having sold it, brought the sum of money and placed it at the feet of the apostles." The Greek word rendered "encouragement" in verse 36 also means consolation. Barnabas, a Levite and a native of Cyprus, sold his property, brought the money from the sale, and placed it at the feet of the apostles for distribution among the saints according to need. This is part of the positive scene in 4:32-37.

The Negative Scene The Two Persons Residing in Ananias and Sapphira

Following the positive scene at the end of chapter four, Luke presents the negative scene in 5:1-11. The negative scene involves a couple, Ananias and Sapphira: "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a piece of property, and put aside for himself some of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it; and having brought a certain part, he laid it at the feet of the apostles" (vv. 1-2). Ananias and Sapphira had an evil plan to deceive, to lie to, the indwelling Spirit. "But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart that you should lie to the Holy Spirit and put aside for yourself some of the proceeds of the land?" (v. 3). Ananias lied apparently to the apostles but actually to the Holy Spirit, who is God (v. 4), because the Spirit and the apostles were one.

As we read these verses, we see that two persons were making their residence in this couple. First, the Spirit was no doubt dwelling in them. Because they were saved, the Holy Spirit had taken up His residence within them. Second, Satan was dwelling in them, for he had filled their hearts to lie to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, two residents--the Holy Spirit and Satan--were dwelling in Ananias and Sapphira.

We need to realize that, as believers, we also have these two residents within us. However, some teachers of the Bible do not believe that Satan remains in the believers; neither do these teachers believe that saints can be possessed by demons. Because Jesse Penn-Lewis spoke about cases of demon possession of believers in her book *War on the Saints*, some went so far as to call her a "witch." Although some may deny that believers can be possessed by demons, it is a fact that certain genuine believers have been demon possessed. Here in chapter five of Acts is perhaps the first case of believers possessed by or deceived by Satan. Peter asked Ananias, "Why has Satan filled your heart?" This indicates that Satan was not merely outside them but was in their hearts deceiving them and seducing them.

The Problem of Ambition

How could Satan have such ground within them? Satan had this ground because of their ambition. I have learned over the years that believers can be ambitious to have a name, position, title, and rank. This ambition can be found even among those in the church life. Both in the Orient and in the West I have seen those in the church who were ambitious concerning rank, position, title, and name. Even the young people may be ambitious to be leaders.

Recently in Taipei the Lord moved among us in such a way that we established more than four hundred small groups in the church. When we established similar groups in the past, we appointed a leader in every group and also assistants. However, we found out that those appointments became a factor of corruption. Therefore, this time we told the church that there would not be any designated leaders in the small groups. Rather, every one in every group could take the lead.

The ground in Ananias and Sapphira that was the basis for Satan's deception of them was their desire to have a name. They wanted to have the reputation for having sold everything for the church. Because of their ambition, they formed a plan. They sold a piece of property, kept some of the proceeds for themselves, and then brought a certain part and laid it at the feet of the apostles.

As we have pointed out, Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit. Do you think that the Spirit to whom they lied was the Spirit in the heavens, the Spirit outside them? Do you think they lied merely to an objective Spirit? Ananias and Sapphira lied to the very Spirit who was within them. If the Holy Spirit had not been within them, why would Peter have said that they lied to the Holy Spirit? Both Satan and the Holy Spirit resided in Ananias and Sapphira at the same time.

Today there is a trend among Bible teachers to deny the fact that Satan, the Devil, dwells in man's flesh. But consider Peter's experience in Matthew 16. Peter recognized that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. The Lord said to him, "You are blessed, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in

the heavens" (v. 17). Later in the same chapter we see that Peter, the one who received a revelation from the Father, was also occupied by Satan. When Peter took the Lord and began to rebuke Him, "He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan" (v. 23). Here we see that Satan was within Peter, not merely outside of him.

Ambition Resulting in Death

Satan is not far from us, and we need to be careful lest we be deceived by him. If we would avoid Satan's deception, we must reject, condemn, and abandon the ambition to be somebody in the church life. Whenever we have the thought of being somebody in the church life, Satan has the ground to deceive us and, spiritually speaking, to bring us into death.

Ananias and Sapphira had the ambition to be somebody in the church; they had the ambition to have a name. Because of their ambition they were deceived, and that deception brought them into death. As the record indicates, both Ananias and Sapphira died physically.

We should not think that because there is no physical death in the church like that of Ananias and Sapphira, that this means there is no death at all. On the contrary, the ambition to be somebody, the ambition to be a leader, brings the ambitious ones into spiritual death. Those who are ambitious may not die physically, but they will die spiritually. We have seen cases like this in the Lord's recovery. These cases make it evident that ambition results in spiritual death. Concerning this we all need to be very careful.

The fact that Ananias and Sapphira suffered the punishment of physical death does not mean that they will suffer eternal perdition. Although Ananias and Sapphira were saved, they committed a sin unto death (1 John 6:16-17). In God's governmental dealing, some of His children may be destined to physical death in this age due to a certain sin. This was the situation of Ananias and

Sapphira, who were punished with physical death because of their lying to the Holy Spirit. Their case teaches us to be extremely careful about ambition and dishonesty in the church life.

The Holy Spirit used Luke to record the case of Ananias and Sapphira to point out to us that although the church life may be wonderful, we still need to be careful concerning ambition. We should not have any ambition to be somebody in the church. We should not have the ambition for rank, position, or name. If we have such an ambition, we shall give the enemy the ground to bring us into spiritual death.

The Sin of Lying to the Holy Spirit

In 5:4 there is a word related to having all things common: "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And when it was sold, was it not in your authority?" This indicates that to sell possessions and distribute them to others was not considered by the apostles a practice of legality. The believers were not required to have all things common. That was something that should have been done willingly. If Ananias and Sapphira did not want to sell their property, they were not required to do so. Furthermore, the money from the sale was in their own authority. Their sin was that they intended to lie to the Holy Spirit. It would not have been sinful to keep their property or to keep the proceeds from the sale of the property. Their sin consisted in lying to the Holy Spirit. Their intention was to cheat the church and to get a name for themselves by lying. This was a gross sin that offended the indwelling Spirit. Their sin was a willing cooperation with Satan, the evil resident within them. We all need to learn the lesson afforded by the case of Ananias and Sapphira.

In 5:3 Peter told Ananias that he lied to the Holy Spirit. Then at the end of verse 4 Peter said to him, "You did not lie to men, but to God." This proves that the Holy Spirit in verse 3 is God.

Later, when Peter was speaking to Sapphira, he said to her, "Why was it agreed together by you to test the Spirit

of the Lord?" The Holy Spirit in verse 3, God in verse 4, and the Lord in verse 9 are all one, especially in the experience of the believers.

Fear Coming upon the Church

In verse 11 Luke closes his account of the negative scene by saying, "And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all those who heard these things." The Greek word for "church" is *ekklesia*, composed of *ek*, out, and a derivative of *kaleo*, called; hence, the called out (congregation), the assembly. This is the first time that the church is mentioned in Acts as a local church. As we shall see in a later message, 8:1 speaks of the church in Jerusalem. This was the first church established in a locality. It was established within the jurisdiction of the city, the city of Jerusalem. It was a local church in its locality, as indicated by the Lord in Matthew 18:17. The church revealed in Matthew 16:18 is the universal church, which is the unique Body of Christ. The church revealed in Matthew 18:17 is the local church, the expression of the unique Body of Christ in a certain locality. The record of the New Testament concerning the establishment of the church in its locality is consistent throughout (Acts 13:1; 14:23; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 8:1; Gal. 1:2; Rev. 1:4,11).

SIGNS AND WONDERS DONE THROUGH THE APOSTLES

Acts 5:12 says, "And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders took place among the people." The record here is very similar to that in 2:43, where we are told that "many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles." We need to realize that wonders and signs are not part of God's central testimony of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. Neither are they part of His full salvation. Rather, wonders and signs are only evidences that what the apostles preached and ministered and how they acted were absolutely of God and not of man (Heb. 2:3-4). This

means that wonders and signs are neither a part of God's central testimony nor a part of God's salvation. Wonders and signs are means used by God to prove that the preaching and ministry of the apostles are of God. At the apostles' time there was the need for signs and wonders to be done through them. No doubt, that caught the attention of the multitude. However, we today should not emphasize wonders and signs.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE EIGHTEEN

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(13)

Scripture Reading: Acts 5:17-42

In 5:17-42 we have the continuation of the persecution by the Jewish religionists. This section of Acts covers four matters: the Sanhedrin's arrest of the apostles and the Lord's rescue (vv. 17-28), the apostles' testimony (vv. 29-32), the Sanhedrin's prohibition and release (vv. 33-40), and the apostles' rejoicing and faithfulness (vv. 41-42).

THE SANHEDRIN'S ARREST OF THE APOSTLES AND THE LORD'S RESCUE

Acts 5:14 says, "Believers were all the more being added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and of women." Because of this, "the high priest and all those with him (that is, the sect of the Sadducees) rose up and were filled with jealousy, and they laid their hands on the apostles and put them in public custody" (vv. 17-18). The expression "public custody" denotes the outer prison house, not the inner prison used for serious cases. During the night, an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison and led the apostles out (v. 19). Those guarding the doors did not know what had happened. The next morning the Sanhedrin and the council of the elders of the sons of Israel sent deputies to the prison to get the apostles. "But when the deputies arrived, they did not find them in the prison; and when they returned, they reported, saying, The prison house we found locked with all security, and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened the

doors, we found no one inside" (vv. 22-23). "The captain of the temple and the chief priests were utterly perplexed." Then "someone came up and reported to them, Behold, the men whom you put in the prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people" (vv. 24-25). Although the religionists could not understand what had happened, the apostles had been rescued from prison and were in the temple teaching.

THE WORDS OF THIS LIFE

When the angel of the Lord rescued the apostles from prison, he said to them, "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life" (v. 20). We need to pay attention to the word "this," for it indicates a particular life. The Greek word rendered "words" here is *rhema*, denoting the present spoken word, not the constant written word. Therefore, the angel was saying to the apostles, "Go and speak the present words of this life."

What life is indicated by "this life"? It is the divine life preached, ministered, and lived by Peter that overcame the Jewish leaders' persecution, threatening, and imprisonment. This word indicates that Peter's life and work made the divine life so real and present in his situation that even the angel saw it and pointed it out.

The apostles were not told to speak of the divine life in a doctrinal way. Today certain Christians may talk about life, but their talk is altogether doctrinal. We need to seek mercy and grace from the Lord so that whenever we speak concerning the divine life, we speak the words of the very life we live. This means that the divine life becomes our daily life. It is this life that we should minister to others.

Acts 5:26 says, "Then the captain with the deputies went away and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned." The religious leaders did not know how to handle the situation. In particular, they did not know what to do with "this life." Fearing the people, they did not do anything violent to the apostles. Instead, "having brought them, they stood them in the Sanhedrin. And the high priest questioned them, saying, We strictly charged you not to teach in this name,

and look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring upon us this man's blood" (vv. 27-28). Literally, the Greek words rendered "We strictly charged you" mean, "We charged you with a charge." Those in the Sanhedrin charged the apostles not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus.

THE APOSTLES' TESTIMONY

In verses 29 through 31 "Peter and the apostles answered and said, It is necessary to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you slew, hanging Him on a tree. This One God has exalted to His right hand as a Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." Jesus' incarnation made Him a man, His human living on earth qualified Him to be man's Savior, His crucifixion accomplished full redemption for man, His resurrection vindicated His redemptive work, and His exaltation inaugurated Him to be the ruling Leader that He might be the Savior.

Concerning the Leader and the Savior

The Greek word rendered "Leader" is *archegos*, meaning author, origin, originator, chief leader, captain. In 3:15 the same Greek word is translated "Author." God exalted the Man Jesus, rejected and killed by the Jewish leaders, as the highest Leader, the Prince, the Ruler of the kings to rule over the world (Rev. 1:5; 19:16), and the Savior to save God's chosen people. "Leader" is related to His authority, and "Savior" to His salvation. He rules sovereignly over the earth with His authority so that the environment may be fit for God's chosen people to receive His salvation (Acts 17:26-27; John 17:2).

Who rules the earth today? We may say that the earth is ruled by kings and presidents, but the Lord Jesus as the highest Ruler is above them. According to Revelation 1:5, He is the Ruler of the kings of the earth. Which title do you think is higher--ruler or king? Probably most people would say that a king is a higher title than a ruler. Nevertheless, the New Testament speaks of Christ as the

Ruler of the kings, and Peter says that He is the Leader, the chief Ruler.

In a very real sense, Christ as the Ruler of the kings dethrones all the kings. Only He is the Ruler. Furthermore, according to Revelation 19:16, He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Christ is both the Ruler and the King. As the Ruler, He rules the entire earth. It may seem that kings and presidents rule the earth and that the Lord Jesus is not on the throne. Nevertheless, this One who seems not to be on the throne is the Ruler of all the enthroned ones. Today the entire world is under the Lord's ruling. He is truly the Leader, the chief Ruler.

For what purpose is the Lord Jesus ruling the earth? As the Leader, the Ruler, He is ruling the earth for the purpose of our salvation. He is ruling so that we may be saved. Let us take as an illustration the case of Chinese immigrants to the United States. We have found that a great many of these immigrants are very open to the Lord. But if they had remained in China, it is not likely that they would be this open. The Lord Jesus exercises His authority to cause so many foreigners to come to this country. Then once they arrive, they become open to Him. This is an illustration of the Lord's ruling the earth for the sake of saving people.

We believe that God has chosen us, and then at the right time the Lord Jesus, the Ruler of the kings of the earth, exercised His authority to produce a certain environment so that we had no choice except to believe in Him. In a sense, we have been "caught" by the Lord. A number of saints have testified that they have been caught by Him. We may not feel this way when we are in a season of refreshing. However, when the "sky" above us is not clear and we are in a "cloudy" situation spiritually speaking, we may begin to consider that the Lord has caught us, even trapped us. We may also believe that we are caught in the church life. There is no way for us to escape from the Lord's "trap." We have been caught by Christ and in Christ; furthermore, we have been caught in the church. In a sense, this is our situation. We have been caught by the Lord in His sovereignty.

Before we were saved, we were like mice running loose. But the Lord Jesus exercised His sovereign authority to set up a trap to catch us. The faster we ran, the easier it was for Him to catch us. In this matter He is sovereign; He is the Ruler of the kings, arranging the environment so that we were constrained to believe in Him. Without such an environment, we would not have believed in Him. Actually, believing in the Lord does not depend on us--it depends altogether on Him. He has been exalted to be the Leader over all the kings to arrange the environment so that His chosen people will believe in Him.

In 5:31 Peter says that God has exalted Christ to His right hand as a Leader and Savior. After the Lord catches us, He becomes our Savior. However, He does not save us from being caught; rather, He keeps us in a "trap" in order to save us from God's condemnation, from the lake of fire, and from many evil things. His being the Leader is for authority, and His being the Savior is for salvation.

I do not know of anyone who has chosen to believe in Jesus on his own. We were all compelled to believe in Him. Many have testified, saying, "Concerning believing in the Lord Jesus, I did not have any choice. I simply had to believe in Him." Actually, none of us was willing to believe in the Lord. We all were caught by Him and constrained to believe in Him. Praise the Lord that we believe in Him!

We have pointed out that we cannot run away from the Lord's trap. We may use as an illustration the ark made by Noah. This ark is a type of Christ. Once we have entered into Christ as our ark, we cannot get out. We need this ark, for without it we would perish.

In one of the messages on the book of Genesis, I said that the local church is an ark for us today. Now we all are in this ark. Who put you into the ark of the church? Did you put yourself there? The Lord is the One who has put us into the church ark. He has been exalted by God to be the Leader, and as the Leader He has put us into the ark. At times we may want to get out of the ark of the church, but we cannot escape. Because of the Lord Jesus as the Leader, we are in the ark, and now we should live together

Concerning Repentance and Forgiveness

According to Peter's word in 5:31, the Lord is the Leader and the Savior "to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." To give repentance and forgiveness of sins to God's chosen people requires Christ to be exalted as a ruling Leader and Savior. His sovereign ruling causes and leads God's chosen people to repent, and His salvation based upon His redemption affords them forgiveness of sins.

Repentance is for forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). On God's side, forgiveness of sins is based upon His redemption (Eph. 1:7). On man's side, forgiveness of sins is through repentance.

Repentance and forgiveness are major gifts, and only the Lord Jesus as the Leader and the Savior is qualified to give them. No one else is qualified to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to others. We need to realize that in this universe He is the only One qualified to give repentance and forgiveness of sins.

In a positive sense, we have been caught by the Lord Jesus. If we had not been caught, who among us would have repented? None of us would have repented if the Lord had not captured us. Actually, the Lord compelled us to repent. Otherwise, we would not have repented. Repentance is not of us; repentance is a gift given by the exalted Leader and Savior. Following repentance, we received the gift of forgiveness. Praise the Lord for the gifts of repentance and forgiveness! Praise Him that He is qualified to give repentance and forgiveness to God's chosen people!

In 5:32 Peter goes on to say, "And we are witnesses of these things, and the Holy Spirit also, whom God has given to those who obey Him." The Greek word translated "things" here is *rhema*. Both the apostles and the Holy Spirit were witnesses of these things. This indicates that the Holy Spirit was one with the apostles. In this verse

Peter says that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him. Obedience is the way and the condition to receive and enjoy the Spirit of God.

THE SANHEDRIN'S PROHIBITION AND RELEASE

Acts 5:33-40 describes the Sanhedrin's prohibition and release of the apostles. Verse 33 says, "But when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and intended to do away with them." Literally, the Greek words rendered "cut to the heart" mean "being sawed through." This is a strong figure for being exasperated.

Verse 34 continues, "But a certain Pharisee in the Sanhedrin named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, honored by all the people, stood up and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while." The Pharisees were the strictest religious sect of the Jews (Acts 26:5). This sect was formed about 200 B.C. They were proud of their superior sanctity of life, devotion to God, and knowledge of the Scriptures.

In verse 35 Gamaliel said to the Sanhedrin, "Men, Israelites, take heed to yourselves regarding what you are about to do to these men." Then after referring to the cases of Theudas and Judas the Galilean, he continued, "Now I say to you, stay away from these men and leave them alone; for if this counsel or this work is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them, lest perhaps you even be found fighters against God" (vv. 38-39). Here Gamaliel spoke a very good word.

Gamaliel was a pious, godly man. But was he in God's economy? Did he know anything concerning God's economy? Gamaliel was not in God's economy, and he did not know anything about it. Throughout the centuries many godly ones have been like Gamaliel. Although they were pious and godly, they did not know anything about God's economy. They had no understanding of God's move. Like Gamaliel, who did not know what the Lord was doing through Peter and John, these pious ones did not know what the Lord was doing in their time.

In 5:35-39 we see that Gamaliel was quite wise and also

neutral. Notice his use of the word "if" in verses 38 and 39. In verse 38 he said, *"If this counsel or this work is of men, it will be overthrown."* Then in verse 39 he went on to say, *"If it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them."* Instead of taking sides, Gamaliel left the entire situation to God. He knew that if this work was of men, it would be overthrown. But if it was of God and not of men, nothing could be done concerning it. As we have pointed out, although Gamaliel was godly and pious, and also wise and neutral, he did not know God's economy, and he was not in it. Throughout the years many have been like Gamaliel. They were very godly and pious, but no matter how godly and pious they were, they did not know what God was doing on earth.

From the case of Gamaliel we see that it is not adequate simply to be godly and spiritual. We also need to know how God is moving today. Where is God moving, and in what way is He moving? Since God is always moving, we must find out in what way He is moving. Is He moving in the way of Roman Catholicism, or in the way of the denominations? Is He moving in the way of Pentecostalism, or in the way of the inner life? In what way is God moving now? We cannot believe that God is dormant. Since He is moving, we need to have the inner assurance, the inner satisfaction, that we know His move and are in it. We need assurance concerning God's up-to-date move.

We should not be like those in the Sanhedrin, and neither should we be like Gamaliel. Instead, we should be today's Peters and Johns. From the record in the divine revelation we can see that Peter and John were in God's economy. They were moving with God, or, more accurately, God was moving with them. They had been motivated to move with God.

How about us today? I can testify that I have the assurance that the Lord's move is in and with His recovery. Concerning this, we have the Holy Spirit as the inner witness. With Peter we can say, "We are witnesses of these things, and the Holy Spirit also." We have the inner assurance and satisfaction that we are in the Lord's up-to-

date move. We are not Gamaliels--we are today's Peters and Johns.

THE APOSTLES' REJOICING AND FAITHFULNESS

Those in the Sanhedrin were persuaded by Gamaliel. After calling the apostles, "they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and they released them" (v. 40). Therefore, "they went from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonored on behalf of the Name" (v. 41). To be dishonored on behalf of the Name is to suffer shame for the Name. It is a real honor to be dishonored on behalf of the Name, the very name of the man-dishonored but God-honored Jesus. Hence, the sufferers rejoiced that they were counted worthy of this.

Acts 5:42 says, "And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and bringing the good news of Jesus as the Christ." Here we see that the apostles preached the gospel in the temple and in the houses of the believers. We have the burden to follow this practice of preaching and teaching from house to house.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE NINETEEN

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(14)

Scripture Reading: Acts 6:1-7

In this message we shall consider 6:1-7. In 6:1-6 we have the appointment of seven serving ones, and in verse 7 we see the growth of the word of God and the multiplication of the disciples.

THE APPOINTMENT OF SEVEN SERVING ONES

A Problem in the Church Life

Acts 6:1 says, "But in these days, when the disciples were multiplying, there was a murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews, because their widows were overlooked in the daily dispensing." The Hellenists were Jews who spoke Greek, and the Hebrews were Jews who spoke Hebrew. At the very beginning of the practice of the church life, there was trouble caused by different languages. Proper care was taken to solve this problem.

Often there are problems in the church life. These problems are not caused by outsiders but by those in the church. The first problem recorded in Acts was caused by a couple, Ananias and Sapphira, who were ambitious and dishonest. That problem was solved by God's sovereign judgment. From this we see that we may not need to do much about certain problems in the church, for those problems are taken care of by the Lord's sovereignty. However, in chapter six of Acts we have another kind of problem--the problem of language or of race. Apparently the problem in the church at Jerusalem was a problem of language related to those who spoke Hebrew and those

who spoke Greek. Actually, this was a problem not mainly of language but of race.

We know from Acts 2 that Jews had come from their dispersion to Jerusalem to keep the feast of Pentecost. Those who had been dispersed among other races gradually came to speak the languages of those races. Thus, when they came to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Pentecost, they were not able to speak Hebrew but spoke their native languages. In particular, the Hellenists spoke Greek. The difference of language became a problem. Actually, the source of the trouble was not language but race. If all of mankind were of one race, there would probably be just one language. Different languages are the result of different races. According to Genesis 11, the source of this problem was Babel.

From experience we know the problems that are caused by the different languages among those in the church life. For example, among those saved through our gospel preaching on the island of Taiwan were those who spoke a number of different languages, including the local dialect. We certainly suffered from the problems caused by different languages.

When we first came to the United States, we did not carry out a work among the Chinese-speaking people. However, because it became possible for so many Chinese-speaking people to emigrate to this country, it became necessary to have a work among the Chinese-speaking ones. The Lord has blessed this work very much. We thank the Lord that although we have among us those of different languages and races, we do not have a problem concerning language or race. We are thankful to the Lord for His mercy and for all that we have learned in the past related to this. We praise Him that race and language are no longer a problem!

Seven Men Full of the Holy Spirit

In Acts 6 the apostles encountered a problem related to language and race. They exercised their wisdom to solve

the problem and to take care of all the different saints.

Acts 6:2 says, "And the twelve, having called the multitude of the disciples to them, said, It is not fitting for us to leave the word of God to serve tables." Here we see that in the church life some things are major and others are minor. To minister the word and pray are major matters, but to serve tables is a minor matter.

In verses 3 and 4 the apostles went on to say, "Now brothers, select seven well-attested men from among you, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we shall appoint over this need. But we will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word." The Greek word for "full" in verse 3 is *pleres*, an adjective form of *pleroo*, according to the usage here and in 6:5; 7:55; 11:24; and Luke 4:1. Full of the Spirit is one's condition after being filled with the Spirit inwardly and essentially, as mentioned in 13:52. This refers to life, not to work. The word "wisdom" in 6:3 also indicates that in this verse to be full of the Spirit is for life, as in Luke 2:52.

In verse 4 the apostles said that they would continue in prayer and in the ministry of the word. To pray is not only to entreat the Lord to do things for His move, but also to cause our spirit to be exercised and to be strengthened. Hence, prayer should precede the word just as the apostles practiced. Without such prayer, the ministry may not be enlivened and empowered.

The apostles told the multitude to select seven well-attested men from among them to be appointed over the need. Verses 5 and 6 say, "And the word pleased all the multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and having prayed, they laid their hands on them." Since these seven were chosen to serve tables, they may be considered deacons, just as those whom Paul and his co-workers appointed later in the churches (Rom. 16:1; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8).

According to verse 6 the apostles laid their hands on

the seven serving ones. In the Bible laying on of hands has two functions: one for identification, as in Leviticus 1:4; and the other for impartation, as in 1 Timothy 4:14.

A Pattern for Us Today

Because Peter and the other apostles bore the responsibility of ministering the word, they distributed the serving of tables to other saints. This is a pattern we need to follow today. According to this pattern, we should not keep all the responsibilities on our own shoulders, but distribute the responsibilities to all the saints. This is an important principle. We have learned much from the pattern in Acts, and we have been following this pattern in the church life for more than fifty years.

Allow me to testify concerning my experience of distributing responsibilities to others. Some may think that I am capable and able to do many things. Actually, I am not unusually capable. However, I have learned to distribute responsibility to other saints. For example, the Lord blessed the work in Chefoo. When it was time for me to leave that city, it was very easy to do so. There was no need to talk to the brothers about the work, the church service, and other things, because I had learned not to keep matters in my hands. For years, the things concerning the church and the work had been distributed to the saints, and they were bearing the responsibility for these things. Therefore, when the time came for me to leave, I simply left.

I had a similar experience in the church in Shanghai. Some had the concept that many things related to the church were in my hands. Actually, that was not the situation at all. When I received word from Brother Nee that I should leave Mainland China, I left within a couple of days. The things in the church had been distributed to the brothers.

This has also been my practice in the church life in this country. If you inquire of the brothers who know the history among us, they will be able to tell you that I have not kept the matters of the church to myself. Once again, I

have had the practice of distributing the responsibility to others. For this reason, there are many things concerning the local churches that I do not know. If you ask me about these things, I would refer you to the elders or to the church service office. My point here is that by the Lord's mercy we have learned to distribute responsibility to others.

According to our human nature, we either do not care at all to do certain things, or we want to do those things in such a way that all the matters related to them are in our "pocket." At first, our pocket may be "flat." But eventually it will become filled with things that we reserved for ourselves. Therefore, I would emphasize the need for us to learn to distribute responsibility to others. First, we may give a responsibility to a certain brother. Then we shall give a different responsibility to another brother. This distribution of responsibility is needed for the spread of the Lord's testimony.

To those who think that I am especially capable and have carried on a great work throughout the world I would say this: "Please do not think that I am so capable. I have only done a little. You need to give credit to all the saints, who have done many things and carried much responsibility. I have only done my portion." Like the apostles in Acts, may we all learn to do our portion and to distribute the responsibility for other things to all the saints.

We need to see that whatever is recorded in Acts is a pattern for us to follow. In the initiation of the church life we have the pattern of distributing responsibilities to others. The appointing of the seven serving ones to care for the particular need is a very good pattern, and we need to follow it in the church life today.

Two Brothers with Particular Gifts

Of the seven who were selected as deacons, two--Stephen and Philip--had particular gifts. From Stephen's speaking in chapter seven we can realize that he was a great teacher. His long speech indicates that he was knowledgeable in God's Word. He surely was qualified to

teach the Scriptures. Stephen's teaching was rich, powerful, and full of significance. He certainly was an excellent teacher. Philip also had a particular gift, and he was eventually manifested to be a great evangelist.

Although Stephen and Philip had particular gifts, when they were selected to serve tables, they willingly served. Here we have a good example. Some who have particular gifts may not be willing to serve tables. For example, suppose a certain brother is an excellent teacher. If he is selected to serve as a deacon, he may be unhappy and say, "Don't you realize that I am a teacher of the Word? Why do you ask me to serve as a deacon?" Another brother, one who is gifted in preaching the gospel, likewise may say, "You need to realize that I am an evangelist, that I have the gift to preach the gospel. You belittle me when you ask me to serve tables." But from the example of Stephen and Philip we see that no matter what kind of particular gift we may have, if we are selected to serve tables, we should be willing to serve. When we are asked to serve, even if it is to clean the restroom, we should serve willingly.

According to the pattern in Acts 6, Stephen and Philip did not murmur when they were asked to serve tables. Stephen did not say, "I am a great teacher. How can you ask me to be a deacon?" Likewise, Philip did not say, "I am an outstanding evangelist. Why do you ask me to serve tables?" Instead of murmuring, Stephen and Philip did a good job in serving tables.

In the church life we are under the Lord's grace and also under His sovereignty. Therefore, without murmuring we should accept the Lord's sovereignty and the environment arranged by Him. If we do this and follow the pattern in Acts 6, we shall have a happy and pleasant church life.

Stephen served tables, but eventually he functioned as a great teacher of the Word. This indicates that whatever we are in the Lord cannot be hidden. Sooner or later, what we are will be manifest. Stephen was a teacher, but he was selected to serve tables. However, the record in Acts actually says little about his serving of tables but much about his teaching. In chapter seven we have a lengthy record of Stephen's teaching. From the example of Stephen we see

that what we can do will not be lost, and what we are will eventually be manifest. Sooner or later the Holy Spirit will use our gift, even as the Spirit used Stephen's gift of teaching.

No Leader Appointed

In the appointment of the seven serving ones, one point is quite striking and remarkable. That is, among the seven serving ones, no leader was appointed. This indicates that no rank nor position was regarded. All the serving ones are the servants to the saints. This is a good pattern for us to learn and follow that we may avoid leadership in rank and position in any form.

THE GROWTH OF THE WORD AND THE MULTIPLICATION OF THE DISCIPLES

Acts 6:7 says, "And the word of God grew, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied exceedingly; and a large number of the priests obeyed the faith." The word "grew" refers to growth in life. This indicates that the word of God is a matter of life that grows as a seed sown into man's heart (Mark. 4:14).

Verse 7 says that many priests obeyed the faith. "Faith" here is the objective faith, referring to what the believers believe in concerning Christ. The entire revelation of the New Testament concerning Christ and His redemptive work is considered the faith of God's New Testament economy (Rom. 16:26). Therefore, the faith here, as the content of the complete gospel of God's New Testament economy, is objective. This objective faith is mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:19; 2:7; 3:9; 4:1, 6; 5:8; 6:10,12, 21; 2 Timothy 2:18; 3:8; 4:7; and Titus 1:13.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE TWENTY

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(15)

Scripture Reading: Acts 6:8-15

Acts 6:8--8:3 describes the increase in persecution by the Jewish religionists. In 6:8--7:60 we have an account of the martyrdom of Stephen. In this message we shall consider 6:8-15.

OPPOSED AND ARRESTED

Verse 8 says, "And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people." As we have pointed out, these wonders and signs were not part of God's central testimony of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ; neither were they part of His full salvation.

Verses 9 and 10 continue, "But there arose some of those of the synagogue which is called the synagogue of Libertines, and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, and discussed with Stephen; and they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke." Verse 9 speaks of the synagogue of Libertines. The Libertines were Freedmen. There were a number of synagogues in Jerusalem composed respectively of the returned Jews according to the languages they had acquired in their dispersion (see 2:9-11). The word "synagogue" is the anglicized form of the Greek word *synagogue*, composed of *sun*, together, and *ago*, to bring; hence, a collecting, gathering, congregation, assembly; by transition, the place of gathering. It is used

in the New Testament to denote the congregation (13:43; 9:2; Luke 12:11) and the congregating place (Luke 7:5) of the Jews, where they sought the knowledge of God by studying the Holy Scriptures (Luke 4:16-17; Acts 13:14-15). In Jerusalem there were quite a few synagogues of various kinds of Jews.

Acts 6:11 and 12 say, "Then they instigated men, saying, We have heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God. And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and led him to the Sanhedrin." The Sanhedrin, the highest court of the Jews, was a council composed of chief priests, elders, lawyers, and scribes. The Sanhedrin condemned the Lord Jesus to death (Matt. 26:59) and persecuted the believers. This indicates that Judaism had fallen into the hand of God's enemy, Satan, and was being used by him to frustrate God's move in His New Testament economy for the carrying out of His eternal purpose.

THE ACCUSATIONS OF THE PERSECUTORS

Acts 6:13 and 14 go on to say, "And they set up false witnesses, saying, This man does not cease speaking words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him saying that this Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this place and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us." In verse 13 "this holy place" refers to the temple (Matt. 24:15; Psa. 68:35; Ezek. 7:24; 21:2).

Verse 15 says, "And all those sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw his face as the face of an angel." The fact that Stephen's face was as the face of an angel indicates that it had a heavenly appearance. Stephen was a man on earth, but he bore a heavenly appearance while being persecuted.

A CHANGE OF DISPENSATION AND A TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

According to verse 14, the opposers accused Stephen of saying that Jesus would destroy the temple and change the customs delivered by Moses. This indicates that there

must have been words circulating among the believers concerning the destruction of the temple, as prophesied by the Lord in Matthew 23:37-39 and 24:2, and words concerning the termination of the dispensation of law, as spoken by the Lord in Matthew 11:13. The opposing Jews twisted the believers' words, as they did in Matthew 27:40 regarding the Lord's word in John 2:19 when they crucified Him. Undoubtedly, the Jews' opposition was instigated by Satan to frustrate God's New Testament economy. But the ground used by Satan for his instigation was the change of dispensation, which contradicted the Judaic traditions. God's New Testament economy is to have a new dispensation absolutely separated from Judaism. This offended the Jews by touching the traditions they had inherited for generations and stirred up their opposition, which began with the Lord's ministry in the Gospels and grew more fierce toward the apostles' ministry in the Acts, during which the Lord's New Testament move was passing through a transitional period.

According to Luke's narration in Acts, the church among the Jews, including the early apostles, did not pass through this transition successfully due to the remaining influence of their Judaic background and the entangling opposition from their Judaic kinsmen. This trouble returned to them again and again in Acts (11:1-3; 15:1-5; 21:18-26). Even the Apostle Paul was in danger of being brought back to the Judaic practices in his last visit to Jerusalem (21:20-26).

In Acts the Jewish believers still practiced the keeping of the Old Testament law, as indicated by the word in 21:20 spoken to Paul by James and the elders in Jerusalem. James, the elders in Jerusalem, and many thousands of Jewish believers still remained in a mixture of the Christian faith and the Mosaic law. They even advised Paul to practice such a semi-Judaic mixture (21:17-26). They were unaware that the dispensation of law was altogether over and that the dispensation of grace should be fully honored, and that any disregard of the distinction between these two dispensations would be against God's dispensational administration and would be

a great damage to God's economical plan for the building up of the church as the expression of Christ.

The children of Israel had been given the law through Moses. They also had a system of worship involving the temple, the priests, and the offerings. With the children of Israel the two main things were the law and the temple as the center of their worship. Both the law and the temple were types of Christ. It is not God's intention to have a written law and a material temple. God's intention is to have the living Christ as the law of life and also to have Christ as the living temple for God's New Testament economy. God desires to have Christ as the living law within us and as the living temple outside of us so that He may carry out His New Testament economy. This economy is absolutely a matter of the Triune God mingling Himself with His chosen people to produce a corporate entity for His expression. This was God's intention from the very beginning in the book of Genesis. However, the children of Israel regarded the law and the temple in a traditional way according to dead letters.

About fifteen hundred years after the law was given, the Triune God came in incarnation. One day this incarnated One said, "All the prophets and the law prophesied until John" (Matt. 11:13). This indicates the termination of the Old Testament dispensation. Although the principles of the law cannot be terminated, the dispensation of the law was ended.

Furthermore, in Matthew 23:37-39 the Lord forsook Jerusalem with its temple. In verse 38 He said, "Behold, your house is left to you desolate." Here "house" denotes the house of God, the temple (Matt. 21:12-13). This prophecy concerning the desolation of the temple corresponds to that in Matthew 24:2, where the Lord said concerning the temple, "Truly I say to you, A stone shall by no means be left upon a stone which shall not be thrown down." This was fulfilled in A.D. 70 when Titus destroyed Jerusalem with the Roman army. Therefore, in Matthew 23:38 and 24:2 the Lord indicated to His disciples that the material temple, which had become a frustration to God's economy, would be destroyed.

The Lord Jesus indicated plainly that the law would be terminated and that the temple would be destroyed. No doubt, His word made a deep impression on the disciples. They must have had fellowship concerning the termination of the law and the destruction of the temple, since both the temple and law were great matters to the Jews.

After the Lord ascended to the heavens and the Spirit was poured out, there was a prevailing move among His disciples. The opposers began to twist the words that must have been circulating among the believers concerning the termination of the dispensation of the law and the destruction of the temple. In particular, the opposers accused Stephen of "speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God" and of saying that "Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this place and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us" (Acts 6:11, 14). To be sure, the opposers were twisting the truth. The Lord Jesus had spoken concerning the termination of the dispensation of law and the destruction of the temple. But the opposers twisted His word.

The old dispensation was the dispensation of the law and of the temple. The new dispensation is the dispensation of Christ as the law of life and as the living temple. Between these two dispensations there was a transitional period in which God was transferring His chosen people from the old dispensation into the new. All the early disciples, including Peter, were undergoing God's transfer. They had been born into the old dispensation, and they had been raised with the knowledge of that dispensation. Thus, they were people of the old dispensation. However, they had been called by the Lord and had spent three and a half years with Him. Moreover, they spent forty days with Him after His resurrection in a wonderful, spiritual way. We may think that this would be sufficient for God to transfer them fully out of the old dispensation into the new, that is, out of the law in letters and the material temple into Christ as the law of life and as the living temple. Although they had come to know Christ in this way, they were still under a strong Judaic influence, and they were surrounded by their Jewish

kinsmen. Therefore, it was very difficult for them to be released from their old background.

This was especially true of James, a flesh brother of the Lord Jesus. James was godly, pious, and highly respected by the Jews. It was very difficult for him to be transferred out of the Judaic background. On the contrary, he took the lead to remain there, as indicated by the record in Acts 21.

According to Acts 21, when Paul made his last visit to Jerusalem, he went in to James, and all the elders were present (v. 18). James encouraged Paul to come back to certain Judaic practices: "Four men are with us who have a vow on themselves; take these and be purified with them, and pay their expenses that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things of which they had been instructed concerning you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law" (vv. 23-24). Paul followed this advice and went to the temple with those who had made the vow. It is difficult to believe that Paul could do such a thing after having written the book of Romans and the book of Galatians, books that indicate that the dispensation of law is over. But Paul in Acts 21 was not able to overcome the Judaic environment.

According to the record in Acts, the church in Jerusalem, including the twelve apostles, did not pass through the transitional period successfully. Rather, they had a failure. Their failure to make the transition in full was one of the reasons the Lord sent the Roman army to destroy Jerusalem with its temple. The religious mixture there in Jerusalem was also destroyed at that time.

TODAY'S SITUATION

Concerning the need for a transition from the old dispensation to the new, we do not care merely for Bible knowledge but for the application to today's situation. Not only have the Old Testament things been made into a traditional religion; even the things of the New Testament

have been used in a traditional way. Even before the end of the first century, Christians began to make the things of God's New Testament economy into a religious tradition. If you study church history, you will see this degradation coming in after the time of the apostles. Eventually, when Christianity was presented to us in the twentieth century, it was presented in a traditional way. As a result, we did not see the genuine New Testament economy of God.

What a mercy that we are in the Lord's recovery! We can say honestly that, at least to some extent, we have been brought back to God's New Testament economy in a genuine way. I believe that if those in Catholicism and in the denominations would visit a Lord's table meeting in the church and were honest about what they observed, they would admit that among us there is something real of the New Testament economy of God.

Christianity has become a religion of tradition. Throughout the centuries, some of the things of God's New Testament economy have been used as elements to form a tradition. Just as Peter and John were born into the traditions of the old dispensation and raised up in them, so many of us were born into the traditions of Christianity and raised according to those traditions. Thus, there is the need for the Lord to recover His genuine New Testament economy.

As Peter and John were in a transitional period, we today are also in a period of transition. As we are making the transition into God's New Testament economy, we should be warned by the failures of James, Peter, and the others and learn of their failures. We should learn not to care for any tradition and not to be under any religious influence. We need to be definite and absolute for the Lord's transfer in order to be brought out of tradition and brought back to God's pure New Testament economy. What is the New Testament economy of God? It is nothing other than Jesus Christ, the God-man, as everything to us. He is our law, our temple, our everything.

In this Life-study of Acts, we are not merely learning the Bible according to letters. We are not interested only in gaining biblical knowledge. By the Lord's mercy we

need to be willing to be brought by Him into the depths of His truths so that we may see what is on His heart. God's people need to realize that the situation of today's religion is far off from God's intention. I hope that God will have mercy on all His chosen people, including all the believers in the Roman Catholic Church and the denominations, that they may see the genuine light and revelation in the Bible concerning His New Testament economy. As those in the Lord's recovery, we thank Him for what He has shown us in the Word regarding His economy. May we all be helped by the Lord to see the light of the divine truths in the Bible so that we may be brought fully into God's New Testament economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE TWENTY-ONE

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(16)

Scripture Reading: Acts 7:1--8:3

After Stephen was opposed and arrested (6:8--7:1), he testified before the Sanhedrin (7:2-53), and then he was stoned (7:54-60). Following this, we read in 8:1-3 concerning the devastation of the church in Jerusalem.

STEPHEN'S TESTIMONY

The God of Glory Appearing to Abraham

As Stephen testified before the Sanhedrin, he said, "Men, brothers, and fathers, listen! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, Go out of your land and from your relatives, and come into the land which I will show you" (vv. 2-3). The glory spoken of in verse 2 might have been visible glory (see v. 55), as when the cloud and the fire appeared to Israel (Exo. 16:10; 24:16-17; Lev. 9:23; Num. 14:10; 16:19; 20:6; Deut. 5:24) and filled the tabernacle and temple (Exo. 40:35; 1 Kings 8:11). It was the God of such glory who appeared to Abraham and called him. His glory was a great attraction to Abraham. It separated, sanctified, him from the world unto God (Exo. 29:43), and it was a great encouragement and strength which enabled him to follow God (Gen. 12:1, 4). In the same principle, God also calls the New Testament believers by His invisible glory (2 Pet. 1:3).

Stephen's teaching in Acts 7 begins with the word regarding the God of glory appearing to Abraham. We do not know where Stephen gained this understanding, for in

Genesis we are not told that the God of glory appeared to Abraham. But Stephen tells us that when God appeared to Abraham, He appeared as the God of glory. Although we do not know where Stephen learned this, we believe that his word was spoken according to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Stephen's message, therefore, begins with the God of glory calling Abraham.

Stephen's word about the God of glory fits in with God's New Testament economy. Peter in his second Epistle tells us that God has called us by His glory and to His glory (2 Pet. 1:3). Because we have been called by God's invisible glory, we eventually received the Lord Jesus, realizing that He is better than anything else and anyone else. For example, certain Chinese believers came to appreciate Jesus Christ more than Confucius. Because of this appreciation, they eventually believed in the Lord and received Him. This evaluation of Christ implies glory.

The God of glory called Abraham, and Abraham was attracted and caught by that glory. The principle is the same with us today. We all have been caught by the Lord in His invisible glory. We have been captured by His glory, and we cannot escape.

Abraham's Seed

In 7:4 Stephen went on to say of Abraham, "Then going out of the land of the Chaldeans, he dwelt in Haran. And from there, after his father died, He removed him into this land, in which you are now dwelling." Apparently it was Abraham journeying into Canaan (Gen. 12:4-5), but actually it was God removing him into the good land.

Acts 7:5 and 6 continue, "And He did not give him an inheritance in it, not even a place to set his foot on; and while he had no child He promised to give it to him for a possession and to his seed after him. And God spoke to this effect, that his seed would be a sojourner in a land belonging to others, and they would enslave them and mistreat them four hundred years." The land referred to in verse 6 is Egypt (Exo. 1:1), and the pronoun "they"

denotes the Egyptians (Exo. 1:11, 13-14). The word "them" refers to the seed. According to verse 6, Abraham's seed was to be mistreated in Egypt for four hundred years. This differs from Galatians 3:17 which speaks of four hundred and thirty years. This is the length of time counted from the time God gave Abraham the promise in Genesis 12 to the time He gave the law through Moses in Exodus 20. This period was considered by God as the time of the children of Israel's dwelling in Egypt (Exo. 12:40-41). The four hundred years mentioned in Genesis 15:13 and Acts 7:6 are counted from the time Ishmael mocked Isaac in Genesis 21 to the time the children of Israel came out of the Egyptian tyranny in Exodus 12. This is the period when Abraham's descendants suffered the persecution of the Gentiles.

Jacob, Joseph, and Moses

In Acts 7:14 and 15 Stephen speaks of Jacob's going down into Egypt: "Joseph sent and called for Jacob his father and all his relatives--seventy-five souls in all. And Jacob went down into Egypt; and he ended his days, he and our fathers." We should compare the number seventy-five in verse 14 with the number seventy in Genesis 46:27 and Exodus 1:5. Stephen quoted this number from the Septuagint, which adds Joseph's five descendants in Genesis 46:20. Hence, the number he mentioned of the house of Jacob who came to Egypt was seventy-five instead of seventy.

In Acts 7:18 Stephen says that "another king rose up over Egypt who did not know Joseph." The Greek word rendered "another" also means different in character. The king referred to here was not only another king, but a king of a different character.

In 7:20 through 44 Stephen purposely gives a long narration in the most positive way concerning Moses. He did this to vindicate himself before his opposers, who had accused him of blaspheming Moses (6:11). In verse 20 Stephen says, "At which time Moses was born and was handsome to God; and he was nurtured three months in his father's house." The Greek words translated

"handsome to God" also mean "fair to God." This is a Hebraism denoting fair in the sight of God; hence, exceedingly fair.

In verse 21 Stephen continues, "And when he was thrown out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up and nurtured him as her own son." The Greek words rendered "thrown out" also may be translated "put out to die." The Greek verb for "took him up" is "used of acknowledging or adopting as one's child" (F. F. Bruce).

Acts 7:22 says, "And Moses was trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was powerful in his words and deeds." The wisdom mentioned here is wisdom in learning.

In 7:30 Stephen says, "And when forty years were fulfilled, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai in the flaming fire of a thornbush." Here and in verses 35 and 38 the angel in the Old Testament was Christ the Lord, who is Jehovah, the Triune God (Exo. 3:2-16; Judg. 6:12-24; Zech. 2:6-11). This is proved by "the Lord" and "God" in the following verses. The Lord and God in verses 31 through 35 is the angel in verses 30, 35, and 38.

The Children of Israel in the Wilderness

In 7:41 through 43 Stephen went on to say, "And they made a calf in those days and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and made merry in the works of their hands. But God turned and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven, even as it is written in the book of the prophets, Have you offered slain beasts and sacrifices to Me forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? And you took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rompha, the images which you made to worship them. And I will carry you away beyond Babylon." In verse 42 serving the hosts of heaven is a matter of star worship. The tent of Moloch in verse 43 was the portable tent-temple of the god to be carried in procession (M. R. Vincent). Rompha was the Coptic name for Saturn.

God's Habitation

In verse 44 Stephen comes to the matter of God's habitation, the tabernacle of testimony. Concerning this Stephen says, "The tabernacle of testimony was with our fathers in the wilderness, even as He who spoke to Moses instructed him to make it, according to the pattern which he had seen; which also our fathers, having in their turn received, brought in with Joshua in their taking possession of the nations, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David; who found favor before God, and asked to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob" (vv. 44-46). These verses indicate that one generation after another maintained the tabernacle. God, however, was not satisfied, and David, a man according to God's heart, knew it. Therefore, David was seeking a better habitation for God. However, it was eventually Solomon who built a house for the Lord (v. 47). But God could not be satisfied with anything made by human hands. He needed something better. In his speaking Stephen began with the God of glory and covered many matters until he came to God's habitation.

In verses 48 through 50 Stephen went on to say, "But the Most High does not dwell in that which is made by hands, even as the prophet says, Heaven is My throne, and the earth is a footstool for My feet. What kind of house will you build for Me, says the Lord, or what is the place of My rest? Has not My hand made all these things?" In verse 48 Stephen speaks of God as the Most High. Stephen called God the God of glory and the Most High to vindicate himself before his opposers who had accused him of blaspheming God (6:11).

In verse 48 Stephen says that the Most High does not dwell in that which is made by hands. This implies that God would abandon the material temple of the Old Testament and initiate a new dispensation for His people to worship Him in the spirit (John 4:24), in which is God's spiritual habitation, the church (Eph. 2:22).

The word in 7:49 indicates that the Lord was seeking a spiritual habitation in man's spirit. This is proved by the

following part of the quotation from Isaiah 66:1-2, which says, "But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit."

A Strong Word to the Opposers

In verse 51 Stephen spoke a very strong word to the opposers: "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in hearts and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, you also do!" Since Stephen was full of the Spirit (v. 55) and was one with the Lord the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), to resist him was to resist the Holy Spirit. Hence, the Lord indicated to Saul, one of his persecutors (Acts 7:58; 8:1), that he was persecuting Him (9:4).

In verses 52 and 53 Stephen continued, "Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand concerning the coming of the Righteous One, of whom you have now become betrayers and murderers; you who received the law by the disposition of angels, and did not keep it." In verse 53 "disposition" indicates to transfer to the care or possession of another.

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

Acts 7:54 says, "Now when they heard these things, they were cut to their hearts and gnashed their teeth at him." Here the Greek word translated "cut" means "sawn through."

Stephen Seeing the Glory of God and Jesus Standing at the Right Hand of God

Verse 55 continues, "But being full of the Holy Spirit, looking intently into heaven, he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." The Greek word for "full" is pleres, an adjective form of pleroo, according to the usage here and in 6:3, 5; 11:24; and Luke 4:1. In 7:55 Stephen was filled with the Spirit inwardly and essentially, as mentioned in 13:52. This refers to life, not to work.

According to 7:55, Stephen saw the glory of God. This was a great vindication and encouragement to the persecuted one.

Verse 55 says that Stephen also saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. The Lord in ascension is usually referred to as sitting at the right hand of God (Matt. 26:64; Heb. 1:3, 13). But Stephen saw Him standing there. This indicates that the Lord was greatly concerned for His persecuted one.

Stephen did not care for the environment. Rather, being full of the Spirit, he looked intently into heaven. In 7:2 Stephen said that the God of glory appeared to Abraham. Now we are told that Stephen saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. In the entire New Testament this occurred only once.

In 7:56 Stephen said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." The earth rejected Stephen and was closed to him, but the heavens opened up to him. This indicates that the heavens were with him and for him.

Verses 57 and 58 say, "But crying out with a loud voice, they covered their ears and rushed upon him with one accord. And having thrown him outside of the city, they stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man called Saul." Here we see that Saul, who later became an apostle (13:9), was a helper of the persecutors in slaying Stephen. Saul must have been deeply impressed with what was taking place as Stephen was stoned.

Stephen Calling Upon the Name of the Lord

Acts 7:59 says, "And they stoned Stephen as he was calling upon the Lord and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Here we see that while Stephen was being stoned, he called upon the name of the Lord Jesus. To be sure, Stephen did not say in a weak, mild way, "Lord Jesus, have mercy." On the contrary, he loudly called on the Lord's name, saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" According to verse 60, Stephen knelt down and "cried with

a loud voice, Lord...." From the case of Stephen we see that calling on the name of the Lord is something audible.

Verse 60 says, "And kneeling down, he cried with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them! And having said this, he fell asleep." Here we see that Stephen prayed for his persecutors in the same way as his Lord, whom he loved and lived (Luke 23:34).

THE DEVASTATION OF THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM

Saul Approving of the Killing of Stephen

The first part of 8:1 says, "Saul was approving of his killing." Whenever we approve something, as Saul did, we consider ourselves to be somebody. If we do not regard ourselves as somebody, we shall not approve anything in this way. We simply shall not care what others do. Both those who criticize the church and those who approve what the church does, regard themselves as somebody. In 8:1 the young man Saul approved the persecution and killing of Stephen, considering himself to be somebody. Actually, as 8:3 indicates, Paul did become somebody--he became the leading persecutor of the church.

A Great Persecution against the Church in Jerusalem

Acts 8:1b says, "There occurred in that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem; and all were scattered throughout the countries of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." This was the first church established in a locality within the jurisdiction of a city, the city of Jerusalem. It was a local church in its locality, as indicated by the Lord in Matthew 18:17. It was not the universal church, as revealed by the Lord in Matthew 16:18, but only a part of the universal church, which is the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). The record of the New Testament concerning the establishment of the church in its locality is consistent throughout (13:1; 14:23; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 8:1; Gal. 1:2; Rev. 1:4, 11).

All Scattered except the Apostles

Acts 8:1 clearly says that all the believers were scattered throughout the countries of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Since the Bible says this, we need to believe it.

The Lord's gospel was powerful and prevailing in Jerusalem. Although only the twelve apostles remained, it did not take long before a great many others came to believe in the Lord. Before the persecution there must have been thousands of believers in Jerusalem. Then during the great persecution against the church, all these believers left, with the exception of the apostles. But because the gospel was prevailing, soon after the scattering of the saints, a good number of others rose up to believe in the Lord Jesus. It seems that the more the believers left, the more others came to believe in Christ. This seems to be the only way to understand this matter in 8:3 in the light of the book of Acts as a whole.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE TWENTY-TWO

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(17)

Scripture Reading: Acts 8:4-13

In chapter eight of Acts there are many patterns for us to follow today. In particular, the patterns in this chapter are related to the preaching of the gospel. In this message we shall begin to consider the patterns in Acts 8.

THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL THROUGH THE SCATTERING OF THE SAINTS

Acts 8:4 says, "Those therefore who were scattered went about the land bringing the good news of the word." It was sovereign of God that the scattering of the believers from Jerusalem to other localities through the persecution should carry out the spreading of the gospel for the fulfillment of the Lord's word in 1:8 (see 11:19).

A Pattern for Today's Gospel Preaching

The first pattern in Acts 8 is that of the preaching of the gospel through the scattering of the saints. In Jerusalem, the gospel preaching was carried out mainly by the apostles. Although this also is a pattern, it is not the unique pattern for our gospel preaching. If it were the unique pattern, then the preaching of the gospel would be limited. Therefore, in 8:4 we have another pattern of the preaching of the gospel--the preaching of the gospel through the scattering, the migrating, of the saints.

In Acts 8 we do not have the words "migrate" or "migration." Nevertheless, migration is implied by the

word "scattered." The scattering of the saints was actually a migration.

Before the scattering of the saints in 8:4, there were many thousands of believers in Jerusalem. Like most people, they probably did not desire to move; instead, they may have wanted to settle there. But the Lord is sovereign, for He is the Leader, the Ruler of the kings. Although Satan instigated the persecution against the church, the Lord is over Satan, and whatever Satan does is under the Lord's sovereignty. Therefore, the persecution in chapter eight actually worked out for the spreading of the gospel, because thousands of believers were scattered throughout the lands of Judea and Samaria. Through this scattering the good news was brought to many cities. Here we have the pattern of the preaching of the gospel through the migration of the saints.

For many years in the Lord's recovery we have been practicing the matter of migration. For example, many saints were gathered to Los Angeles from 1962 until 1970. Then in 1970 we began to migrate, and the migration was a great success. When the saints migrate, the gospel goes out with them. The migrating saints bring the gospel wherever they may go.

All the churches should follow the pattern in 8:4 concerning migration. The saints should not stay in a certain place for too long. On the contrary, we all should be migrants, following in the footsteps of our father Abraham. Abraham was a river-crosser; he migrated from Chaldea to Canaan. Like Abraham, we should not be permanently settled. We all should learn to migrate.

Outflow and Inflow

For some years many of the saints in this country were reluctant to migrate. But we thank the Lord that recently the saints have begun to migrate again. In the last year a number of churches have been raised up through the migrating of the saints.

The saints in all the churches should be encouraged to migrate. If the saints in a certain locality do not migrate,

eventually that locality will become a "Dead Sea." The Dead Sea is a reservoir for the water from the river Jordan. Once the water from the Jordan reaches the Dead Sea it does not proceed any farther. If the church in a particular locality is to avoid becoming such a Dead Sea, a "canal" must be dug to allow the "water" to flow out. Perhaps ten percent of the saints in a locality may migrate each year. This will allow for the necessary outflow without devastating the church. Furthermore, if water is allowed to flow out, more water will flow in.

Using the illustration of a hose, we may say that every church should be like a hose that is open at both ends. When a hose is open in this way, water is able to flow in and out. But if water is not able to flow out of a hose, nothing more will be able to flow in. How much water flows in depends on how much flows out. If we want the church to increase, there must be the outflow. Only when there is an outflow can the church in a certain locality be preserved from becoming a Dead Sea.

However, the migration of the saints is not a legality. The point we are making is that the churches need to follow the pattern in 8:4. This means that, in principle, we should be willing to migrate.

From my own experience I can testify of the importance of migration. At first, I did not want to move but preferred to settle down in one place. But the Lord is the Ruler of the kings, and He did not allow me to settle down. Instead, He caused my life to be a life of traveling. I moved here and there, and eventually I came to the United States. After spending more than twenty years in this country, I am burdened to spend more time in Taiwan because of the need in the churches there.

Migrating for the Sake of the Gospel

I encourage you all to pick up the burden to migrate. We should migrate not for the sake of our living but for the sake of the gospel. The Lord called Abraham, and Abraham migrated. In following the Lord, Abraham had no lack. Likewise, as we migrate for the gospel's sake the

Lord will meet our needs. To migrate for the gospel is to migrate for the Lord, since the gospel is actually the Lord Himself. The first pattern found in chapter eight of Acts is the migration of the saints for the spreading of the gospel.

PHILIP'S PREACHING IN THE CITY OF SAMARIA

Manifested to Be an Evangelist

Acts 8:5 says, "And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ." This Philip was not the Philip among the apostles (1:13), but the Philip among the seven appointed by the apostles to serve tables (6:5). But through his ministry in preaching the gospel as recorded in chapter eight, he was manifested to be an evangelist (21:8).

Philip's preaching Christ in Samaria was a further step in the Lord's evangelical move. By this He spread Himself as the seed of the kingdom of God from the racially pure Jews to the mixed Samaritans for the fulfillment of His prophecy in 1:8.

According to 8:4 and 5, among the saints who migrated from Jerusalem was at least one who was an evangelist. Philip took part in this migration, and he had an outstanding gift of gospel preaching. Because of this gift, he was eventually called "Philip the evangelist" (21:8).

Preaching Christ and the Kingdom

Concerning Philip's gospel preaching, 8:12 tells us that he brought "good news concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ." Philip preached Jesus Christ as the good news. In verse 12 "bringing the good news" is a verbal form of the noun "gospel." Philip preached Christ as the good news; he preached Christ as the gospel. In other words, he preached Christ, and Christ was his gospel.

Acts 8:12 also indicates that Philip preached the kingdom of God as the gospel. He preached the kingdom of God as the gospel just as the Lord did (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43). Like Philip, we should preach the gospel that is

Jesus Christ and also the kingdom of God. In fact, we should preach Jesus Christ as the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is the Lord Jesus, the Savior, as the seed of life sown into His believers, God's chosen people (Mark 4:3, 26), and developing into a realm which God may rule as His kingdom in His divine life. Its entrance is regeneration (John 3:5), and its development is the believers' growth in the divine life (2 Pet. 1:3-11). The kingdom of God is the church life today, in which the faithful believers live (Rom. 14:17), and it will develop into the coming kingdom as an inheritance reward (Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5) to the overcoming saints in the millennium (Rev. 20:4-6). Eventually, it will consummate in the New Jerusalem as the eternal kingdom of God, an eternal realm of the eternal blessing of God's eternal life for all God's redeemed to enjoy in the new heaven and new earth for eternity (Rev. 21:1-4; 22:1-5, 14). Such a kingdom, the kingdom of God, is what both the Lord Jesus and Philip preached as the gospel, the good news.

In the Gospels the Lord Himself was the seed of the kingdom. In Acts we see the spreading of this seed. In particular, this seed spread through Philip's preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. Today much of the gospel preaching among Christians does not include the kingdom of God. Therefore, we must preach a gospel that has Christ as the content and also has Christ as the kingdom.

We need to experience Christ not only as our Savior and as our life but also as the kingdom of God. When we received Christ, we received a Savior, a life, and a kingdom. Now we should live a kingdom life. Then we shall know how to preach the kingdom of God as the gospel.

Certain preachers today are eloquent and know how to stir people and inspire them. In their speaking these preachers may use stories and illustrations. But if you examine the content of their messages, you will find that there is very little of Christ or the kingdom. Our preaching of the gospel must be different. We need to

preach a high and rich gospel with Christ as the kingdom. In our preaching we should have Christ not only as the Savior and as life, but also as the kingdom.

I am happy that Luke pointed out in his narrative that Philip preached the gospel concerning Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. Although Luke did not give the details of Philip's preaching, he does tell us that Philip preached Christ and the kingdom of God as the gospel. This should be a pattern for our gospel preaching today.

THE SAINTS BRINGING THE GOOD NEWS OF THE WORD

We have seen that according to 8:4, those who were scattered went about the land bringing the good news of the word. We have seen that this verse contains the pattern of the saints migrating for the spread of the gospel. Now we need to consider another pattern found in this verse--the saints bringing the good news of the word.

Filled with the Lord's Word

Among much of today's preaching there is little of the Word of God. Instead of the word, there are stories and illustrations. Our speaking should not be like this. Rather, we need to learn the word in the New Testament. We need to study the New Testament and be saturated with it. If we are saturated with the New Testament in this way, when we open our mouths to speak the word will come forth spontaneously. There will not be the need to use so many stories and illustrations. We should simply give people the word.

People may be entertained by a preacher's stories and illustrations, but they may not receive much of the word. This is the poverty of a great deal of today's teaching and preaching.

We in the Lord's recovery should be full of the Lord's word. The Life-study Messages do not contain many stories, but these message are full of the rich Word of God. The saints do not receive help from stories; they receive help from the solid, divine word.

The Word That Conveys Christ and the Kingdom

As we go forth for the spreading of the gospel, we should go with the gospel of Christ and the kingdom in the word. Only the divine word can contain and convey Christ and the kingdom of God. The teachings of Confucius certainly cannot convey Christ. Such teachings cannot be vessels to convey Christ to others. Only the holy word, the divine word, is useful in conveying Christ as the kingdom of God to others.

When we sow the word into others, we also sow Christ into them. According to the Gospels, we cannot separate Christ from the word. Christ is the seed, and the seed is the word. Therefore, we need to be filled with the word and sow it into others.

In this message we have seen some crucial points concerning our preaching of the gospel. The content of our gospel must be Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. Furthermore, we need to preach Christ and the kingdom of God in the word and with the word. In order to preach Christ and the kingdom, and even to preach Christ as the kingdom of God, in this way, we need to be very familiar with the Scriptures. We need to be filled and saturated with the divine word in the New Testament.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE TWENTY-THREE

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(18)

Scripture Reading: Acts 8:14-35

In this message we shall continue to consider the patterns presented in chapter eight of Acts.

THE LORD'S RESERVING THE ECONOMICAL SPIRIT

Acts 8:14-16 says, "Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them so that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them, but they had only been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus." In these verses we see a matter of great importance. The scattered saints had done a good job in preaching the gospel. They had migrated with the gospel, and Philip had strengthened their preaching of the gospel. As a result, a marvelous work was done. But although the Lord did much through the preaching of the scattered saints and Philip the evangelist, He reserved one thing--the economical Spirit. According to 8:14-16, the Samaritan believers had not yet received the economical Spirit. Peter and John were sent to them and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit economically.

To Prevent an Attitude of Independence

In these verses we have an important pattern related to the gospel work. From this pattern we see that the gospel work should not be independent of the Body of

Christ. The scattered saints and Philip the evangelist carried on a very good work. But if the Lord had not withheld something, they might have been encouraged to be independent. They might have said, "Peter and John, we are doing the same thing that you are doing in Jerusalem. Whatever you can do, we can do also." In order to prevent such an attitude of independence, the Lord withheld the economical Spirit.

A Particular Case

According to 8:15, Peter and John prayed for the Samaritan believers to receive the Holy Spirit. The situation here is different from that in 2:38. The apostles preached and ministered Christ, but when their hearers repented and believed in Him, they received the wonderful Spirit of the Triune God. This implies that this Spirit is just the resurrected and ascended Christ Himself. The receiving of the Spirit in 2:38 is both essential and economical, in a general and all-inclusive sense. It differs from the receiving of the Spirit in 8:15-17, which is particularly the receiving of the Spirit falling upon the believers economically.

Acts 8:16 tells us that before Peter and John came, the Holy Spirit had not fallen upon the believers in Samaria. This does not mean that those new believers had not received the Holy Spirit within them essentially when they believed in the Lord. According to the teaching of the New Testament in Ephesians 1:13 and Galatians 3:2, they should have received the Holy Spirit essentially when they believed for their regeneration (John 3:6, 36). But they had not yet received the Spirit economically to identify them with the Body of Christ. The reason the Holy Spirit did not fall upon them outwardly and economically was that the apostles, through whom the practical establishment of the church was initiated in Jerusalem, might come to bring them into identification with the Body of Christ. This case is different from those in the house of Cornelius, who received the Holy Spirit when they believed in the Lord, both essentially within them for regeneration and economically upon them for baptism into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13) and

identification with the Body of Christ. That was because the gospel was preached then directly by Peter, who played the main role in the initiation of the practical establishment of the church.

The Spreading of the Body of Christ

We need to learn from the pattern presented here not to be independent of the Body in our gospel work. Suppose some migrate to a particular locality and begin a work there. If these saints think that they can do everything, they may become independent of the Body. This means that they actually become a division, a sect.

The pattern in chapter eight reveals that the Head of the Body is sovereign. He gave many things to the believers in Samaria, but He did not give the economical Spirit until the apostles came and laid their hands on the believers. Only then did the economical Spirit come upon these new believers.

The situation among most believers today is very different from that in Acts 8. Often Christian workers have the attitude that they are qualified to do everything. It seems that today it is as easy to open a so-called church as it is to open a restaurant, if not easier. Concerning this, the situation is deplorable.

When the migrants went out from Jerusalem in Acts 8, they did not establish churches of their own. On the contrary, they spread the Body of Christ. The work done in Samaria needed to be confirmed by the apostles. Therefore, Peter and John confirmed the new believers and identified them with the Body by laying their hands on them. Then the Spirit came upon these believers economically for their identification with the Body of Christ. From this we see that the work done in Samaria was not an independent work, a separate work. Rather, what was produced in Samaria was truly the spreading of the Body of Christ. The church in that locality did not belong independently and separately to the migrated saints. Neither was it a work belonging to Philip in a separate, independent way. No, it was part of the Body. This means that what came out through the migration and

through Philip's gospel preaching was part of the Body of Christ. Spontaneously, unlike the situation today, the oneness of the Body was maintained.

The Believers Baptized into the Name of the Lord Jesus

Acts 8:16 says that before the apostles came to Samaria the believers there "had only been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus." Notice that this verse does not say "in the name"; it says "into the name." The name denotes the person. To be baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus is to be baptized into the Person of the Lord, to be identified with the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ, to be put into an organic union with the living Lord.

In Matthew 28:19 the Lord charged the disciples to baptize the believers into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. But later, in practice, the believers were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus, both in Acts 8:16 and in 19:5, and into Christ in Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27. This indicates that to be baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus is equivalent to being baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, because the Lord Jesus is the embodiment of the Triune God (Col. 2:9). This also indicates that to be baptized into the name of the Triune God or of the Lord Jesus is equivalent to being baptized into the Person of Christ.

Since the Samaritan believers had been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus, that is, into the Lord Himself, they surely must have received the Spirit of life essentially within them so that they might not only be born of the Lord but also joined to Him (1 Cor. 6:17).

The Believers Identified with the Body of Christ

Acts 8:17 says, "Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." Peter and John were

sent to Samaria not only to confirm the preaching of the gospel by Philip, one of the seven appointed to serve tables, but also to bring the church in Samaria, composed of Samaritans whom the Jews had no dealings with, into identification with the Body of Christ by laying their hands on them. The Holy Spirit honored this and fell upon them, signifying their identification with the Body of Christ. In this way the Samaritan believers received the Holy Spirit economically in addition to their receiving the Holy Spirit essentially when they believed in the Lord Jesus.

THE CASE OF SIMON

In 8:9-13 we see that a man named Simon, who practiced magic in the city of Samaria, believed in the Lord and was baptized. When he saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the hands of the apostles, "he offered them money, saying, Give me also this authority, that on whomever I lay my hands he may receive the Holy Spirit" (vv. 18-19). Simon's request indicates that his practice of magic, which had amazed the people (v. 9), was for money.

In verse 20 Peter said to him, "May your silver go with you into destruction, because you supposed that the gift of God could be acquired through money." Here "destruction," as in Hebrews 10:39 and Matthew 7:13, does not denote eternal perdition. In particular, this refers to the destruction of one's deeds and work (1 Cor. 3:15). Simon had believed in the gospel and was baptized. Hence, he should have been saved initially. However, he was not saved from his wicked thought and act concerning money. Therefore, he needed to repent of this wickedness so that he could receive the Lord's forgiveness. Otherwise, he would be punished along with his silver.

TESTIFYING THE WORD OF THE LORD

Speaking of Peter and John, Acts 8:25 says, "They therefore, having solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem; and they brought the good news to many villages of the Samaritans." To testify

is to witness by personal experience of the Lord, and to speak the word of the Lord is to preach and teach according to the revelation of the Lord. In order to testify we need experiences of seeing, participation, and enjoyment.

PHILIP'S LEAVING THE WORK IN SAMARIA

Acts 8:26 says, "But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, 'Rise up and go south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is the desert route.'" Here we see that Philip left the work in Samaria. Later, after preaching the gospel to an Ethiopian, Philip was caught away by the Spirit (v. 39). Here we have another pattern related to the gospel work. Philip had played a major role in the work in Samaria. No doubt, the believers trusted in him and relied on him. But suddenly Philip was told by an angel to rise up and go south. Although Philip had been helpful to the believers in Samaria, he was able to leave the work there as soon as he was required to do so.

In Philip's leaving the work in Samaria we see a pattern with an important principle. This principle is that whenever we go forth to a certain locality and establish a church there, we should be prepared to leave that place, even to be "caught away." However, most of us would have the tendency to remain in a place where a strong church has been established through us. We may say, "This city will be my home. I shall buy a house and settle here." Would you be happy to be "caught away" from a church established through you? According to the pattern here, we must be ready to leave any work that has been established through us. This means that we should always be ready to be caught away from the work in a particular place.

No work should remain in our hands. To be caught away simply means not to keep a work in our hands. No matter how much we have done or how much we have accomplished, we must be ready to leave our work to the church, to the saints, and to the Lord, and allow the Spirit to carry us away.

From my own experience I can testify concerning following the pattern seen in Philip's leaving the work in Samaria. I carried on a work in Chefoo, in Shanghai, and then on the island of Taiwan. But although I did much work in those places, I was always ready to leave. When it was time, I did leave Chefoo, Shanghai, and Taiwan.

It is easy for a preacher or a minister to regard his work as his career. If we do this, we shall keep the work in our "pocket." Then once a church has been established through us, it will become our "pocket church." This should not be our practice in the Lord's recovery. No matter how much we may accomplish for the Lord in a particular place, we must always be ready to go away and leave the work to the church, the saints, and the Lord Himself. This is an important principle, and we need to follow it today.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE TWENTY-FOUR

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(19)

Scripture Reading: Acts 8:26-40

Acts 8:26-40 records the case of Philip preaching the gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch. In this case there are a number of patterns that we should follow in our gospel preaching today.

Verses 27 and 28 say, "And he rose up and went. And behold, an Ethiopian man, a eunuch, a man in power under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was over all her treasure, had come to worship in Jerusalem, and was returning and sitting in his chariot and reading the prophet Isaiah." Ethiopia is Cush (Isa. 18:1), the land of the descendants of Cush, the son of Ham (Gen. 10:6). The gospel had spread from the racially pure Jews to the mixed Samaritans through Philip and Peter and John (vv. 5-25). Now the angel of the Lord directed Philip to contact a total Gentile from Ethiopia. Through this the gospel also spread southward to Africa.

The Ethiopian man in verse 27 had come to worship in Jerusalem. This proves that the Ethiopian eunuch was seeking after God (see 17:26-27). According to the Lord's sovereign arrangement, Philip came into contact with this God-seeking man, with one who was hungry and thirsty for God.

USING THE BEST PORTIONS OF THE BIBLE IN PREACHING THE GOSPEL

The Spirit told Philip to approach the chariot, and

when he did so he heard the eunuch reading Isaiah the prophet (vv. 29-30). It was sovereign that the Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah 53: "Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so He does not open His mouth" (v. 32). This verse, a quotation from Isaiah 53:7, refers to Christ the Redeemer. It must have been sovereignly of the Spirit's leading that this passage concerning Christ as the sinner's redeeming Lamb, a good passage for gospel preaching, was opened to the eunuch. Therefore, "Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this scripture he brought the good news of Jesus to him" (v. 35).

Here we see the principle that in preaching the gospel we need to use the best portions of the Bible. This means that in our gospel preaching we should not speak concerning peculiar things. For example, after learning that stone is a basic item in the Scriptures, you may want to take this as a subject for your gospel preaching. However, such a subject may not be appropriate for the preaching of the gospel. We should always use a proper portion of the Word in our gospel preaching. We should select a portion like Isaiah 53.

Under the Lord's sovereignty, Philip used Isaiah 53 to preach the gospel to a Gentile. This Gentile, a descendant of Cush, the son of Ham, a cursed man (Gen. 9:22-27), heard the complete gospel and was saved. This was the first step taken by the Lord in spreading His gospel to typical Gentiles.

PREACHING THE GOSPEL UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Another important point in Philip's preaching of the gospel was that all his activity was under the direction, leading, and guidance of the Holy Spirit. In 8:29 "the Spirit said to Philip, Approach and join this chariot." The Spirit here, as in verse 39; 10:19; 13:2; and 16:6-7, indicates that the Lord's move in spreading His kingdom through the preaching of the gospel in Acts was by the Spirit's leading and direction, not by man's device and

schedule. Hence, it was not the act of man but of the Spirit.

We all should learn from this pattern to pray and to keep ourselves in fellowship with the Lord. If we maintain our fellowship with the Lord, we shall be able to sense His leading at any time. Then our move and our preaching of the gospel will be according to the Spirit's direction. We need to follow the Spirit's guidance, not our opinion, plan, and schedule. May we learn to have all our activity in preaching the gospel always under the direction and guidance of the Spirit.

A TYPICAL CASE OF WATER BAPTISM

In the case of Philip preaching the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch, we also have the matter of water baptism in 8:26-40. Today there is much debate among Christians concerning water baptism. Here in Acts 8 we have the case of a genuine Gentile believing in the Lord. From Isaiah 53 Philip "brought the good news of Jesus to him" (v. 35). Then "as they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch says, Look, water! What prevents me from being baptized?" (v. 36). The fact that the Ethiopian eunuch had such a reaction when seeing water indicates that Philip in his gospel preaching should have spoken to him about water baptism. If Philip had not said anything about baptism, it is not likely that the Ethiopian would have reacted in this way. Philip may still have been talking about water baptism when they came to the water in which the eunuch was baptized.

It is important for us to see that in this case of water baptism, a typical case, nothing is said about Spirit baptism. In particular, there is no mention of the Ethiopian eunuch speaking in tongues. Certainly if the eunuch had spoken in tongues, Luke would have given an account of this in his record. Since he records this case of water baptism, he surely would have recorded the experience of speaking in tongues had it taken place here. Those who promote tongue-speaking today need to pay attention to this case. This typical case of water baptism is a pattern, but in this pattern there is no mention at all of

tongue-speaking. Luke's record here emphasizes water baptism.

WATER BAPTISM AND SPIRIT BAPTISM

We have seen that the eunuch's reaction to seeing water indicates that Philip had preached water baptism to him. In this gospel case water baptism is particularly emphasized, but no mention is made of Spirit baptism. This should give us strong instruction that we must pay attention to water baptism, which signifies the believers' identification with Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 6:5; Col. 2:12), as well as to Spirit baptism. Spirit baptism signifies the reality of the believers' union with Christ in life essentially and in power economically, whereas water baptism is the believers' affirmation of the Spirit's reality. Both are needed (10:47), and neither can replace the other. All believers in Christ should properly have both, just as the children of Israel were baptized both in the cloud (signifying the Spirit) and in the sea (signifying water), as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 10:2.

Concerning baptism, water signifies death and burial for the termination of repentant people, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life and resurrection for the germination of the terminated ones. The death-water, pointing to and signifying the all-inclusive death of Christ into which His believers are baptized, buries not only the baptized ones themselves but also their sins, the world, and their past. It also separates them from the God-forsaking world and its corruption. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:9). Hence, to be baptized in the Holy Spirit is to be baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3), into the Triune God (Matt. 28:19), and even into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), which is joined to Christ in the one Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). It is through baptism in such a water and in such a Spirit that the believers in Christ are regenerated into the kingdom of God, into the realm of the divine life and the divine rule (John 3:3, 5), so that they may live by the eternal life of God in His eternal kingdom.

One Baptism

In chapter eight of Acts, the eunuch received water baptism and Spirit baptism at the same time. There are not two baptisms, a water baptism and a Spirit baptism. Water baptism and Spirit baptism are one.

Bible teachers have debated whether the baptism in Romans 6 refers to water baptism or Spirit baptism. Actually, there is no need for argument about this, because in God's economy there is only one baptism. It would be wrong to ask whether this one baptism is water baptism or Spirit baptism. To ask such a question indicates a lack of knowledge. In the sight of God there is one baptism with two aspects--the aspect of water and the aspect of Spirit.

For God there is not the need of water, only of Spirit. However, as human beings, who are physical, we have the need for a material confirmation of spiritual things. Water baptism, therefore, is the outward affirmation of inward Spirit baptism.

Among many Christians today water baptism is merely a ritual for the receiving of new members. Our practice of baptism must be altogether different. Whenever we baptize someone in water, we need to have the faith that we are baptizing that person not only into water but also into the Spirit as the realization of the Triune God.

The Significance and Issue of Water Baptism The Triune God

The water of baptism is rich in significance. First, this water signifies the Spirit as the realization of the Triune God. In Matthew 28:19 the Lord Jesus charged the disciples to baptize believers into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when we baptize believers, we must baptize them not only into water, but also into the Triune God.

Christ

The water of baptism also signifies Christ. Actually, when we baptize people into the Triune God, we baptize

them into Christ. Whereas Matthew 28:19 speaks of baptizing believers into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, in Acts the believers were baptized into the name of Jesus Christ. The reason for this is that Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God. Since water signifies the Triune God, it also signifies Christ.

The Death of Christ

Furthermore, the water of baptism signifies the death of Christ. Regarding this, Romans 6:3 and 4a say, "Are you ignorant that as many as have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? We have been buried therefore with Him through baptism into death." Hence, to be baptized into Christ is to be baptized into His death.

The Body of Christ

We have seen that the water of baptism signifies the Triune God, Christ, and the death of Christ. The issue of such a baptism is the Body of Christ: "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). The Body is therefore the issue of our being baptized into the Triune God, into Christ, and into Christ's death.

The Reality and the Affirmation

We need to lay aside the traditional concepts of baptism and come back to the pure word of the Bible to see that this one baptism has the aspects of the Spirit and the water. The Spirit is the reality, and the water is the outward affirmation.

We may use the signing of a contract as an illustration of these two aspects of baptism. A contract may first be made orally. This oral agreement is the reality of the contract. But in order for the contract to be secure, there is the need of outward affirmation in writing. A written, notarized contract is the outward affirmation of the inward reality of the contract. In a similar way, we may regard water baptism as the writing of the contract, and Spirit baptism as the reality of the contract. The signing

of a contract is not vain, for it is the affirmation of a real contract. In like manner, water baptism is not a mere ritual, for it is the outward affirmation of the Spirit as the reality of baptism. Water baptism without the Spirit would be empty. But Spirit baptism without water baptism would be lacking the necessary outward affirmation. Therefore, according to God's New Testament economy, baptism should be inwardly of the Spirit and outwardly of water.

Our Practice of Baptism

Our practice of baptism should be according to the pure word in the Bible. When we baptize people into the water, this signifies that we are baptizing them into the Triune God, into Christ, and into the death of Christ with the issue that they are baptized into the Body of Christ. This is the unique baptism mentioned in Ephesians 4:5 and also the baptism spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12:13.

In typology, the children of Israel were baptized in the cloud and in the sea. They did not have two baptisms; they had one baptism with two elements--the cloud and the sea. The cloud signifies the Spirit from the heavens, and the sea signifies the water on the earth. This type is a picture of our baptism today. Whenever we baptize believers, we baptize them in water and in the Spirit at the same time. This means that whenever we baptize people in water, we simultaneously baptize them into the Triune God.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE TWENTY-FIVE

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

(1)

Scripture Reading: Acts 9:1-19

In this message we shall begin to consider the conversion of Saul.

SAUL'S THREEFOLD QUALIFICATION

Acts 9:1 says, "But Saul, still breathing threatening and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest." Saul approved of Stephen's killing (8:1), and those who stoned Stephen laid down their garments at the feet of Saul (7:58). Saul, a persecutor, was a young man with a very strong sense of purpose.

Saul was born in Tarsus, a highly cultured city, and received his Greek education at the university there. In 22:3 he says that he studied "at the feet of Gamaliel, having been trained according to the strictness of the law." This indicates that he received his religious education from Gamaliel, a great rabbi. No doubt, Saul was a scholar in both the Greek and Hebrew languages, and he was trained in both Greek culture and in Hebrew religion. Furthermore, he was a Roman citizen. With him we see the three main elements of Western culture: Hebrew religion, Greek culture, and Roman politics. He was taught according to the Hebrew religion, he was trained in Greek culture, and he was a citizen of the Roman Empire. His parents or grandparents may have become Roman citizens, and Saul himself was born a Roman (22:25-28). Therefore, Saul had a threefold qualification--in Greek culture, Hebrew religion, and Roman politics.

The Lord is sovereign and all-knowing. Stephen seemed

to be better educated than Peter and John, who were unlearned Galilean fishermen. But Stephen was not as qualified in the three elements of Western culture as Saul was. In Philippians 3:5 he describes himself as "a Hebrew of Hebrews," for he was born a Hebrew and was well educated in the Hebrew religion. No one else was as qualified as he to bear the commission to bring God's New Testament economy to the Gentile world.

DEVASTATING THE CHURCH

Before the Lord gained Saul, he was gained by Satan. Satan must have known that Saul was an important person. Satan not only gained Saul; he also instigated him to take a leading part in persecuting the followers of Jesus. When the persecutors were stoning Stephen, Saul took care of their garments. After the death of Stephen, "Saul was devastating the church, entering house after house; and dragging off both men and women, he delivered them to prison" (8:3). It is significant that Luke purposely uses the word "devastating" to indicate that Saul wanted to destroy, to demolish, the entire church and all the followers of Jesus.

Saul was not satisfied with persecuting the believers in Jerusalem. He went to the high priest and "asked for letters from him to Damascus, for the synagogues, so that if he found any who were of the way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (9:2). According to 9:14, Saul had authority to bind all those who called on the name of the Lord Jesus. Saul wanted to go to Damascus because a number of the scattered saints were there. He intended to go there to arrest all those who called on the Lord's name.

PERSECUTING THOSE OF THE WAY

Acts 9:2 says that Saul's intention was to find those "who were of the way" and "bring them bound to Jerusalem." Here the way denotes the Lord's full salvation in God's New Testament economy. It is the way God dispenses Himself into the believers through Christ's redemption and the Spirit's anointing; it is the way the

believers partake of God and enjoy God; it is the way the believers worship God in their spirit by enjoying Him, and follow the persecuted Jesus by being one with Him; and it is the way they are brought into the church and built up into the Body of Christ to bear the testimony of Jesus.

The way in 9:2 includes the way of truth, the straight way, and the way of righteousness spoken of in 2 Peter 2:2, 15, and 21. The way of truth is the path of the Christian life according to the truth, which is the reality of the contents of the New Testament (1 Tim. 2:4; 3:15; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:15, 18; Titus 1:1). It is designated by other titles according to its various virtues, like the straight way, the way of righteousness, the way of peace (Luke 1:79; Rom. 3:17), the way of salvation (Acts 16:17), the way of God (Matt. 22:16; Acts 18:26), the way of the Lord (John 1:23; Acts 18:25), and the way (19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:22). It was slandered as the way of heresy (Acts 24:14).

MET BY THE LORD

Saul was probably very happy as he was on his way to Damascus. He may have been excited and perhaps even was in an ecstasy. Saul may have said to himself, "I have obtained authority from the high priests to bind all those who call on the name of Jesus. I am going to Damascus to arrest all those who call on this name, bring them to Jerusalem, and put them in jail."

A Heavenly Light and a Heavenly Voice

The Lord Jesus was watching over Saul as he was journeying toward Damascus. Instead of appearing to Saul immediately, the Lord waited until "he drew near to Damascus" (9:3). Then "suddenly a light from heaven shone around him; and he fell on the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (9:3b-4). Saul must have been shocked by the light from heaven and by the voice that called him by name. Saul thought that he was persecuting merely the followers of Jesus. Now a voice came from the heavens and told him that he was persecuting this One who is in the heavens.

To Saul's great surprise, he experienced a heavenly light, a heavenly voice, and a heavenly One. Spontaneously Saul said, "Who are You, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (v. 5). Saul called Him Lord, even without knowing Him.

Saul may have said to himself, "I have never persecuted Jesus. Rather, I persecuted Stephen and other followers of Jesus. I thought that Jesus was in the tomb, but now He comes to me from the heavens."

A Corporate "Me"

According to 9:4, the Lord Jesus asked Saul, "Why are you persecuting Me?" This is a corporate Me comprising Jesus the Lord and all His believers. Saul did not have this revelation, thinking that he was persecuting Stephen and other Jesus-followers in the way he considered heresy (24:14). He did not know that when he persecuted these he persecuted Jesus, for they were one with Him by being united to Him through their faith in Him. He considered that he was persecuting people on earth, never thinking that he touched anyone in heaven. To his great surprise, a voice from heaven told him that He was the One whom he was persecuting, and His name was Jesus. To him this was an unique revelation in the entire universe! By this he began to see that the Lord Jesus and His believers are one great person--the wonderful "Me." This must have impressed him and affected him for his future ministry concerning Christ and the church as the great mystery of God (Eph. 5:32), and laid a solid foundation for his unique ministry.

Hearing the Gospel and Being Saved by the Lord Directly

Luke does not give us the details related to Saul's conversion. Nevertheless, we can see that the Lord Jesus preached an adequate gospel to Saul. Saul indeed heard the gospel. Some may wonder how we can say this. They may point out that the voice from heaven did not say anything about the crucifixion, the redeeming blood, or the resurrection. However, we need to realize that the

name Jesus is an adequate gospel. Saul was a sinner, an opponent, but he must have known the significance of this name, since he knew both Hebrew and Greek. He must have realized that Jesus means Jehovah, the Savior. Is this not the gospel? Do we not hear the gospel when we hear of Jesus? Who is Jehovah, the Savior? Paul surely knew the meaning of the name of Jesus.

In 9:6 the Lord Jesus said to Saul, "Rise up and enter into the city, and it shall be told you what you must do." The Lord would not directly tell Saul right after his conversion what He wanted him to do, for the reason that he needed a member of His Body to initiate him into the identification with His Body, since he had been saved and brought to the Lord directly by Him, not indirectly through any channel. Without a member sent by the Lord from His Body to contact him, it would be difficult for any member of His Body to receive him (see 9:26).

The Lord's Dealing with Saul

Verse 8 says, "And Saul rose from the ground, and though his eyes were opened, he saw nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus." Here we have the Lord's dealing with Saul. Before this, Saul considered himself marvelously knowledgeable, regarding himself as one who knew all things concerning man and God. Now the Lord made him blind so that he could see nothing until the Lord opened his eyes, especially his inner eyes, and commissioned him to open the eyes of others (26:18).

CONFIRMED THROUGH ANANIAS

Identified with the Body of Christ

In 9:10-19 we see that Saul's conversion was confirmed through Ananias. Verses 10 and 11 say, "Now there was a certain disciple in Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias! And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said to him, Rise up and go to the lane called Straight, and seek in the house of Judas a man from Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying."

The Lord sent Ananias, one member of His Body, to go to Saul so that Saul might be initiated into the identification with the Body of Christ. This also must have impressed Saul with the importance of the Body of Christ and helped him realize that a saved believer needs the members of the Body of Christ.

A Chosen Vessel

In 9:12 the Lord told Ananias that Saul had "seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him, so that he may receive his sight." For the blinded Saul to receive sight was for him to be saved in full. It meant a great deal to him, especially for his inner eyes to be opened to see the things of God concerning His mysteries and His economy.

In verses 13 and 14 Ananias said, "Lord, I have heard from many concerning this man, how many evil things he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Your name." This indicates that calling upon the Lord's name in the early days was a sign of the Lord's followers (1 Cor. 1:2). This kind of calling must have been audible so that others could hear. Thus it became a sign.

In 9:15 and 16 the Lord said to Ananias, "Go, for this man is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before both the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer on behalf of My name." Because Saul was a chosen vessel to the Lord, he was set apart from his mother's womb and called by the Lord (Gal. 1:15). The Lord is sovereign and able, according to His choosing in eternity, to make the most fierce among His persecutors a vessel, a leading apostle, to carry out His commission in preaching the gospel and taking the way he had opposed and persecuted. Eventually, the opposing Saul became, in his victorious ministry of the gospel, Christ's vanquished captive in the triumphant procession celebrating Christ's victory over all His enemies (2 Cor. 2:14).

Receiving the Holy Spirit and Being Baptized

Acts 9:17 says, "And Ananias went away and entered into the house; and laying his hands on him, he said, Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you came, so that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Saul's case was a particular one because as the most significant persecutor, he was saved directly by the Lord from heaven while he was on his way to persecute the believers. Hence, he needed, as did the Samaritan believers (8:14-17) and the twelve disciples in Ephesus (19:1-7), a member of the Body of Christ to initiate him into the identification with the Body of Christ by the laying on of hands.

The filling with the Holy Spirit in 9:17 is the outward filling. According to the principle of salvation in God's New Testament economy, Saul must have received the Holy Spirit of life essentially at the time of his conversion, prior to Ananias' coming and laying his hands on him. Before Ananias came, he was praying to the Lord (v. 11). This indicates that Saul had believed in the Lord and was calling on Him (Rom. 10:13-14) like those believers whom he had ravaged and was going to arrest. But since he was not saved through any member of the Body of Christ, the Holy Spirit did not fall upon him economically until Ananias came, as the representative of the Body, to identify him with the Body of Christ.

Verses 18 and 19 continue, "And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight and rose up and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened. Now he was with the disciples in Damascus for some days." The case of Saul, like that of the Ethiopian eunuch, instructs us to pay attention to water baptism, which signifies the believers' identification with Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12), as well as to Spirit baptism, which signifies the reality of the believers' union with Christ in life essentially and in power economically. Water baptism is a believer's affirmation of the reality of Spirit baptism. Both are necessary.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE TWENTY-SIX

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

(2)

Scripture Reading: Acts 9:1-19

In this message we shall continue to consider the conversion of Saul (9:1-19).

PRAYING FOR THREE DAYS

As Saul drew near to Damascus, "suddenly a light from heaven shone around him; and he fell on the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (vv. 3-4). After he rose from the ground, he saw nothing, even though his eyes were opened (v. 8). For three days Saul was not able to see. The Lord not only took away his sight; He also dealt with Saul's clever mind. We have seen that Saul was learned in Hebrew religion, Greek culture, and Roman politics. He was trained in the three basic elements of Western culture. In taking away Saul's sight, the Lord Jesus wanted Saul to think about Him.

Acts 9:9 says that Saul "was three days without seeing, and neither ate nor drank." What did he do during those three days? The answer to this question is found in the Lord's word to Ananias recorded in verse 11: "Rise up and go to the lane called Straight, and seek in the house of Judas a man from Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying." Here we see that in those three days Saul was praying. He did not see anything, and he did not eat or drink anything. All he could do was pray.

I believe that as Saul prayed he tried to analyze Jesus, seeking to know who He is. Saul may have said to himself, "I know that Jesus was buried, yet He spoke to me from

heaven. How can this be? Jesus said that I was persecuting Him. How could He have been among those I persecuted?" For three days Paul must have prayed about matters such as these.

RECEIVING THE FULL MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL

It is likely that as Saul was praying, vision after vision and revelation after revelation came to him concerning Christ and the church. His experience during those days may have been one of watching a heavenly television in which he saw many things concerning the Lord Jesus. As he saw these things, Saul may have said, "Jesus the Nazarene is Jehovah. He is my Savior. No wonder that His followers testified strongly that He was resurrected. He surely has been resurrected, for He appeared to me from the heavens." Saul may have gone on to consider the Lord's ascension, which implies His incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection. Saul may have come to realize that as the One who is now in the heavens, the Lord passed through the process of incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension.

We need to be impressed with the fact that for three days Saul did not eat or drink. All he did was pray. While he was praying, the revelation concerning Christ was "televised" into his being. Saul beheld a wonderful view of the Lord on this heavenly television. No longer did Saul have any doubt concerning Christ's resurrection. He also came to believe in His incarnation and death. Through the visions that he saw during those days, Saul received the full message of the gospel.

JESUS AND THE CORPORATE "ME"

Saul not only saw that Jesus is Jehovah, the Savior, who died and was resurrected; he also saw that the Lord Jesus is one with His followers. Perhaps Saul said to himself, "I did not persecute Jesus--I persecuted His followers. But He told me that I persecuted Him. This must mean that He is one with His followers." In this way Saul came to see the Body. He heard a message not only

concerning Christ's salvation, but also concerning the Body of Christ. When the Lord appeared to Saul, He asked him, "Why are you persecuting Me?" The Lord seemed to be saying, "Saul, this 'Me' includes Me personally and My Body corporately. Personally I am in the heavens, but corporately the Body is on earth. When you persecuted My followers, you persecuted My Body. To persecute My Body is to persecute Me." Therefore, the "Me" in 9:4 is corporate, comprising the Lord Jesus and all His believers.

According to 9:5, Saul said, "Who are You, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." The "Me" in verse 4 and the name "Jesus" in verse 5 are of great significance, and Paul must have considered much concerning Jesus and this corporate "Me." During those three days he might have analyzed the two words Me and Jesus.

When Paul said, "Who are You, Lord?" he must have gotten saved and received the essential Spirit. Later, in the book of Romans, he said, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13). In Acts 9:5 Saul called Jesus Lord even without knowing Him. No doubt, Saul was shocked by the Lord's appearing and speaking. At that time the essential Spirit should have entered into his being. Then he was able to pray for three days without eating and drinking. Under the inspiration of the essential Spirit, his only interest was to pray in order to know the significance of what he had seen and heard. During those days, Paul received the full gospel concerning salvation and the Body of Christ.

Saul's experience of the corporate Me, Christ and the Body, must have made a deep impression on him and affected his future ministry regarding Christ and the church. That experience laid the foundation for his ministry. Therefore, he was very strong in teaching the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:16; 4:4, 16). He is the only writer in the New Testament to use the term "the Body of Christ." He placed great emphasis on the Body because at the time of his conversion he heard a message concerning the corporate Me, a message concerning the Body of Christ.

CONFIRMED BY A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE BODY

Immediately after Saul was saved, the Lord began to educate him concerning the Body. This was the reason He said to Saul, "Rise up and enter into the city, and it shall be told you what you must do" (9:6). Here the Lord seemed to be saying, "Saul, I shall not tell you what you need to do. You have been saved directly by Me, and no other person knows that you have been saved. Therefore, you need a representative of My Body to come to you and confirm the fact that I have saved you, chosen you, and called you. You also need such a representative of the Body to bring you into the identification with My Body." As we shall see, when Saul came to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples, "all feared him, not believing that he was a disciple" (v. 26). Such a situation made it necessary for his salvation to be confirmed by a representative of the Body.

When the Lord told Ananias to seek Saul, Ananias replied, "Lord, I have heard from many concerning this man, how many evil things he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem" (v. 13). Here we see that Ananias did not want to have anything to do with Saul. Then the Lord went on to say to Ananias, "Go, for this man is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before both the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer on behalf of My name" (vv. 15-16). Then Ananias went to contact Saul. In his contact with Saul, Ananias recognized him as a brother in the Lord (v. 17). If the Lord had not told Ananias to seek out Saul, none of the believers would have recognized Saul as a brother. Through Ananias the Lord gave Saul excellent instruction concerning the practice of the Body life.

BEING FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

In 9:17 Ananias said to Saul, "The Lord has sent me, Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you came, so that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." The filling here is the outward filling with the economical Spirit. Both in the case of Saul in chapter nine and in the case of the Samaritans in chapter eight, the Head of the Body withheld the economical Spirit. The

Lord held back the economical Spirit from the Samaritan believers because the Jews regarded them as strangers and had no dealings with them. The Jews would have found it difficult to believe that God would save the Samaritans. Therefore, the Head of the Body withheld the economical Spirit until Peter and John came to Samaria to lay their hands on the Samaritan believers. Through the laying on of the hands of Peter and John, the Head passed on the economical Spirit as a sign to the Jewish believers that even Samaritans could be members of the Body of Christ.

Saul of Tarsus, of course, was a typical Jew, a pure Hebrew. However, he was a leading persecutor of the church, one who devastated the church in Jerusalem. Who would ever believe that he had turned to the Lord and had been saved? When Paul received the Lord's salvation, he also received the essential Spirit within him. However, the Head of the Body held back the economical Spirit until a representative of the Body came to Saul and laid his hands on him. At that juncture, the economical Spirit came upon him as strong evidence of the fact that he had been saved and had been accepted by the Head into the Body as a member. Actually, Saul was a particular member, a member that was to bear the weighty commission to minister God's New Testament economy to the Gentile world.

It is not easy to have the proper understanding of all that is portrayed in 9:1-19. Likewise, it is not easy to see the significance of what is recorded in this section of Acts. Our understanding of this portion of the holy Word came not only from reading the Bible and books written by others, but also from considering our own history and experience. As a result of many years of study and experience, we can see the crucial points in 9:1-19. Each point should not merely be a teaching to us; rather, every point should be a vision that we see on the heavenly television.

THE COMPLETION OF GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

In Acts 9 we see that the leading persecutor and foremost opponent of Jesus was saved and became a vessel. Saul became one with the Head and with the Body. As a member of the Body, he was qualified to receive the heavenly commission to complete the word of God's New Testament revelation. Concerning this, he himself says, "I became a minister according to the stewardship of God, which was given to me for you, to complete the word of God" (Col. 1:25). Without the Epistles of Paul, God's New Testament revelation would not have been completed. Among the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, fourteen were written by Paul as the completion of God's New Testament economy. With the ministry of Peter and his company we have the initiation, but we do not have the completion. If we had only the ministry of Peter and his company, the New Testament economy of God would not be complete. For this completion there was the need of another vessel, the vessel chosen by God to carry out His New Testament economy. Eventually, God in His wisdom put Paul into prison so that he could write those Epistles which are especially crucial to the New Testament economy of God.

A CHOSEN VESSEL

In 9:15 we see that Saul of Tarsus was a chosen vessel. In reading the Scriptures we may not pay adequate attention to the word "vessel," an important spiritual term. A vessel is a container and therefore is different from a tool or a weapon.

In the Epistles of Paul there is a strong emphasis on the importance of vessels. For example, Romans 9:23 speaks of God making known "the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He had before prepared unto glory." In Romans 9 we have the thought that human beings were made by God to be vessels to contain Him. In 2 Corinthians 4:7 Paul again speaks of vessels: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." Then in 2 Timothy

2:20 he says, "In a great house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also wooden and earthen, and some unto honor, and some unto dishonor." God's intention in saving Saul of Tarsus was to fill him with Himself and thereby make him an outstanding vessel. In Paul's writings we see the development of the spiritual significance of the word "vessel."

It may have been from Ananias that Saul learned that he was a chosen vessel. Saul of Tarsus was chosen by the Lord not only to be His apostle, His servant, and His minister; he was also chosen to be His vessel. In Acts 9:15 the Lord Jesus seemed to be saying to Ananias, "Saul is a chosen vessel. He will contain Me, and his ministry will be to convey Me to the Gentile world." We all need to see the importance of Saul being a chosen vessel.

In Paul's life and writings we can see the three elements of western culture--the Hebrew element, the Greek element, and the Roman element. Paul was a composition of these three elements. Therefore, he embodied Hebrew religion, Greek culture, and Roman politics. Because he was a composition of these elements, he became suitable as an earthen vessel to contain and convey the all-inclusive Christ. Paul was adequate to be such a vessel.

OUR NEED FOR SPIRITUAL VISION

In studying the Bible it is not sufficient to know only the letters in black and white. We also need spiritual vision and insight. The Lord Jesus had such vision and insight when He revealed that the divine title "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" indicates resurrection (Matt. 22:23-33). We cannot see such a thing simply by reading the Bible in letters. Only by having spiritual vision and insight can we see that resurrection is implied in this divine title. To have such an understanding is not to allegorize the Scriptures or merely to make inferences. On the contrary, this is to receive revelation through the study of the written Word of God. In our reading of chapter nine of Acts we also need to see the heavenly vision concerning "Me," Jesus, and the chosen vessel.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE TWENTY-SEVEN

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

(3)

Scripture Reading: Acts 9:20-30

IMMEDIATELY PROCLAIMING THIS ONE

Probably no one has ever turned to the Lord Jesus more quickly than Saul of Tarsus did. After Saul was baptized, "he was with the disciples in Damascus for some days" (9:19). Verse 20 says, "And immediately in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus, that this One is the Son of God." Here the word "immediately" is significant. It indicates that in a very short period of time his turn to the Lord was absolutely completed. Saul was a persecutor, but he turned to the Lord and became a vessel to contain Christ and minister Him to others. I believe that Luke inserted the word "immediately" with the purpose of showing that Saul's turn took place very quickly.

In chapter nine Luke also gives us a short and simple record concerning Paul's preaching. According to verse 20, Saul "proclaimed Jesus, that this One is the Son of God." Then in verse 22 Luke goes on to say that "Saul was all the more empowered and confounded the Jews dwelling in Damascus, proving that this One is the Christ." In these verses Luke twice uses the phrase "this One." In verse 20 we see that this One is the Son of God, and in verse 22 that this One is the Christ.

The phrase "this One" is meaningful and rich in its implications. If we study Saul's experience on the road to Damascus, we shall be able to understand why he used the term "this One." This is the One whom he persecuted, the One whom the authorities in the Jewish religion opposed and condemned. This One is also the One in whom many

believed and whom they followed. The reason Saul used the expression of "this One" as his emphasis was that his audience knew about Jesus and about what was taking place with Saul and the believers. Acts 9:21 indicates this: "And all those hearing him were amazed and said, Is not this man the one who ravaged those who call upon this name in Jerusalem, and he had come here for this, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests?" Because the people knew about this, Saul could simply speak of "this One." The fact that Saul used this expression indicates that his audience knew about whom he was speaking. Therefore, when Saul began to speak about Jesus, he spoke concerning this One.

THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

With the all-inclusive Christ there are two main aspects--the aspect of His Person and the aspect of His work. We see these two aspects in 9:20 and 22, where Saul speaks of the Son of God and the Christ. The Son of God denotes the Lord's Person, and the Christ denotes His work.

The Lord's Person

As the Son of God, the Lord Jesus is the divine One, even the very God Himself. According to John 5, the Jews realized that to say that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God is to say that He is God. Concerning this, John 5:18 says, "For this therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God." This indicates that for the Lord to be the Son of God means that He is God.

The expression "the Son of God" refers to the Person of the Lord Jesus. As the Son of God, the Lord Jesus is divine. However, all the opposers considered Him merely a human being. They did not realize that this Jesus is also divine, that He is the Son of God. He is the One with the unique divine source.

In the synagogues in Damascus Saul proclaimed Jesus

as the Son of God. His audience was made up of those who were knowledgeable concerning Jesus. They knew that Jesus was the Nazarene who was opposed by the authorities in the Jewish religion. Now Saul declared that this One is the Son of God. He seemed to be saying, "This One whom you regard merely as a man is the Son of God. Yes, He came out of a human source, and He is the Son of Man. Nevertheless, this One is the Son of God." Concerning this, Saul gave a strong testimony.

The Jews were not happy to hear Saul proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God. On the contrary, they could not tolerate hearing that Jesus has the unique divine source and that He is the Son of God. Therefore, they opposed Saul's preaching. They regarded it as blasphemy to declare that a man is the Son of God. Because they regarded this as blasphemy, they opposed Saul and wanted to do away with him (9:24).

The Lord's Commission

According to 9:22, Saul proved to the Jews in Damascus that "this One is the Christ." The title "the Christ" denotes the Lord's commission, that is, the Lord's work. Christ means the anointed One. The Lord Jesus is God's anointed One. As the anointed One of God, the Christ, He is the unique One. Only He has been anointed by God and appointed by Him to carry out His commission, to do work God assigned to Him.

In Matthew 16:15 the Lord Jesus said to His disciples "Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). The revelation given to Peter includes the two aspects of the Lord Jesus, the aspects of His Person and His commission. Christ's commission is to accomplish God's eternal purpose through His crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and second coming. His Person embodies the Father and issues in the Spirit for a full expression of the Triune God.

Saul of Tarsus, who was blinded for a period of time, received a heavenly vision concerning the Lord Jesus. He

saw the same thing Peter did in Caesarea Philippi; that is, he saw that Jesus the Nazarene is the Son of God and the Christ.

The Lord Jesus is both human and divine. As a divine-human person, He is the God-man. The Lord is the One with a dual status--human and divine. In Acts 9 Saul does not emphasize the Lord's humanity, for everyone, including the opposers, recognized that Jesus was a human being and not a phantom. He was truly a man, and His humanity was recognized by all. But the opposers did not see that Jesus is the Son of God. Therefore, immediately after Saul turned to the Lord, the first thing he testified concerning Him is that Jesus, the man from Nazareth, is the Son of God. As we have pointed out, this was blasphemy to the Jews, and they wanted to do away with Saul for proclaiming it.

In addition to proclaiming that Jesus is the Son of God, Saul also testified that He is the Christ. He is unique, the only One anointed and appointed by God to carry out God's commission. As the Christ, the Lord has been anointed and appointed to fulfill God's purpose, to accomplish God's plan. Only He is qualified to carry out God's eternal redemption. As to His Person, He is divine. As to His work, He is the God-anointed and God-appointed One to carry out whatever God intends.

A Pattern for Our Gospel Preaching

In Acts 9 Paul set up a very good pattern for our gospel preaching today. No matter what portion of the Bible we may use in preaching the gospel and no matter what the subject of our preaching may be, we must always emphasize these two aspects of Christ. We need to preach both the Person of Christ and the work of Christ. However, much of today's preaching does not place the proper emphasis on Christ's Person and work. Instead, the gospel may be preached in a vague, general way. People may be told that Jesus is the Savior and the Redeemer, but there may not be the needed emphasis on the two basic aspects of Christ. Our gospel preaching must be different. We need to emphasize the fact that the One we preach is divine. He

is the Son of God, and His source is divine. We should also emphasize His work as the One anointed by God to carry out His commission. This means that we should preach the Son of God and the Christ.

Believing That Jesus Is the Christ, the Son of God

John 20:31 says, "These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." Here we see that in order to have eternal life, we need to believe that Jesus is the Christ and that He is the Son of God. We need to believe in His divine Person as the Son of God and in His work, as the anointed One of God. The title "the Christ" is related to the Lord's work, to His office and mission. The title "the Son of God" denotes the Lord's Person. His Person is a matter of God's life, and His mission is a matter of God's work. He is the Son of God to be the Christ of God. He works for God by the life of God so that man also, by believing in Him as the Christ and the Son of God, may have God's life and thereby become a child of God. John 20:31 makes it crystal clear that to believe in the Lord Jesus is to believe in His divine Person and in His divine work.

Mistaken Beliefs concerning Christ's Humanity Denying That the Ascended Christ Still Has Humanity

Some Christians today may not believe properly in the humanity of the Lord Jesus. Many years ago, a certain person told me that he did not believe that the Lord Jesus, as the One in the heavens, still possesses the human nature. This person thought that after His resurrection the Lord put off His humanity. To such a person we need to preach the humanity of Jesus.

Stephen's experience in Acts 7 proves that even in His ascension the Lord Jesus is still a man. Stephen said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (7:56). When Stephen saw the ascended Lord, he saw Him as a man.

The Lord's word to the high priest in Matthew 26 is further proof that He still has His humanity: "Henceforth you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64). The high priest was inquiring if the Lord Jesus was the Son of God (v. 63). In His answer the Lord acknowledged that He is the Son of God, but He went on to say that in His ascension and at His coming back on the clouds He will be the Son of Man. Therefore, the Lord was a man not only on earth before His crucifixion, but also in the heavens at the right hand of God after His resurrection and ascension.

In John 1:51 the Lord Jesus said to Nathanael, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." This is the fulfillment of Jacob's dream (Gen. 28:11-22). Christ as the Son of Man with His humanity is the ladder set up on earth and leading to heaven. This word spoken by the Lord to Nathanael refers to eternity. This means that in eternity Christ will still be the Son of Man. Therefore, He will have both divinity and humanity forever.

Denying That Christ Came in the Flesh

At the time of the Apostle John, some denied that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Concerning this, John said, "Every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ having come in the flesh is out of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus, is not out of God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist" (1 John 4:2-3). It is a great heresy to deny the fact that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

Denying That Christ is a Creature

It is also heretical to deny that Christ is a creature with respect to His humanity. We have been strongly opposed for teaching, according to Colossians 1:15, that with regard to His humanity the Lord Jesus is a creature. But those who deny that the Lord is a creature fall into the category of those who deny that Christ has come in the flesh. To say that Jesus is not a creature equals to say

that He did not become flesh. Is flesh not a created thing? To be sure, flesh and blood are created elements. The blood shed by the Lord Jesus on the cross was surely something created by God.

If we make a thorough study of the word, we shall see that, on the one hand, our Lord is the Creator and that, on the other hand, He is also a creature. As God, He is the Creator; as a man, He is a creature. Is a man not part of God's creation? Of course, man is included in God's creation. Since the Lord Jesus became a man with blood and flesh, both of which are created elements, He is also a creature with respect to His humanity.

It is heretical to deny the fact that the Lord Jesus is a creature, just as it is blasphemous to deny the fact that He is God. According to the Scriptures, we say that Jesus is both God and man, that our Lord is both the Creator and a creature. He is truly the all-inclusive One. This all-inclusive One is both God and man, both the Creator and a creature.

SAUL'S DISCIPLES

In 9:25 we see something very surprising concerning Saul--he had disciples. This verse definitely and clearly speaks of "his disciples." Saul, who was once a leading persecutor of Jesus, now has disciples following him. The point we would make concerning this is that Saul's having disciples indicates that his preaching was powerful and prevailing. Through his preaching people were gained for the Lord.

Saul's powerful, prevailing preaching stirred up the opposition of the Jews, who "consulted together to do away with him" (v. 23). We are told that they "watched the gates closely, both day and night, so that they might do away with him" (v. 24). Since Saul had no way to escape, "his disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket" (v. 25). Therefore, in a way that was not at all glorious, Saul escaped from the opposers in Damascus. This way of escape was according to the Lord's sovereignty.

The Lord Jesus did a wonderful work in turning His leading persecutor into a prevailing preacher. This change took place within a very short period of time.

Saul's experience exposes the shortness of today's seminaries. A person may attend a seminary to be trained in the way of knowledge, but become spiritually "flat" by the time he completes his education. We may say that Saul of Tarsus attended the Lord's "seminary" and "graduated" after a short while to become a prevailing preacher. Unlike many preachers today, Saul did not try to teach and preach in the way of psychology. Instead, he came forth to tell people that this One is the Son of God and the Christ. As a result, he even gained disciples. However, eventually it became necessary for him to escape and go to Jerusalem.

SAUL AND THE DISCIPLES IN JERUSALEM

Although a great deal had taken place in Damascus, Jerusalem had not heard the news concerning it. For this reason, when Saul tried to join the disciples, they "all feared him, not believing that he was a disciple" (v. 26). They could not believe that this opposer was now a disciple of the Lord Jesus. They were still afraid of him But in His sovereignty the Lord provided Barnabas, a son of encouragement (4:36). Barnabas took hold of Saul and "led him to the apostles, and related to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He spoke to him, and how in Damascus he spoke boldly in the name of Jesus" (9:27). Then Saul remained with them, "going in and going out in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord" (v. 28).

According to 9:29, Saul was "speaking and discussing with the Hellenists," that is, with the Greek-speaking Jews. As Saul debated with them, they were offended and "attempted to do away with him" (v. 29). When the brothers realized what was happening, they decided to send Saul back to Tarsus. Therefore, 9:30 concludes this section by saying, "They brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus."

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE TWENTY-EIGHT

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(20)

Scripture Reading: Acts 9:31-43 In this message we shall cover 9:31-43.

THE BUILDING UP AND THE MULTIPLICATION OF THE CHURCH

In Three Provinces

Acts 9:31 says, "So the church throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplied." This verse speaks of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, all of which were provinces in the Roman Empire. Judea was in the southern part of the Jewish land, Galilee was in the north, and Samaria was in between the south and the north. There were churches in all three of these provinces. Since at this time the church had spread only to the provinces of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and the word "whole" covers all the places where the church existed, the "church" in singular is used in the universal sense. The church here is spoken of in the universal sense although there must have been a number of churches in the various cities of these three provinces, which may be called churches in the local sense.

Having Peace

According to verse 31, the church throughout the whole of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee had peace. The church had peace inwardly although there was persecution outwardly.

Being Built Up

Having peace in the midst of persecution, the church was being built up. The building up proceeded after the establishment of the church.

Going On in the Fear of the Lord

We are also told that the church in these provinces was going on in the fear of the Lord. Although there were persecutions, the church was not in the fear of men. Rather the church went on in the fear of the Lord lest the church offend the Lord by being put down or even subdued by persecution, or lest she offend the Lord in other things.

In the Comfort of the Holy Spirit

According to 9:31, the church was going on also in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. This indicates that the church was suffering affliction through the persecutions, in which she feared the Lord and enjoyed the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

The Jews regarded Judea as the best province. They considered Galilee a despised region and Samaria a region full of mixture. Therefore, the Jews in Jerusalem despised Galilee and rejected Samaria. But in 9:31 we see that the churches in these three provinces are regarded as one. This verse speaks of "the church throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria." I believe that the Spirit inspired Luke to write in this particular way in order to indicate that no matter how much Galilee was despised and Samaria was rejected by the Jews in Jerusalem, the churches raised up in those regions should all be considered one church. In the local sense, there were the churches, but in the universal sense, all these churches are the church. Here we have a basic revelation concerning the oneness of the church universally.

THE SPREAD OF PETER'S MINISTRY

To Lydda, Healing Aeneas

Some readers of Acts may think that by the time of

chapter nine, when Saul of Tarsus came into the Lord's testing, Peter has moved out of the scene. However, in 9:32-43 we see that Peter is still in the scene, and these verses describe the spread of Peter's ministry. His ministry has spread from Jerusalem to Lydda. Acts 9:32 says, "Now it came about that as Peter was passing through all those parts, he came down also to the saints dwelling at Lydda." Lydda was a town about eleven miles southeast of Joppa, called in the Old Testament, Lod (1 Chron. 8:12; Ezra 2:33). While he was in Lydda, Peter healed a "certain man named Aeneas, who for eight years had been lying on a bed, for he was paralyzed" (v. 33). Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you! Rise up and make your own bed!" Immediately Aeneas rose up, and "all those dwelling in Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord" (vv. 34-35).

To Joppa, Healing Dorcas

In 9:36-43 we have the healing, or quickening, of Dorcas in Joppa. Verse 36 says, "Now there was a certain disciple in Joppa named Tabitha (which translated is called Dorcas); this woman was full of good works and alms which she did." "Dorcas" is the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic "Tabitha," meaning gazelle. When the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, which was near to Joppa, "they sent two men to him, entreating him, Do not delay to come through to us" (v. 38). Peter came down to Joppa and healed Dorcas. It may be better to say that Dorcas was quickened.

Some may consider the quickening of Dorcas a case of resurrection. Dorcas may have been dead for a full day before Peter came to Joppa. Peter prayed and "turning to the body, he said, Tabitha, rise up! And she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up" (v. 40). This may be considered an instance of resurrection. However, the term "resurrection," a strong expression, is not used here. Therefore, instead of speaking of the resurrection of Dorcas, I prefer to say that through Peter she was healed or quickened.

A Preparation to Open the Door of the Kingdom to the Gentiles

In 9:32-43 we see Peter in his ministry outside of Jerusalem, even outside of Judea, in a region that is somewhat related to the Gentiles. When Peter was in Joppa, he was not far from Caesarea, which was a center for the Roman government. This means that Peter had moved away from Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish center, toward the city of Caesarea, the place where one of the Roman governors resided. Because Joppa was close to Caesarea, it became a stepping stone for Peter to open the door of the kingdom to the Gentiles. Peter's stay in Joppa, therefore, was a preparation for him to go to the house of Cornelius and use the second key given him by the Lord to open the door so that the Gentiles may enter into the kingdom. As we shall see, in Caesarea Peter opened the door for typical Roman Gentiles to enter into the kingdom of God.

VISIONS AND MIRACLES

Both in the case of Saul and that of Cornelius, the Lord worked through visions. In a vision the Lord appeared to Ananias: "Now there was a certain disciple in Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias! And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord" (9:10). Before this, Saul of Tarsus had a vision of the Lord Himself. The Lord appeared to Saul and spoke to him. Following that, Saul had another vision, in which he saw Ananias laying his hands on him. The Lord told Ananias about this, saying that Saul "has seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him, so that he may receive his sight" (9:12). Therefore, with both Saul and Ananias there was a vision. Here we have the matter of visions related to the carrying out of the Lord's work.

In the case of Cornelius the Lord also worked through visions. First, Cornelius "saw clearly in a vision about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in to him and saying to him, Cornelius!" (10:3). On the next day,

Peter saw a vision as he was praying on the housetop (10:9-10, 17). Therefore, in the case of Cornelius we have two more visions--the vision seen by Cornelius and the vision seen by Peter.

We have pointed out that the cases of both Saul and Cornelius involve visions. A vision was given to Saul, and then to Ananias. Likewise, a vision was given to Cornelius, and then to Peter. In between these two cases, both of which involve visions, there are two miracles which took place through Peter. First we have the healing of Aeneas, and then the quickening of Dorcas. In our study of the book of Acts, we need to put together different cases such as these and then consider what is portrayed. We should not consider chapter nine in isolation. Rather, we should study this chapter in relation to what precedes it and to what follows it.

PETER'S MINISTRY AND THE INITIAL STAGE OF SAUL'S MINISTRY

Chapter one of Acts stands alone as a chapter concerned with preparation. Then in chapter two we have the beginning of the propagation. Chapters two through five are one portion. These four chapters are concerned with Peter's propagating ministry. In chapter two we have Peter's first message, given on the day of Pentecost, and then in chapter three we see the miracle done for a man lame from birth. Based upon that miracle, Peter gave another message, which is recorded in chapters three and four. This is related to what took place in chapter five. Therefore, these four chapters form a section concerned with the propagating ministry of Peter.

Acts 6 begins with the appointment of seven serving ones. Among these seven was Stephen, who was a teacher of the Word. In chapter seven we have a record of Stephen's teaching. Another of the seven serving ones was Philip, who was an evangelist. Chapter eight gives us a record of the preaching work of this evangelist.

Stephen was persecuted and eventually put to death. A young man named Saul took part in that persecution. The

case of Stephen caused the Jewish leaders to be stirred up to persecute the followers of Jesus. Concerning this, 8:1 says, "There occurred in that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem." Following this we are told, "Saul was devastating the church" (8:3). This indicates that Saul was one of the main leaders of the persecution against the followers of Jesus. But as this leading persecutor was on the way from Jerusalem to Damascus, he was saved. Not only was he saved--he became a prevailing preacher, as indicated by the record in 9:20-30.

Saul's conversion and his becoming a prevailing preacher do not mark the end of Peter's ministry. Immediately after the record of Saul's preaching, Peter comes back into the scene. The scene, however, is not in Judea but in a place not far from Caesarea. As we have seen, this place became a stepping stone for Peter to go into the Gentile world and open the gate for the Gentiles to enter into the kingdom of God.

Readers of the book of Acts may find it difficult to divide this book into sections. In our study of Acts, we may regard chapters six through eleven as a section. In this section of Acts we see that Saul's ministry in its initial stage is mingled with Peter's ministry. But although these two ministries are mingled, Peter's ministry is still primary in these chapters.

As we shall see, Saul's ministry comes in gradually. Peter went to Joppa, which became a stepping stone to the Gentiles in Caesarea. This was a preparation for the gaining of the Gentiles so that Saul, who was to become an apostle to the Gentiles, may begin his ministry to the Gentiles. In chapters six through eleven Peter, although his ministry is still primary, is beginning to move out of the scene. Also in these chapters Saul is coming into the scene. We first hear of Saul at the end of chapter seven where we are told that the witnesses to Stephen's stoning "laid down their garments at the feet of a young man called Saul" (7:58). This indicates that when Paul came into the scene, he came in as a persecutor. Then in chapter

nine this persecutor was converted into a prevailing preacher. Toward the end of Acts 9, Saul begins to step into his ministry. As we shall see, his ministry to the Gentile world began in a definite and prevailing way in chapter thirteen. By that time Peter is out of the scene, and Paul is fully in the scene.

THE LORD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN HIS PROPAGATION

In these chapters we see the Lord's sovereignty in propagating Himself by spreading into His chosen people. The Lord spent three and a half years plus an additional period of time to prepare Peter. Then the Lord spent another period of time to prepare Saul. In our reading of Acts, we need to realize that between the end of chapter nine and the beginning of chapter thirteen there is an interval. During that interval Saul received a great deal from the Lord. However, what took place is not recorded in the Scriptures. We only know that for a time Paul was in Arabia (Gal. 1:17). We have no way to find out what he did there. Nevertheless, we believe that during this interval Paul received a great deal more from the Lord. Therefore, when he came forth to preach in chapter thirteen, his preaching was much more inclusive than that in chapter nine. Paul's preaching in Acts 9 was simple and brief. According to this chapter, he emphasized Jesus as the Son of God and as the Christ; that is, he emphasized Christ's Person and His work. But in chapters thirteen through twenty-eight his preaching was much more inclusive.

As we study Acts, we see that the Lord had His sovereign way to prepare a chosen vessel such as Saul of Tarsus. The Lord turned this one from a leading persecutor to one who became a great blessing to the believers.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE TWENTY-NINE

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(21)

Scripture Reading: Acts 10:1-33

THE SUCCESS OF PETER'S MINISTRY

By the end of chapter nine the Lord had done many things to prepare the way for Peter to open the door for the Gentiles to come into the kingdom of God. Acts 9:31 points to the success of Peter's ministry: "The church throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplied." Here we see that churches had been strongly established in the three provinces of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. This indicated that Peter's ministry in the propagation of the resurrected Christ was very successful in the Jewish land. This land included not only Judea but also Galilee and Samaria, a region in between Judea and Galilee. Through Peter's ministry the territory called the holy land was filled with churches.

According to 9:32-43, Peter was moved by the Lord toward Caesarea, which was a strong center of the Roman government. In Caesarea lived a man named Cornelius. Here we see the Lord's preparation for the opening of the door for the Gentiles to come into the church life.

In Matthew 16:19 the Lord Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom. On the day of Pentecost Peter used the first of these keys to open the door for the Jewish people to come into the kingdom of God. As we shall see, in Acts 10 Peter used the second key to open the door of the kingdom of God to the Gentiles.

A FURTHER STEP IN THE LORD'S EVANGELICAL WORK

Acts 10:1 and 2 say, "Now there was a certain man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what is called the Italian cohort, devout and fearing God with all his household, giving many alms to the people, and beseeching God continually." The word "cohort" signifies one of the ten divisions of an ancient Roman legion. It was composed of six hundred men. Cornelius, the Roman centurion, like the Ethiopian eunuch, was seeking God, as mentioned in 17:27.

In 10:1 we see that the Lord now took a further step in His evangelical work. By this He reached another total Gentile, a man of Italy of the Roman Empire in Europe. Thus the door of the gospel was opened to all the Gentiles. It was a difficult thing for the Jewish apostles and disciples with their Jewish background and habit to approach the Gentiles (v. 28). Hence, it was an extraordinary move, needing an angel of God to take part in it (v. 3), just as an angel did in the case of Philip approaching the Ethiopian from Africa in 8:26. And in both cases the Spirit spoke to Philip and Peter particularly (8:29; 10:19).

The Lord is sovereign over the entire situation of the world. What happened in Acts 10 was surely according to the Lord's sovereignty. In Caesarea, an important city for the Roman government, there was a certain centurion named Cornelius. Cornelius was not only a good man and a moral man, but was also a devout man, one seeking after God. From the beginning of mankind, there have always been devout men who sought God. Cornelius was in this category. He and all those of his household feared God and were devout. Acts 10:7 even speaks of a devout soldier. This indicates that in Cornelius' household there was a devout atmosphere. In Acts 10 we see the kind of person used by God to open the way for the kingdom of God to the Gentile world.

A VISION OF AN ANGEL

Acts 10:3 and 4 say, "He saw clearly in a vision about

the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in to him and saying to him, Cornelius! And looking intently at him and becoming terrified, he said, What is it, Lord? And he said to him, Your prayers and your alms have ascended for a memorial before God." Cornelius was one of fallen mankind, sinful and condemned before God as all others yet God accepted his prayers and his alms, whereas Cain's He rejected (Gen. 4:3, 5). This must have been due to the fact that God, based upon Christ's eternal redemption and in view of His believing in Christ in the ensuing days, forgave him (v. 43) according to His foreknowledge.

According to 10:3, an angel of God appeared to Cornelius and spoke to him. An angel was also used by God in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch. In that case "an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, Rise up and go south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza" (8:26). The angels in these two cases indicate that these cases are extraordinary. The preaching of the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch was the bringing of the gospel to a Gentile. Likewise, the preaching of the gospel to the house of Cornelius was the preaching of the gospel to a Gentile family. Since this was an extraordinary case, an angel was involved. However, neither in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch nor in the case of Cornelius and his household was the angel commissioned to preach the gospel. The reason for this is that only human beings who are believers in the Lord Jesus have the privilege of bringing the good news to others.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

After the vision of Cornelius (10:1-8), we have the vision of Peter (10:9-16). Acts 10:9 says, "And on the next day as they were journeying and drawing near to the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray about the sixth hour." Cornelius received a vision in prayer (v. 30), and Peter also received a vision (vv. 17, 19) in prayer, through which God's plan and move were carried out. Man's prayer is needed as a means of cooperation with God's move.

In chapter ten of Acts there is a strong emphasis on

the importance of prayer. First we have Cornelius' prayer and then Peter's prayer. The prayers of these two men became the means for the Lord to come in to open the door for the Gentiles. While Cornelius, a devout man, was praying, a vision came to him. Likewise, it was while Peter was praying that the vision recorded in this chapter came to him. From this we see that we all need to learn to have a prayer life, for a prayer life always prepares the way for the Lord's move and opens the gate for Him to spread. As those who are here for the Lord's recovery, we must learn that the Lord can use only those who have a prayer life, a life of contacting Him in prayer.

We are not told for what Cornelius and Peter were praying. The record does indicate, however, that they set aside certain times for prayer, that they prayed according to a schedule. Acts 10:3 says that Cornelius was praying at the ninth hour, at three o'clock in the afternoon, and 10:9 says that Peter was praying at the sixth hour, at twelve o'clock noon. From this we see that they had a prayer life and even prayed at scheduled times. If we in the Lord's recovery have such a prayer life according to set times, we shall be used by Him in opening the way for the spread of His recovery.

PETER'S VISION OF A GREAT SHEET

According to 10:10 Peter "became very hungry and desired to eat; and while they were preparing, a trance came upon him." Peter's hunger here signifies the seeking after the things of God (Matt. 5:6). God fills this hunger (Luke 1:53). The Greek word rendered "eat" is usually rendered "taste."

In an Ecstasy

The Greek word translated "trance" is ekstasis, which means being put out of its place; hence, referring to a state in which a man passes out of himself and from which he comes to himself (12:11), as in a dream, but without sleep. It differs from a vision, as in verses 3, 17, and 19, in which definite objects are visible to human eyes. In this ecstasy--trance--Peter saw a vision (11:5).

The Spreading of the Gospel

In this trance, this ecstasy, Peter "beheld heaven opened, and a certain vessel like a great sheet descending, being let down by four corners onto the earth, in which were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and birds of the heaven" (vv. 11-12). The opening of the heavens in verse 11 indicates that the Lord's evangelical move on earth is under His administration on the throne in heaven (see Heb. 8:1; Acts 7:56). All the apostles and evangelists were and still are carrying out the heavenly commission on earth for the spreading of the gospel of the kingdom of God.

Men of All Kinds

Verse 11 says that a vessel like a great sheet descended from the heavens. This vessel symbolizes the gospel spreading to the four corners of the inhabited earth to collect all kinds of unclean (sinful) people (Luke 13:29). The four-footed animals, reptiles, and birds mentioned in verse 12 symbolize men of all kinds.

Acts 10:13 says, "And a voice came to him, Rise up, Peter, slay and eat!" To eat, in this sign, is to associate with people (v. 28).

In verse 14 Peter answered, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything common and unclean." Peter's not eating things common and unclean is according to the teaching in Leviticus 11. Circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and a particular diet are the three strongest ordinances according to the law of Moses that caused the Jews to be distinct and separate from the Gentiles, who are regarded by them as unclean. All these scriptural ordinances of the Old Testament dispensation became an obstacle to the spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles according to God's New Testament dispensation (15:1; Col. 2:16).

Acts 10:15 continues, "And a voice came to him again a second time, What God has cleansed, do not consider common!" This refers to the people whom God has cleansed through the redeeming blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5).

A DISPENSATIONAL TRANSFER

In chapter ten of Acts we see an important matter related to God's economy--the need for a dispensational transfer. In the Old Testament, God's economy was in a dispensation of figures, types, and prophecies. There was no accomplishment at all of God's economy in the Old Testament. Eventually the Triune God came in to accomplish everything required by God's righteousness, holiness, and glory to carry out His economy. It was not only the Son who came but the Son with the Father and through the Spirit. The carrying out of God's economy is the dispensing of Himself into His chosen people so that He may be mingled thoroughly with humanity to build up an eternal habitation for Him and His chosen people in order that He may have a full expression of Himself in eternity.

Since God in His Trinity came to accomplish everything necessary that He might carry out His economy, there was a dispensational transfer. On the one hand, God could not avoid using the Jewish people for this transfer. On the other hand, Judaism was the foremost obstacle to this transfer. We can see in the four Gospels that there was a struggle, a confrontation, between Judaism and the Lord Jesus. The Lord came to initiate the transfer, that is, to initiate the change. But Judaism tried to frustrate this change. This struggle that began in the Gospels continued in Acts.

Even the Lord's chosen ones such as Peter, John, and James were not clear concerning the need for an absolute and thorough transfer. Peter's response to the vision of the great sheet descending from the heavens indicates this. Peter was very good in keeping this time of prayer. But when the Lord wanted him to go to the Gentiles and associate with them, this became a problem to Peter.

Due to his Judaic background, Peter did not want to associate with Gentiles. For a Jew to associate with Gentiles was like eating unclean things. To eat something is to take that thing into us and make it one with us. Peter's refusing to eat the unclean things contained in the

great vessel that descended from the heavens is a portrait of the Jews' unwillingness to take in the Gentiles and to be one with them. Any Jew who would go to the Gentiles and become one with them would be like a person who eats unclean things.

We have pointed out that the three main ordinances that caused the Jews to be distinct and separate from the Gentiles are circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and a particular diet. Concerning these ordinances conservative Jews are very strict. According to Ephesians 2:15, these ordinances of the law have been abolished by the Lord's death on the cross. He has abolished circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and the particular diet. But although the Lord Jesus abolished these ordinances, Peter still held to them.

PETER TESTED BY THE LORD

In Acts 10 the Lord Jesus tested Peter. As Peter was praying, a trance came upon him. This means that Peter was in an ecstasy, that he was outside of himself. While he was in this ecstasy, this trance, a vision came to him. He saw a vessel like a great sheet descending, and in this vessel there were all the four-footed animals, reptiles of the earth, and birds of the heaven. Peter must have been greatly surprised at this vision. Then a voice said to him, "Rise up, Peter, slay and eat!" (v. 13). Peter responded by saying, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything common and unclean" (v. 14). Here Peter seemed to be saying, "Lord, I cannot eat these things. I have never eaten anything that is common. Whatever I eat, Lord, must be holy. I can only eat things that are sanctified."

Peter's answer indicates that it was very difficult for the Lord to work out His transfer with him. Because of this difficulty, it was necessary for the vision to take place three times: "And this occurred three times; and immediately the vessel was taken up into heaven" (v. 16). Like Peter, we also may have difficulty making the transfer today, for our thinking may still be under the influence of religious tradition.

THE SPIRIT SPEAKING TO PETER AND PETER GOING TO CAESAREA

In 10:17-33 we have the account of Peter's visit to the house of Cornelius in Caesarea. Verses 19 and 20 say, "And while Peter was pondering concerning the vision, the Spirit said to him, Behold, three men are seeking you. But rise up and go down and go with them, doubting nothing, because I have sent them." This indicates that Cornelius' sending of the three men (vv. 7-8) was the Spirit's move and act through him even before his conversion. In 8:29 the Spirit spoke to Philip, and here in 10:19 the Spirit spoke to Peter. In the cases both of the Ethiopian eunuch and of Cornelius and his household, first an angel spoke and then the Spirit spoke.

Peter received those sent by Cornelius and lodged them. "And on the next day he rose up and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him" (v. 23). Peter, in this strategic case, did not act individualistically, but with some of the brothers in the principle of the Body of Christ so that they might witness what God would do with the Gentiles through the preaching of the gospel by his breaking the Jewish tradition and habit (11:12).

Acts 10:24 says, "On the next day he entered into Caesarea; and Cornelius was awaiting them, having called together his relatives and intimate friends." Here we see that Cornelius was prepared to receive Peter and hear what he had to say. For this purpose Cornelius had called together his relatives and intimate friends. Here we have a good pattern for our gospel preaching today. According to this pattern, we should open our homes and invite our relatives and intimate friends to hear the gospel.

In 10:28 Peter said to those who were gathered together in the house of Cornelius, "You understand how unlawful it is for a man, a Jew, to associate with or to approach one of another race; and yet God has shown me not to call any man common or unclean." Peter's word here indicates that eventually he understood the significance of the vision he saw in the trance (vv. 11, 17, 19), that the

animals in the great sheet signified men. In the next message we shall consider the content of Peter's message to those in the house of Cornelius.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE THIRTY

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(22)

Scripture Reading: Acts 10:34-48

In this message we shall cover three matters: Peter's message to those gathered together in the house of Cornelius (vv. 34-43); the falling of the Holy Spirit on the house of Cornelius--the Gentile believers' baptism in the Holy Spirit (vv. 44-46); and the water baptism of the house of Cornelius (vv. 47-48).

PETER'S MESSAGE

The Lord of All

Acts 10:34-36 says, "And opening his mouth, Peter said, I surely perceive that God is not a respecter of persons, but in every nation he who fears Him and works righteousness is acceptable to Him. The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, bringing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ (this One is Lord of all)." First, Peter says that God is not a respecter of persons. Then he goes on to say that in every nation those who fear God and work righteousness are acceptable to Him. Those who fear God and work righteousness in every nation are still a part of fallen mankind. God accepts them in view of the redemption of Christ. Without Christ, no fallen man is justified by his works (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16).

In Acts 10:36 Peter declares that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. Some readers of Acts may understand the word "all" in this verse to mean both all things and all persons. However, strictly speaking the word "all" here denotes only persons, not things. This "all" refers to men (1 Tim.

2:4), not only Jews but also Gentiles. Peter's word here indicates that he now realizes that God has made Christ the Lord of both the Jews and the Gentiles. With Him there is no respect of persons.

The Living and Ministry of the Lord Jesus

In his message Peter also spoke concerning the living and ministry of the Lord Jesus when He was on earth. He said to those in the house of Cornelius that they knew the word which God "sent to the sons of Israel, bringing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ... the word which came throughout the whole of Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John proclaimed: Jesus, the One from Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and power, who went about doing good and healing all those who were oppressed by the Devil, for God was with Him" (vv. 36-38). The Greek word rendered "word" in verse 37 is *rhema*. In these verses Peter points out that the Lord Jesus performed miracles to rescue and set free those who were under the oppression of the Devil.

Christ's Resurrection

In verses 39 through 41 Peter speaks concerning Christ's resurrection: "And we are witnesses of all things which He did, both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom also they did away with, hanging Him on a tree. This One God raised on the third day and made Him manifest, not to all the people, but to witnesses appointed beforehand by God, to us, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from among the dead." The Greek word rendered "manifest" in verse 40 literally means "to become visible." In verse 40 Peter says that God raised this One, but in verse 41 he says that the Lord rose from among the dead. Regarding the Lord as a man, the New Testament tells us that God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 8:11). But considering Him as God, the New Testament tells us that He Himself rose from the dead (Rom. 14:9).

The Judge of the Living and the Dead

In Acts 10:42 Peter goes on to say, "And He charged us to proclaim to the people and solemnly testify that this is the One who was designated by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead." Here we see that Christ has been designated the Judge of all mankind. He will judge both the living and the dead. The resurrected Christ at His coming back will be the Judge of the living before the millennium on His throne of glory (Matt. 25:31-46). This is related to His second coming (2 Tim. 4:1). He will also be the Judge of the dead after the millennium on the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15).

The Forgiveness of Sins

In 10:43 Peter continues, "To this One all the prophets testify that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." This proves that even though Cornelius feared God and worked righteousness and his prayers and alms had been accepted by God, he still needed God's forgiveness of his sins through believing in Christ the Redeemer. Cornelius was a devout man, but he still needed the forgiveness of sins. Although he was devout, he could not say that he had not sinned. Hence, he was devout yet still sinful. Therefore, he needed redemption and forgiveness.

THE FALLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ON THE HOUSE OF CORNELIUS-- THE GENTILE BELIEVERS' BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 10:44 says, "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those hearing the word." In this verse hearing includes believing in the Lord (v. 43; John 5:24; Rom. 10:14; Eph. 1:13).

The All-inclusive Spirit

While Peter was speaking the Spirit fell upon those in the house of Cornelius. No doubt, the Spirit here is the all-inclusive Spirit. After the all-inclusive Spirit fell upon the

house of Cornelius, they began to speak in tongues and magnify God (v. 46). Here to magnify God is to praise Him. When Peter and those with him saw what happened, they knew that those in the house of Cornelius should not be prohibited from being baptized in water (v. 47).

The Holy Spirit fell upon those who heard the word in the house of Cornelius outwardly and economically. In the case of the house of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit's entering into the believers essentially for life and falling upon them economically for power took place simultaneously when they believed in the Lord. However, only His falling upon them economically is noted in verse 44, because it was outward and could be realized by others by their speaking in tongues and praising God, whereas His entering into them took place silently and invisibly. They received both aspects of the Holy Spirit directly from Christ the Head of the Body, without any mediatorial channel, before they were baptized in water by other members of the Body of Christ. This indicates emphatically that the spreading of the gospel of the kingdom of God to the Gentiles was of the Lord, and that the Head of the Body baptized the Gentile believers into His Body directly, without the laying on of hands of any member of His Body, as in the cases of the Samaritan believers and Saul of Tarsus (8:17; 9:17).

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Acts 10:45 says, "And the believers of the circumcision, as many as accompanied Peter, were amazed, because on the Gentiles also the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out." Here the gift of the Holy Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit Himself, not something of the Holy Spirit given to the believers as a gift. They did not receive any gift distributed by the Spirit, as mentioned in Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:4; and 1 Peter 4:10. Rather, they received the gift which is the Holy Spirit Himself, given by God to the believers in Christ as the unique gift that produces all the gifts mentioned in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and 1 Peter 4.

Acts 10:45 speaks of the outpouring of the gift of the

Holy Spirit. This gift was poured out by God from the all-inclusive, resurrected, and ascended Christ. The pouring out of the Spirit after Christ's ascension was the descending of the resurrected and ascended Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit to carry out His heavenly ministry on the earth to build up His church (Matt. 16:18) as His Body (Eph. 1:23) for God's New Testament economy.

Speaking in Tongues and Magnifying God

Acts 10:46 continues, "For they heard them speaking in tongues and magnifying God." Speaking in tongues was not the unique issue of receiving the Holy Spirit economically, because the magnifying, that is, the praising of God, was also one of its issues in this case, as prophesying was also one of its issues in the case of the twelve believers in Ephesus (19:6). Hence, speaking in tongues is not the only evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit economically; neither is it the necessary evidence, because there is at least one case of the receiving of the Holy Spirit economically, the case of the Samaritan believers (8:15-17), which does not mention speaking in tongues. In the case of Saul of Tarsus (9:17) concerning this matter, there is also no mention of speaking in tongues, although he told us later in 1 Corinthians 14:18 that he spoke in tongues.

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit

The Gentile believers in the house of Cornelius received the Holy Spirit economically, as the early apostles and the Jewish believers did on the day of Pentecost (2:4), directly from the ascended Head. Only these two instances are considered in the New Testament as the baptism in the Holy Spirit (1:5; 11:15-16). By these two steps the Head of the Body baptized all His believers once for all, both Jewish and Gentile, into His one Body (1 Cor. 12:13). Hence, the baptism in the Spirit was an accomplished fact carried out by Christ in His ascension both on the day of Pentecost and in the house of Cornelius. All the other cases--the Samaritan believers in chapter eight, Saul of Tarsus in chapter nine, and the twelve Ephesian believers in chapter

nineteen--are not considered the baptism in the Holy Spirit according to the revelation of the New Testament. These cases were only the believers' experiences of the once-for-all accomplished baptism in the Holy Spirit.

In Acts, concerning the believers' receiving the Holy Spirit economically, that is, the Holy Spirit's falling upon them, only five cases are referred to. Two of them are for the accomplishment of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. These are the instances which took place on the day of Pentecost and in the house of Cornelius. The other three, the cases of the Samaritan believers, Saul of Tarsus, and the twelve believers in Ephesus, are all considered extraordinary, needing some members of the Body of Christ to identify them with the Body by the laying on of hands. Besides these five cases, in many cases of conversion, such as the three thousand (2:41), the five thousand (4:4), the Ethiopian eunuch (8:36, 38-39a), the many who believed in Antioch (11:20-21, 24), the many cases in chapters thirteen and fourteen under Paul's preaching ministry, Lydia in Philippi (16:14-15), the jailer in Philippi (16:33), the believers in Thessalonica (17:4), the believers in Berea (17:10-12), the believers in Athens (17:34), the ruler of the synagogue and many other believers in Corinth (18:8), and the believers in Ephesus (19:18-19), there is no mention of the believers' receiving the Holy Spirit economically--the Holy Spirit's falling upon the believers--because in all these cases the believers were brought into the Body of Christ through their believing in a normal way, and they had no particular reason for some member of the Body of Christ to bring them into the identification with the Body by the laying on of hands. According to the principle of God's New Testament economy, they all should have received the Holy Spirit essentially for life and economically for power in a normal way through their believing into Christ.

THE WATER BAPTISM OF THE HOUSE OF CORNELIUS

In verse 47 Peter answered, "Can anyone forbid water

that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit even as we?"

Then in the next verse Peter charged those in the house of Cornelius "to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." This indicates that we should pay attention to water baptism, signifying the believers' identification with Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12), as well as to Spirit baptism. Spirit baptism signifies the reality of the believers' union with Christ in life essentially and in power economically, whereas water baptism is the believers' affirmation of the Spirit's reality. Both are needed, and neither can replace the other. All believers in Christ should properly have both.

Cornelius and his household were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. To be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ is to be baptized in the sphere of the name of Jesus Christ, within which is the reality of baptism.

The "name" in verse 48 denotes the person. To be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ is to be baptized into the Person of Christ (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27) to have an organic union with Him through faith.

THE HEAD BAPTIZING THE BODY IN THE HOLY SPIRIT ONCE FOR ALL

In this message we have covered a number of matters, but the main thing we need to see is the Head of the Body completing the baptism of His Body into the all-inclusive Spirit, who is actually He Himself. We have pointed out that on the day of Pentecost, Christ, the Head of the Body, baptized the Jewish believers into the Spirit. That was the first step, the first instance of Christ baptizing the Body into the Spirit. Then in the house of Cornelius He, as the Head of the Body, baptized all the Gentile believers into the Spirit. This was the second step, the second instance. By these two steps, these two instances, Christ, the Head of the Body, baptized His entire Body into the Spirit.

For more than fifty years we have been studying this matter of the baptism into the Holy Spirit. In 1933 Brother Nee and I had a thorough talk regarding this. We

came to see that of the five cases of the Holy Spirit falling upon the saints in the book of Acts, only two are called the baptism of the Spirit. As we have seen, the first is the case of the Jewish believers on the day of Pentecost, and the second is the case of the Gentile believers in the house of Cornelius. These two cases were the two instances of the accomplishment of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The three other cases of the Holy Spirit coming upon the believers--the case of the Samaritan believers, the case of Saul of Tarsus, and the case of the believers in Ephesus--are not called the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, in the great many cases of conversion recorded in Acts, there is no mention of the Holy Spirit falling upon the believers economically. May we all see that in Acts only two cases are called the baptism in the Holy Spirit and that through these two cases Christ as the Head of the Body accomplished the baptism of His Body in the Holy Spirit once for all.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE THIRTY-ONE

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(23)

Scripture Reading: Acts 1:5, 8; 2:1-4; 10:44-48; 11:15-16

In this message we shall consider a matter that will help us to understand God's economy in the record of the New Testament. We shall see that in God's economy certain things, in particular the baptism in the Holy Spirit, have been accomplished once for all.

SIX ETERNAL MATTERS

For the carrying out of the steps required by God's righteousness, holiness, and glory, the Triune God has passed through incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. In addition to these four matters, we have the breathing of the Holy Spirit into the disciples (John 20:22) and the pouring out of the Spirit upon them.

The Lamb Slain from the Foundation of the World

The incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the breathing of the Spirit into the disciples, the ascension, and the outpouring of the Spirit upon the disciples are all eternal. They are not temporal matters; that is, they are not limited by the element of time. Consider the crucifixion, for instance. According to our understanding, Christ was crucified nineteen hundred years ago. But Revelation 13:8 speaks of "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." This indicates that in the sight of God Christ was slain from the foundation of the world,

from the time the created world came into being. Christ was crucified from the beginning of the existence of the material world because His redemption must cover the whole of the created universe. Concerning this, Hebrews 9:12 indicates that Christ has accomplished an eternal redemption. His redemption is not temporal; it is eternal.

Suppose we use a circle to signify eternity, and then at a certain place on the circle we place a cross signifying the crucifixion of Christ. Where in relation to the cross on the circle would you put Old Testament saints such as Abraham and Moses, and where would you put all the believers in Christ throughout the centuries? It would be difficult to say, according to such a diagram, who is before the cross and who is after. The point we are making here is that the crucifixion is eternal and covers the entire span of need that began from the existence of the universe, from the foundation of the world. Ever since created things came into being there has been the need of the death of Christ. Therefore, in the sight of God, Christ's death began from the foundation of the world. This is the reason Revelation 13:8 says that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world.

Concerning the Lamb being slain from the foundation of the world, we need to be very careful and accurate in our reading of the Scriptures. Although Christ was slain from the foundation of the world, He was foreknown by God before the foundation of the world. Regarding this, 1 Peter 1:20 says that Christ "was foreknown before the foundation of the world." Christ was foreordained, prepared, by God to be the redeeming Lamb for His elect according to His foreknowledge before the foundation of the world. This means that Christ was foreknown and prepared in eternity. But His death was accomplished from the foundation of the world; that is, it was accomplished in time. Although it was accomplished in time, Christ's redemption is eternal. Because what Christ accomplished through His death is eternal, it is called in Hebrews 9:12 an eternal redemption.

Before the crucifixion there was the incarnation, and

after the crucifixion there were the resurrection, the breathing of the Spirit into the disciples, the ascension, and the outpouring of the Spirit. All these things were accomplished in time, but without the element of time. Therefore, these things are eternal. (See the two inserted diagrams.)

Because the crucifixion of Christ is eternal, Paul could say, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20). With Paul, we can declare that we also have been crucified with Christ. This means that we were crucified with Christ long before we were born. When were we crucified with Christ? We were crucified with Him from the foundation of the world. Therefore, we were crucified before we were born.

Since Christ was crucified from the foundation of the world, there is no need for a repentant sinner to ask the Lord Jesus to die for him. If this were necessary, then the Lord would need to die again and again. However, He was crucified once for all; He died once for all.

The Breathing of the Holy Spirit and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

The principle is the same with Christ's incarnation, resurrection, ascension, breathing of the Spirit into His disciples, and the pouring out of the Spirit upon His disciples. It is not the case that whenever someone believes in the Lord Jesus, it is necessary for Him to breathe the Spirit into that one, or pour out the Spirit upon him. On the contrary, the breathing of the Spirit into the believers has been accomplished once for all in John 20. In the same principle, Christ, the Head of the Body, has baptized all His believers, every member of the Body, into the Spirit once for all in two steps. The first step was on the day of Pentecost, when the Jewish believers were baptized in the Holy Spirit. The second step was in the house of Cornelius, when the Gentile believers were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Suppose we are about to baptize a new convert. As we baptize him, we need to realize that the breathing of the essential Spirit and the pouring out of the economical

Spirit have taken place once for all. Therefore, we should not say to a new convert, "Now that you believe in the Lord Jesus, you have received the essential Spirit. After a while, the economical Spirit will fall upon you." We should not understand the essential Spirit and the economical Spirit in this way.

Accomplishment and Application

Let us use the making and eating of a sandwich to illustrate how the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the breathing of the essential Spirit, the ascension, and the pouring out of the economical Spirit apply to us today. In preparing a sandwich we may take two slices of bread. We then may apply mayonnaise to the bread and put on turkey, cheese, tomato, and lettuce. In the preparation of such a sandwich we go step by step. But in the eating of the sandwich, we do not take first the bread, then the turkey, and then the other elements of the sandwich. Instead, we take all the ingredients of the sandwich at once. In like manner, the six matters of Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, breathing of the Spirit, ascension, and outpouring of the Spirit are applied to us at the same time. They were accomplished step by step, but they are applied to us simultaneously. Using the illustration of the sandwich, we may say that the incarnation is the bread, that the crucifixion is the turkey, and the resurrection, the breathing of the Spirit, the ascension, and the pouring out of the Spirit are yet other ingredients. When we come to eat this all-inclusive "sandwich," we do not first "eat" the "bread" of the incarnation and then the "turkey" of the crucifixion. Rather, we take the whole sandwich at one time. We do not consider which item comes first and which comes last.

We have given many messages in the effort to point out what the Triune God has accomplished. The Triune God in the Son became flesh. That was the incarnation. The incarnation has been accomplished once for all, and there is no need for it to be repeated. Likewise, Christ was crucified and died once for all. Furthermore, He was

resurrected, He breathed Himself as the life-giving Spirit into His disciples, He ascended, and He poured out Himself as the all-inclusive Spirit once for all. Christ has accomplished all these things, and He has accomplished them once for all. Now all these matters are included in the Lord's name. Therefore, when we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, we receive all these things.

Seeing the Divine Revelation in the New Testament

There is no need for us to analyze what we receive through calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. We should not ask ourselves, "Have I received the essential Spirit? Has the economical Spirit fallen upon me? Perhaps I have the essential Spirit within me, but I wonder if I have the economical Spirit. Maybe the economical Spirit will leave me, although the essential Spirit will not leave. If the economical Spirit leaves, when will He come back?" It is not a healthy practice to analyze these matters in this way.

Instead of engaging in unnecessary analysis, we need to see the divine revelation in the New Testament. The Bible presents the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the breathing of the essential Spirit, the ascension, and the pouring out of the economical Spirit as accomplished facts. In the Old Testament there were types, figures, and shadows, but there were not the accomplished facts. But according to the New Testament, within a period of less than thirty-four years, six eternal matters were accomplished. As we have strongly emphasized, these six eternal and accomplished things are the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the breathing of the life-giving Spirit, the ascension, and the outpouring of the all-inclusive Spirit. Because all these have been accomplished, whenever a sinner repents, believes in the Lord Jesus, and is baptized in water, which represents the Triune God, Christ, and the death of Christ, he receives everything. This means that he participates in Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, breathing of the Holy Spirit, ascension, and outpouring of the Spirit. If a new believer realizes this, he will be full of praise to the Lord.

Believers may analyze their experience of the Holy Spirit because of the influence of their religious background or of the peculiar teachings common among certain Christians today. We should not analyze our experience in this way, and we should not follow the inaccurate teachings concerning the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Instead of analyzing our experience, we should praise the Lord for all we have received.

Suppose someone asks you if you have received the Holy Spirit. This question actually applies to an extraordinary case, like the case of the twelve believers in chapter nineteen of Acts. The two other extraordinary cases in Acts are those of the Samaritan believers and Saul of Tarsus. Today, however, there are no extraordinary cases. Hence, if you are asked whether you have received the Holy Spirit, you should boldly reply, "Yes, I definitely have received the Holy Spirit!" In giving such an answer we need to realize that actually we received the Holy Spirit more than nineteen hundred years ago and that now day by day we are enjoying Him by faith.

A Picture of Accomplished Facts

The New Testament presents a picture of accomplished facts. These facts are now bequests in the will, the testament. In this will, this testament, Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, breathing of the Spirit into us, ascension, and pouring out of the Spirit upon us have all been bequeathed to us. Of course, Christ Himself and the Triune God are included in the bequests in this will. Today we inherit these bequests. Therefore, we should simply take them by faith and enjoy them. Whenever we sense the need for the essential Spirit or the economical Spirit, we should say, "Amen! In the testament I have the essential Spirit and the economical Spirit as well. All that I need has been bequeathed to me."

LUKE'S RECORD CONCERNING THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Luke's record in the book of Acts concerning the

baptism in the Holy Spirit is clear and complete. This record, of course, is found in various places in the twenty-eight chapters of Acts. Because of this, we need to study this book carefully with regard to the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Although in Acts there are many cases of conversions, only two cases are called the baptism in the Holy Spirit. As we have seen, the first case is that of the Jewish believers on the day of Pentecost; the second is that of the house of Cornelius. These two cases were used by the Head in the heavens to carry out the baptism of His Body in the Holy Spirit.

Accomplished in Two Sections

Concerning the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus said in 1:5, "John indeed baptized in water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now." This was accomplished in two sections. First all the Jewish believers were baptized in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Then all the Gentile believers were baptized in the house of Cornelius (10:44-47; 11:15-17). In these two sections all genuine believers in Christ have been baptized in the Holy Spirit into one Body once for all universally (1 Cor. 12:13). Therefore, what happened on the day of Pentecost and in the house of Cornelius was the fulfillment of Acts 1:5.

Peter's word in Acts 11 proves that what happened in the house of Cornelius was the second step in Christ's baptizing His Body in the Holy Spirit once for all. Peter said, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as also on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, John indeed baptized in water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit" (vv. 15-16). Therefore, the record in Acts strongly indicates that only these two cases are considered the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In these two instances the Head Himself did something directly on His Body. There was no third party, no intermediary, between the Head and the Body.

Three Extraordinary Cases The Samaritan Believers

As we read through the book of Acts, we see that Luke describes three extraordinary cases concerning the receiving of the Holy Spirit economically. The first case concerns the Samaritan believers. In the eyes of the Jewish believers, the Samaritan believers were strange. Due to their background, the Jewish believers would have had difficulty recognizing the Samaritan believers. Therefore, in this extraordinary case the Head did something to indicate and confirm that He had accepted the Samaritan believers as members of His Body. Hence, instead of doing something directly with respect to the economical Spirit, Christ the Head withheld the economical Spirit until two apostles, Peter and John, came from Jerusalem to Samaria to lay their hands on the Samaritan believers so that they might receive the Holy Spirit (8:14-17). Only then did the economical Spirit fall upon them, and that was strong evidence that the Samaritan believers had been accepted as members of the Body. In this extraordinary case there was the need for the laying on of hands by a member of the Body of Christ.

Saul of Tarsus

The second extraordinary case was the case of Saul of Tarsus, who had been a leading persecutor of the followers of Jesus. We have already considered this case in some detail. Here we would point out again that because Saul was such a persecutor and was saved directly by the Lord not through the preaching of any believer, no one would believe that he had become a member of the Body of Christ. Thus, in his case there was the need of another member of the Body to lay his hands upon him so that the economical Spirit may come upon him. The extraordinary case of Saul required the laying on of hands by a member representing the Body.

The Believers in Ephesus

The last of the three extraordinary cases recorded in

Acts is that of the believers in Ephesus (19:1-7). Regarding those believers, there was the need to make up the deficiency in the ministry of Apollos. His ministry lacked a complete revelation of God's New Testament economy. Because those believers had heard only the inadequate preaching of Apollos and knew only the baptism of John, they also needed the laying on of hands of a member of the Body in order to receive the economical Spirit. These three extraordinary cases recorded in the book of Acts reveal a particular need for the laying on of hands by a member of the Body.

Normal Cases of Receiving the Holy Spirit

In addition to the five cases of the believers on the day of Pentecost, the Samaritans, Saul of Tarsus, the house of Cornelius, and the believers in Ephesus, there are many other cases of conversions found throughout the book of Acts. In none of those cases is there any mention of the laying on of hands in order to receive the economical Spirit. The reason for this is that all those cases are normal. However, certain of today's Pentecostal teachings try to make every case an extraordinary case. But unlike the Samaritans, Saul of Tarsus, and the believers in Ephesus, we are not extraordinary cases that require the laying on of hands. Rather, in a normal way and by faith we participate in the baptism in the Holy Spirit that has been accomplished by the Head on the Body once for all.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE THIRTY-TWO

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(24)

Scripture Reading: Acts 11:1-18

In this message we come to 11:1-18. First we shall consider certain matters covered in these verses. Then we shall pay particular attention to the need for a dispensational transfer.

RECOGNITION BY THE APOSTLES AND THE BROTHERS IN JUDEA

Those of the Circumcision

Acts 11:1 and 2 say, "Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. And when Peter went up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision disputed with him." Circumcision was an outward ordinance inherited by the Jews from their forefathers, beginning from Abraham (Gen. 17:9-14), which made them distinct and separate from the Gentiles. It became a dead traditional formality, a mere mark on the flesh without any spiritual significance, and it became a great obstacle to the spread of God's gospel according to His New Testament economy (Acts 15:1; Gal. 2:3-4; 6:12-13; Phil. 3:2).

Peter's Explanation

In verse 3 those of the circumcision said to Peter, "You went in to men who are uncircumcised and ate with them!" Beginning with verse 4 Peter explained to them in sequence what had taken place. In verse 12 he says, "The

Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. And these six brothers went with me also, and we entered into the man's house." These six brothers were present as witnesses to Peter's word while he was speaking.

In verses 15 through 17 Peter went on to explain that the Holy Spirit fell on those in the house of Cornelius, and Peter "remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, John indeed baptized in water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit" (v. 16). Then in verse 17 Peter concluded, "If God therefore gave to them the equal gift as also to us, having believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could forbid God?"

Repentance unto Life

Acts 11:18 says, "And when they heard these things, they were silent and glorified God, saying, Then also to the Gentiles God has given repentance unto life." In this verse the Greek word for "life" is *zoe*, referring to the eternal life (1 John 1:2), the life of God (Eph. 4:18), the uncreated, indestructible life (Heb. 7:16), which is Christ Himself (John 14:6; 11:25; Col. 3:4), the very embodiment of the Triune God (Col. 2:9), as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), of which life the Spirit is (Rom. 8:2), received by the believers through their faith in Christ (John 3:15-16) after repentance for their full salvation (Rom. 5:10). The gospel preached by Peter comprises the divine blessings not only of forgiveness (Acts 5:31; 10:43) and salvation (2:21; 4:12), but also of the Spirit (2:38) and life. Forgiveness deals with people's sins, and life, with people's death (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14; 2 Cor. 5:4).

THE NEED FOR A DISPENSATIONAL TRANSFER

A Transfer from the Old Testament Economy to the New Testament Economy

The book of Acts is very dispensational. The word "dispensational" is, of course, the adjective form of the noun "dispensation." The reason the book of Acts is dispensational is that it describes a great transfer that is accomplished during a period of transition. This is the

transfer from the Old Testament economy to the New Testament economy.

"Economy" is an anglicized form of the Greek word *oikonomia*, which means dispensation. Hence, economy and dispensation are synonyms, with dispensation being the English equivalent of the Greek word *oikonomia*.

In the New Testament the word *oikonomia* denotes an arrangement. God has an arrangement, a household government, a family administration. God's household government, or family arrangement, is what we call His economy. The transfer in the book of Acts is from God's Old Testament arrangement to His New Testament arrangement.

A Transfer from Shadow to Reality

God's Old Testament arrangement was altogether a matter of types, figures, shadows, and prophecies. In other words, the Old Testament arrangement of God was not in reality. Rather, it was a shadow waiting for its fulfillment.

When the Triune God became a man in the incarnation, the transfer from shadow to reality began. Everything in God's old dispensation, or arrangement, was a shadow. But in God's New Testament arrangement we have reality. The transfer from the shadow to the reality began with God's incarnation, that is, with the conception of Jesus, and was completed on the day of Pentecost with the outpouring of the economical Spirit.

Problems concerning the Experience of the Transfer

Since this dispensational transfer was fully accomplished with the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, all the shadows should have been over. But those whom God chose and used had been raised in the Old Testament dispensation, and they had been saturated with and even constituted of God's Old Testament arrangement. As a result, it was very difficult for them to forsake those things in an absolute way.

Let us take the case of Peter as an illustration. Peter was chosen by the Lord and used by Him to carry out His

New Testament economy after He Himself had accomplished the transfer. Peter, however, was saturated with and constituted of the things of the old dispensation. For this reason, when Peter saw the vision of the great sheet in which were four-footed animals, reptiles, and birds, and when a voice told him to rise up, slay, and eat, Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything common and unclean" (10:14). Knowing what the situation would be the Lord had sent an angel to Cornelius with a word concerning Peter. Furthermore, "while Peter was pondering concerning the vision, the Spirit said to him, Behold, three men are seeking you. But rise up and go down and go with them, doubting nothing, because I have sent them" (10:19-20). Peter loved the Lord, and eventually he went to the house of Cornelius. But this was a very difficult thing for Peter to do.

According to the record in Galatians 2, Peter later had further problems concerning the dispensational transfer. Paul tells us that before certain ones came from James, Peter "ate with those of the nations; but when they came, he shrank back and separated himself, fearing those of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy" (Gal. 2:12-13a). Here we see that even after the situation recorded in chapters ten and eleven of Acts, Peter still practiced hypocrisy in not daring to eat with Gentile believers openly in the presence of the brothers who had come from James in Jerusalem. From this we see how difficult it was for Peter to fully experience the dispensational transfer.

A Word Related to the Dispensational Transfer

We have pointed out that Acts is a dispensational book. One verse related to the dispensational element in Acts is 1:8, where the Lord tells the disciples, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the remotest part of the earth." Before the Lord spoke these words, the disciples asked Him, "Lord, are You at this time restoring the kingdom to

Israel?" (1:6). The Lord replied, "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father has placed in His own authority" (v. 7). Then the Lord went on to say that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit had come upon them and they would be His witnesses unto the remotest part of the earth. In 1:8 the Lord Jesus told the disciples that He would use them as His witnesses not only among the Jews in Jerusalem and in all Judea but among those in Samaria, and even among all the Gentiles in the remotest part of the earth. Although the disciples heard this word, they did not realize what the Lord was saying. In this simple word the Lord Jesus was indicating that the disciples would need to break through the Old Testament dispensation. From the disciples' experience we see that to hear is one thing, but to realize and experience what we hear is another. Peter, for example, heard the Lord's word in 1:8, but he nevertheless had difficulty with the Lord's fulfillment of this word.

In 1:8 the Lord said that the disciples would be His witnesses in Samaria. This was fulfilled through the preaching of Philip the evangelist. In chapter eight we see that Philip evangelized Samaria and brought a good number of Samaritans into the Body of Christ. After that, the Lord wanted to go further. He had gone from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria. Now He desired to go from Samaria to the Gentile world. At first Peter did not agree to take this step, but eventually he accepted the Lord's word concerning the Gentiles and went with six other brothers to the house of Cornelius.

Peter's Caution

According to 10:23, when Peter went to the house of Cornelius in Caesarea, "some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him." In 11:12 Peter points out that six brothers went with him. We have noted previously that in this case Peter did not act individualistically, but with some of the brothers in the principle of the Body of Christ so that they might witness what God would do with the Gentiles through the preaching of the gospel by the

breaking of the Jewish tradition and habit. However, Peter may not have been that familiar with the principle of the Body. He may have been acting here out of caution and out of the need to protect himself from the criticism of those of the circumcision. There is no record that the Lord told Peter to take these six brothers with him; neither are we told that Cornelius invited them to come along with Peter. These six were neither sent by the Lord nor invited by Cornelius; instead, they were taken by Peter as a protection for him. We may say that Peter kept the principle of the Body. However, if we could ask him about the matter, he might say, "You give me too much credit in saying that I acted according to the principle of the Body. What I did in taking the six brothers with me was for my protection. I was afraid that the Jewish brothers in Jerusalem would condemn me. Therefore, as a precaution, I took six brothers with me when I went to Caesarea."

Not only did Peter bring these six brothers with him from Joppa to Caesarea; he also took them with him to Jerusalem. Peter knew that he would face trouble in Jerusalem and that he would be criticized for what he had done in Caesarea. He realized that he would need witnesses. He was a witness of Jesus Christ, and the six brothers that he brought to Jerusalem were his witnesses.

When Peter went up to Jerusalem, "those of the circumcision disputed with him, saying, You went in to men who are uncircumcised and ate with them!" (11:2-3). The saints in Jerusalem heard about what had happened in Caesarea, about what Peter had done in the house of Cornelius. Those of the circumcision asked Peter concerning this. They seemed to be saying to him, "Peter, what did you do? You took the lead to associate with the uncircumcised and to eat with them! What is this?"

Peter's Presentation

According to verse 4, Peter began to explain in sequence what had taken place in the house of Cornelius. When I read the account in 11:1-18 many years ago, I thought that Peter was quite spiritual in the way he explained the matter to those of the circumcision.

However, later I came to see that Peter may have actually been somewhat cowardly, somewhat afraid of those of the circumcision. Whatever may have been the situation, Peter explained things in a very nice way.

Peter concluded his presentation with these words: "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as also on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, John indeed baptized in water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit. If God therefore gave to them the equal gift as also to us, having believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could forbid God?" (vv. 15-17). Peter's presentation is excellent, and we may learn of him.

An Indication of Surprise and Unwillingness

Acts 11:18 says, "And when they heard these things, they were silent and glorified God, saying, Then also to the Gentiles God has given repentance unto life." In this verse the word "then" is not positive, for it does not indicate willingness. Those of the circumcision were surprised that God had given to the Gentiles repentance unto life. Their surprise and lack of willingness to accept this fact are indicated by "then."

Actually, those of the circumcision should not have been surprised that God had given repentance unto life to the Gentiles. In 1:8 the Lord Jesus had already told the disciples that they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even in the remotest part of the earth including all the Gentiles. That was the Lord's commandment, but the disciples did not realize it, and they did not accept it. After strong testimony was given concerning the Lord's move among the Gentiles, those of the circumcision could only say, "Then also to the Gentiles God has given repentance unto life."

A Turn from the Old Dispensation to the New

We need to be impressed that Acts is a dispensational book. The matter of the change of dispensation is one of

the strong points in Acts. To speak of a dispensational change means that in this book we see the need for a great transfer, the need for a great turn. This transfer, this turn, is from the old dispensation to the new.

Failure in Making the Transfer

In the book of Acts the early believers, including the apostles, were in a period of transition. We have pointed out that not even the apostles had a clear vision concerning God's abandonment of the Judaic things. Peter and the other apostles, therefore, did not pass through this transitional period successfully. Actually, they had a great failure. This led to a mixture of the church with Judaism, which was not condemned by the early church in Jerusalem. That made it necessary for God to use Titus with the Roman army in A.D. 70 to destroy Jerusalem, the temple, and the religion of Judaism. Through Titus the religious mixture in Jerusalem was also terminated. May we all see from the record in Acts the need for a dispensational transfer.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE THIRTY-THREE

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(25)

Scripture Reading: Acts 11:19-30

In this message we shall cover 11:19-30. In this section of Acts we have the spread of the gospel to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch through the scattered disciples (vv. 19-26) and the communication between the church in Antioch and the churches in Judea (vv. 27-30). First we shall consider these verses in a general way. Then we shall pay particular attention to the Lord's further preparation of Saul.

THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL TO PHOENICIA, CYPRUS, AND ANTIOCH THROUGH THE SCATTERED DISCIPLES

The Fulfillment of the Lord's Word

Acts 11:19 says, "Those then who were scattered by the tribulation which took place over Stephen passed through as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone." It was sovereign of God that the scattering of the believers from Jerusalem to other localities through the persecution (8:4) should carry out the spreading of the gospel for the fulfillment of the Lord's word in 1:8.

According to 11:19, those who went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch spoke the word only to Jews. This indicates how strong the Jewish believers were in keeping their traditions. They would not approach the Gentiles

(10:28). This condition continued even after Peter's preaching to Cornelius, an Italian. It surely restricted the Lord's move in spreading His gospel according to God's New Testament economy.

A Further Step of the Lord's Move

Acts 11:20 continues, "But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and spoke also to the Greeks, bringing the good news of the Lord Jesus." These men of Cyprus and Cyrene must have been the Jewish believers in dispersion (see 1 Pet. 1:1). Their speaking to the Greeks was a further step of the Lord's move in spreading His gospel to the Gentiles following what happened in the house of Cornelius in chapter ten and before Paul's ministry to the Gentiles began in chapter thirteen. Acts 11:21 says, "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord."

An Authoritative Representative

Acts 11:22 tells us that "the account concerning them was heard in the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas as far as Antioch." Literally, the Greek word rendered "sent out" means to be sent out on a mission as an authoritative representative. Barnabas was sent out from Jerusalem to visit the believers in other places with authority from the apostles, not from the church, because the apostles were there.

Saul was saved by the Lord directly without any preaching channel (9:3-6), and he was brought into identification with the Body of Christ through Ananias, a member of the Body (9:10-19). However, Saul was introduced to practical fellowship with the disciples in Jerusalem through Barnabas (9:26-28). Now Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to go as far as Antioch to encourage the believers, and he went to Tarsus to bring Saul to Antioch (11:26-26). This was a big step. It initiated Saul into the Lord's move in spreading the gospel of His kingdom to the Gentile world (13:1-3).

Seeing the Grace of God

According to 11:23, when Barnabas arrived in Antioch and saw the grace of God, he "rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain with the Lord with purpose of heart." We have pointed out elsewhere that grace is God in the Son as our enjoyment. This grace is the resurrected Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) to bring the processed God in resurrection into us to be our life and life supply so that we may live in resurrection. Therefore, grace is the Triune God becoming life and everything to us. The grace that was seen by Barnabas must have been the Triune God received and enjoyed by the believers and expressed in their salvation, change in life, holy living, and in the gifts they exercised in their meetings, all of which could be seen by others.

Full of the Holy Spirit

Acts 11:24 says, "For he was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a considerable number was added to the Lord." The Greek word translated "full" is *pleres*, an adjective form of *pleroo* according to the usage in Acts here and in 6:3, 5; 7:55; and Luke 4:1. Being full of the Spirit is one's condition after being filled with the Spirit inwardly and essentially, as mentioned in Acts 13:52.

The Disciples Called Christians

Acts 11:25 and 26 say, "And he went away to Tarsus to hunt for Saul; and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it came about that for a whole year they were gathered in the church and taught a considerable number. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." The Greek word rendered "Christians" is *Christianos*, a word of Latin formation. The ending *ianos*, denoting an adherent of someone, was applied to slaves belonging to the great families in the Roman Empire. Those who worshipped the emperor, the Caesar--Kaisar--were called *Kaisarianos*, which means adherents of Kaisar, the people belonging to Kaisar. When people

believed in Christ and became His followers, this caused some in the Empire to consider Christ as a rival of the Kaisar. At Antioch they began to call the followers of Christ *Christianos* (Christians), adherents of Christ, as a nickname, a term of reproach. That the disciples in Antioch were given such a nickname as a term of reproach indicates that they must have borne a strong testimony for the Lord, a testimony that made them distinct and peculiar in the eyes of the unbelievers.

Today the term Christian should bear a positive significance, that is, a man of Christ, one who is one with Christ, not only belonging to Him, but having His life and nature in an organic union with Him, and who is living by Him, even living Him, in his daily life. If, according to 1 Peter 4:16, we suffer for being such a person, we should not feel ashamed. Rather, we should be bold to magnify Christ in our confession by our holy and excellent manner of life to glorify God in this name.

THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH AND THE CHURCHES IN JUDEA

In 11:27-30 we have a record concerning the communication between the church in Antioch and the churches in Judea. Acts 11:27 says, "And in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch." In the New Testament prophets are those who speak for God and speak forth God by God's revelation, and who sometimes speak with inspired prediction.

Acts 11:28 tells us that one of these prophets "named Agabus rose up and signified through the Spirit that there was about to be a great famine over the whole inhabited earth, which occurred at the time of Claudius." Claudius was a Caesar of the Roman Empire. In the fourth year of his reign, about A.D. 44, there was a famine in Judea and the neighboring countries.

Acts 11:29 and 30 say, "And the disciples, according as any one of them was prospered, determined each one of them to send things for dispensing to the brothers

dwelling in Judea; which also they did, sending it to the elders through the hand of Barnabas and Saul." Verse 30 indicates that in the early days the finances of the church were under the management of the elders. According to 1 Timothy 3:3, an elder was to be not fond of money. Money is a test to all men. An elder must be pure in money matters, especially since the church fund is under the elders' management.

In Acts 11:30 we see that the things from the church in Antioch were sent to the elders in Jerusalem through the hand of Barnabas and Saul. Here Saul, through Barnabas, was brought into the service among the churches.

THE LORD'S FURTHER PREPARATION OF SAUL

Concerning Saul, God was sovereign in preparing him as another vessel to carry His New Testament economy to the Gentile world. God knew that He needed to prepare such a vessel.

The preparation of Saul of Tarsus to be this kind of vessel began in chapter six of Acts. If we read this book carefully, we shall see that chapters two through six are a section that presents Peter's ministry for Christ's propagation. Then in chapter six the preparation of another vessel begins. In Acts 6 we have the choosing of seven men full of the Holy Spirit. Among these seven was Stephen, and Stephen's martyrdom brought in Saul.

Produced through Jerusalem

As a new vessel, Saul was produced through Jerusalem. This means that he was not a strange vessel produced apart from Jerusalem.

Stephen's Martyrdom

The first step in the producing of Paul through Jerusalem was Stephen's martyrdom. When Stephen was martyred, Saul heard a portion of the gospel. He may have heard Stephen say, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up

and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (7:56). To be sure, Saul heard Stephen "as he was calling upon the Lord and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" (7:59). Saul also heard Stephen cry with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" (7:60). Even though Saul had rejected Stephen and was approving of his killing, he must have considered Stephen's words.

Saul was a very intelligent and thoughtful person, one who had received a high education. He certainly must have thought about the words uttered by Stephen when he was undergoing persecution and martyrdom. Through Stephen Saul heard the preaching of the gospel. Therefore, Saul was brought in through the persecution and martyrdom of this faithful one.

The Lord's Preaching to Saul

After the martyrdom of Stephen, there was a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem (8:1), and Saul was devastating the church (8:3). According to 9:1 and 2, "Saul, still breathing threatening and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to Damascus, for the synagogues, so that if he found any who were of the way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." But while Saul was drawing near Damascus, the Lord came in to deal with him. As He dealt with Saul, the Lord preached to him. If we consider the Lord's preaching to Saul along with the word spoken by Stephen at the time of his martyrdom, we shall realize that Saul certainly was produced through Jerusalem.

Confirmed by Ananias

After Saul was saved, the Lord used Ananias to confirm him and to initiate him into the identification with the Body of Christ by the laying on of hands (9:17). The Lord did not send Peter and John to Damascus for this purpose. Instead, He used Ananias, who must have been saved in Jerusalem and then migrated to Damascus.

This is a further indication that Saul's becoming a vessel of the Lord was accomplished through Jerusalem.

Brought into the Fellowship of the Body through Barnabas

In Damascus Saul proclaimed in a prevailing way that Jesus is the Son of God and the Christ (9:20, 22). Saul's preaching was so prevailing that before long he had disciples (9:25). However, in His sovereignty the Lord did not allow Saul to remain in Damascus. Having escaped those Jews who had consulted together to do away with him (9:23), Saul went to Jerusalem (v. 26). He went to Jerusalem because that was the source through which he was produced. However, the saints there were afraid of him, not believing that he had truly been converted, not believing that he was a disciple. "But Barnabas took hold of him and led him to the apostles, and related to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He spoke to him, and how in Damascus he spoke boldly in the name of Jesus" (9:27). Here we see that Barnabas, the son of encouragement, brought Saul into the fellowship of the Body. It was Ananias that identified Saul with the Body, but it was Barnabas who actually brought him into the fellowship of the Body.

Having considered all these matters, we can see that Saul was a vessel produced through Jerusalem. He was not one that was produced apart from Jerusalem. But although he was related to Jerusalem, the environment did not allow him to remain there. Because certain ones were attempting to do away with Saul, the brothers "brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus" (9:30).

Antioch and Jerusalem

In 10:1--11:18 Luke records the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles through Peter. In 11:19 the record goes on to tell us that those who were scattered by the tribulation that took place over Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Here we see that the migration from Jerusalem went as far as Antioch, where there was a

church. The church at Antioch, therefore, was produced through Jerusalem. We need to trace this matter in the record in Acts.

When the account concerning those in Antioch "was heard in the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem," they sent Barnabas to go as far as Antioch (11:22). Barnabas was sent out to visit the churches in other places.

In 11:19 we see that the scattered saints spoke the word only to Jews. But when some of these saints came to Antioch, they spoke also to the Greeks (v. 20). This is a hint that the trend of the Lord's spreading was toward the Gentiles.

Luke's record not only shows the tendency of the Lord's spread toward the Gentiles, but also reveals how Saul was produced as the vessel to carry out God's ministry in the Gentile world. Saul was produced through Jerusalem. He was not a new start apart from Jerusalem. Jerusalem's migration reached Antioch, and a church was raised up in that city. Then Jerusalem sent out Barnabas as an authoritative representative. When he saw the grace of God, he rejoiced. He was happy with the marvelous situation of the church in Antioch. Nevertheless, Barnabas realized that there was still a particular need--the need of ministry. The scattered saints had gone to Antioch for the raising up of a church, yet among them there was a shortage of ministry. Because of this, Barnabas "went away to Tarsus to hunt for Saul" (11:26). When Barnabas found Saul, he brought him to Antioch, and "for a whole year they were gathered in the church and taught a considerable number" (v. 26). This was part of the initiation of Saul's ministry.

During a time of great famine, the saints in Jerusalem and Judea were in need. Material help was sent from the church at Antioch to those in Judea through Barnabas and Saul (11:29-30). As we have pointed out, this indicates that through Barnabas Saul was brought into the service among the churches. Step by step the Lord brought in Saul. No doubt, he was welcomed in Jerusalem. After

fulfilling their responsibility, Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch.

Keeping the Oneness of the Body

By the time Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch, Saul had been fully prepared as a vessel. He was a product through Jerusalem, for he had been prepared by God through Jerusalem. We have emphasized the fact that with Saul we do not have a new start apart from Jerusalem. We stress this matter because it is something the Lord did sovereignly and wisely in order to keep the oneness of the Body.

One Stream

In the booklet entitled *The Divine Stream* we pointed out that there is only one stream in the book of Acts. This stream started from Jerusalem and flowed through Samaria to Antioch. From Antioch the stream turned to Asia Minor and then to Europe. The Lord did not have two streams, one starting from Jerusalem through Peter and another starting in the Gentile world through Saul. No, the Lord had only one stream, the stream that started from Jerusalem.

The Lord knew that there was the need of a particular vessel, a new vessel. Peter was not qualified to be this vessel, and Peter could not replace this vessel. The Lord did all things wisely and sovereignly to put Saul, His chosen vessel, into the proper relationship with the church in Jerusalem. As we have pointed out, Saul was actually produced through Jerusalem.

Peter's Ministry and Saul's Ministry

In the first chapters of Acts we see that the Lord used Peter very much. Although Peter was good, the Roman Catholic Church was wrong to exalt him so highly. In chapter six of Acts Peter is silent, and there is no mention of him in chapter seven. In chapter eight, of course, Peter and John went down to Samaria to confirm the believers there as part of the Body. Then in chapter nine Saul, a

chosen vessel, is raised up. We have seen that in this chapter we are even told that not long after he was saved Saul had disciples. However, the New Testament never speaks of Peter's disciples.

According to the record in Acts 9, Saul became very prominent in Damascus. But in His sovereignty the Lord brought this prominent one to Jerusalem, where he became a nobody. The believers there would not even recognize him as a disciple. If we had been Saul, we might have said, "In Damascus I was very prominent, and I had a number of disciples. Now I come to you in Jerusalem, and you will not recognize me. I don't want to have anything to do with you. I shall go back to Damascus and start a new work there." This is the practice of many of today's Christians.

Saul surely received mercy from the Lord. Not only did he become a nobody in Jerusalem; the Lord did not allow him to preach in Jerusalem for a long period of time. If Saul had remained in Jerusalem to preach for a long time, he would no doubt have surpassed Peter. Then the saints in Jerusalem might have said, "We are not of Peter of Galilee--we are of Saul of Tarsus." If we had been there at the time, we might have said, "I am for Saul. Peter helped me in an elementary way, but now I am receiving an advanced education from Saul." This is the attitude among many believers today.

In Jerusalem Saul was not highly respected or regarded. Furthermore, the Lord raised up an environment that made it necessary for him to leave Jerusalem. Eventually, the Lord's sovereign hand used Barnabas to find Saul in Tarsus and bring him to Antioch.

After the account of Saul's prevailing preaching in chapter nine, the record comes back to Peter and his ministry. The record indicates that Peter was still powerful. Peter gave messages in chapters two, three, and four, as well as a brief word in chapter five. When the record returns to Peter's ministry in chapter nine, two miracles are described--the healing of Aeneas and the healing, or quickening, of Dorcas. Peter was still in the ministry; the Lord was not through with him. In chapter

nine Peter was not in Jerusalem, but was stepping out toward Caesarea, where he would use the second key given him by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16 to open the door for the Gentiles to come into the kingdom of God. On the one hand, we see the Lord preparing the way to produce a vessel for the Gentile world. On the other hand, we see what the Lord did with Peter to unlock the door for the Gentiles.

As we shall see, in Acts 12 Luke's record again returns to Peter. However, the record does not return to Peter's ministry but speaks of his imprisonment. The account of his imprisonment indicates that his ministry will be set aside from the spreading of the gospel to the Gentile world. In chapter thirteen we see that the vessel for the Gentile world is fully prepared, and the door to the Gentile world is altogether open. In other words, both the vessel and the environment are ready. In Acts 13 the ministry to the Gentile world begins in a full way. After chapter twelve there is no further record concerning Peter.

We have seen that Barnabas, a believer from Jerusalem, helped in the producing of Saul. Barnabas and Saul went on a journey of ministry together. As they were about to take a second journey, there was a contention between them concerning Mark (15:35-39), and Barnabas separated from Saul. Following that, there is no further record concerning Barnabas. This is a further indication that Saul certainly was the chosen vessel for the Gentile world.

According to the picture in the book of Acts, the Lord has only one stream, the stream that started from Jerusalem, and He did not begin another stream with Saul. The Lord did everything sovereignly and wisely to withhold Peter's ministry from the Gentile world and to raise up Saul's ministry for it. May we all see what is portrayed in this picture.

Preserving the Oneness in the One Stream

In Acts we see the activity of the Lord's unique Body. This activity, the flowing of the stream, began in Jerusalem, passed through Samaria, and reached Antioch. From Antioch the stream turned to the Gentile world. In

the current of this one stream the oneness of the Body was preserved.

When we come to chapter fifteen we shall see that certain Judaizers from Jerusalem caused trouble in Antioch. This made it necessary for Paul and Barnabas to go to Jerusalem. By going to Jerusalem the oneness was preserved and even strengthened.

It is crucial that we all see the oneness portrayed in Acts and learn to keep this oneness. Otherwise, eventually among us in the Lord's recovery there may be some new starts, and these new starts will cause divisions. Therefore, we need to see that in Acts the Lord sovereignly kept all the ministries in one ministry and in one current for the one Body in order to keep the oneness of the Body.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE THIRTY-FOUR

THE PROPAGATION IN JERUSALEM, JUDEA, AND SAMARIA THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PETER'S COMPANY

(26)

Scripture Reading: Acts 12:1-24

A PARENTHETICAL SECTION

In this message we shall consider 12:1-24, a parenthetical section concerning Peter in his ministry.

Why is there the need for such a parenthetical section as 12:1-24 to be inserted here? All the writers of the New Testament were inspired by the Spirit to select the proper material for their composition so that their writing might reach the goal. Based upon this principle, we need to consider why Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, inserted the instance recorded in 12:1-24 at this point. Surely the Holy Spirit within Luke must have had a goal in doing this.

In 11:1-18 Peter related to those in Jerusalem how the door was opened for the Gentiles to come into the kingdom of God. According to 11:18, those who heard these things were silent and glorified God. They could only say, "Then also to the Gentiles God has given repentance unto life." In the remainder of chapter eleven (vv. 19-30) Luke tells us about the spread of the gospel to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch through the scattered disciples and about the communication between the church in Antioch and the churches in Judea. Barnabas was sent out from Jerusalem to visit the places where the Lord's work was spreading. When he came to Antioch, he realized that there was the need for ministry. Therefore, he brought Saul to Antioch to help in meeting the need there. It was through this that Saul was brought into the service in the church and was

initiated into his ministry.

Saul's preaching in Damascus was quite prevailing, and he even had disciples. But that was not the right time for him to be fully initiated into the New Testament ministry. We may say that Saul's preaching in Damascus was something done on his own.

Three brothers were especially related to Saul: Stephen, Ananias, and Barnabas. Through Stephen Saul heard the gospel for the first time. Through Ananias he was brought into the identification with the Body. Then through Barnabas Saul was brought into the fellowship in Jerusalem. Although he was brought into the fellowship at that time, he was not yet brought into the ministry. He was not at that time fully initiated into the New Testament economy. Sometime after Saul left Jerusalem for Tarsus, the time became right for Barnabas to find him and bring him to Antioch. Only when Saul was brought to Antioch by Barnabas was he brought into the service for the churches in an absolute way. We see this in the disciples in Antioch sending their material gift to the brothers in Judea through the hand of Barnabas and Saul. Here we see that Barnabas and Saul were assigned to bring the gifts from Antioch to help the saints in Judea. In this way Saul was brought into a service that was recognized by all the churches. Furthermore, after Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch from Jerusalem, Saul entered fully into the New Testament ministry. Therefore, Saul's initiation into the service of the churches and fully into the New Testament ministry took place in 11:19 through 12:25, with 12:1-24 being a parenthetical section related to Peter, not Saul, inserted in the record.

It seems that Peter's ministry has waned by 11:18. Then in 11:19 we have the beginning of the full initiation of Saul's ministry. This initiation is completed at 12:25. Then, as we shall see, his ministry begins fully in 13:1.

REASONS FOR THE INSERTION OF THIS PARENTHETICAL SECTION

Now we need to consider the reason Luke inserted a

section concerning Peter. Actually, this section has nothing to do with Peter's ministry. Rather, it records a miracle through which Peter was rescued from prison. What is the reason for this insertion? What was Luke's goal in recording it?

To Strengthen the Positive Impression concerning Peter and His Ministry

Suppose the account concerning Peter and his ministry ended at 11:18. What kind of impression would we have of Peter? Peter was not bold in relating what took place in the house of Cornelius. If Peter had been bold, he might have said, "Brothers, the Lord Jesus told us that we should be His witnesses to the remotest part of the earth. What, then, was wrong for me to go into the house of a Roman centurion in Caesarea?" But instead of being bold, Peter was very cautious. Galatians 2 confirms the fact that Peter had a problem concerning the association of Jewish and Gentile believers. In this matter he was not strong. Therefore, when he was asked concerning it, he was not bold to answer.

In Acts 1:8 the Lord Jesus prophesied and commanded, saying, "You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the remotest part of the earth." Paul may have endeavored to fulfill this word when he intended to go to Spain. In his heart there may have been the thought that if he could go to Spain, he would reach the uttermost part of the earth. Paul's intention was to fulfill the Lord's commandment in Acts 1:8.

Peter should have remembered the Lord's word in 1:8 when he was speaking with those of the circumcision in Acts 11. That word would have given him the ground to be bold in his speaking. However, Peter did not give a bold testimony. Rather, he spoke in a nice, cautious way, and even used six brothers to cover him.

Without the insertion of 12:1-24, we may not have a favorable impression of Peter, especially of his ministry. We perhaps would have doubts concerning him. Therefore,

as he was writing about the initiation of Paul's ministry, Luke took up the burden to insert something in order to strengthen the positive impression he has given his readers regarding Peter. This, I believe, is the first reason for this insertion.

To Show the Two Sources of Persecution

A second reason for this insertion is to show that the persecution of the church and the apostles came not only from the source of Jewish religion but also from Roman politics. Acts 12:1 and 2 say, "Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some from the church to mistreat them. And he did away with James, the brother of John, with the sword." This was Herod, Agrippa I, whose successor was King Agrippa (II) in 25:13. Both were different from Herod the tetrarch in 13:1. Thus far the church suffered persecution only from the Jewish religion. Now Gentile politics began to participate in the persecution in cooperation with the Jewish religion (v. 11). The Jewish religion joined with the Roman government to execute the Lord Jesus. Here in chapter twelve of Acts Luke shows us that the persecution now comes from Roman politics as well as from the Jewish religion. Luke's insertion of 12:1-24 indicates this.

According to Acts 12, Herod mistreated a number of the saints. In particular, he slew James, the brother of John. "And when he saw that it was pleasing to the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.... And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him.... Peter therefore was kept in the prison" (vv. 3-5). When the Sanhedrin arrested Peter and the other apostles, they were put into the outer prison. Herod, however, put Peter into the inner prison where he was guarded by four squads of soldiers. Literally, the Greek word for "squads" means quaternions. A quaternion was a group of four soldiers. Luke's intention is to show us that Roman politics joined the Jewish religion to persecute the church.

To Present Peter as a Hero

Furthermore, Luke's narration in 12:1-24 makes Peter a hero. This Christian hero suffered persecution both from the Jewish religion and from Roman politics. This leaves us with a very positive impression concerning Peter. As we read chapter twelve, we receive the impression that Peter was a hero.

In 12:5b-19a we see that Peter was rescued by the Lord in a miraculous way. Herod exercised his authority to put Peter into the inner prison, where he was chained to two guards, one on his right and the other on his left. Herod was waiting until after the Passover to bring Peter out to the Jewish people (v. 4), for he thought that this would be very pleasing to the Jews. "When Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping in that night between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards before the door were keeping the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the cell; and striking Peter's side, he roused him, saying, Rise up quickly! And the chains fell off his hands" (vv. 6-7). As Peter went out and followed the angel, "he did not know that what was taking place through the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision" (v. 9). The angel led Peter past the guards and through an iron gate, "which opened of itself to them; and going out they went forward one lane; and immediately the angel departed from him" (v. 10). Then Peter realized that what was happening to him was not a vision but was real. "Peter came to himself and said, Now I surely know that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me out of Herod's hand and from all the expectation of the Jewish people. And when he became aware of this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was surnamed Mark, where a considerable number were assembled together praying" (vv. 11-12).

When a maiden named Rhoda recognized Peter's voice and reported to those in the house that Peter was standing before the entry, they said, "It is his angel" (vv. 13-15). Not only Peter as an apostle had an angel; even the little ones among the believers have their angels

(Matt. 18:10), who are servants to the believers who inherit God's salvation.

Eventually, when those in the house saw Peter, they were amazed (v. 16). "Motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he related to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison, and said, Report these things to James and the brothers" (v. 17). This indicates that James was a leader among the apostles and elders in Jerusalem (see 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12).

Acts 12:18-19b say, "Now when it became day, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. And when Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be executed." Everything was ready for Peter to be brought out of prison and presented to the people, with one exception--the prisoner had disappeared. What a shame that was to Herod! Herod was angry and commanded that the guards be executed.

Although Herod was shamed by Peter's rescue from prison, he was still arrogant, and he still uplifted himself. We are told that "he was furious with the Tyrians and Sidonians; and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country" (v. 20). Because Herod's country was rich and supplied food to Tyre and Sidon, the people there were afraid of Herod. They were concerned that their supply of food would be cut off, and they did something to please Herod. "On an appointed day Herod, having arrayed himself in royal clothing, sat on the judgment seat and made an oration to them. And the populace cried out, The voice of a god and not of a man! And instantly an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give the glory to God; and he was eaten by worms and expired" (vv. 21-23). It seems that Herod did not die immediately when the angel of the Lord struck him. Rather, this arrogant, God-insulting person was eaten by worms.

The account of Herod's fate recorded in 12:19b-23 is related to Peter's suffering and to his being presented as a hero. I believe that Luke's intention in inserting this

section into the narrative is to keep us from having a negative impression of Peter. On the contrary, our impression of him should be very positive, for the record concerning him and his ministry ends with such a miracle. This confirms the fact that even though Peter's ministry was waning, the Lord was still with him and for him.

Because the account regarding Peter ends in a heroic way, we should never depreciate Peter or his ministry. Although we do not agree with the Roman Catholic Church in uplifting Peter as a pope, we recognize that he and his ministry were very good. The record of his ministry is the record of a hero approved by God. Therefore, we should not uplift Paul and depreciate Peter. If we do this, we are like the Corinthians, for we shall be saying that we are of Paul and not of Peter. Because Peter was truly a hero in the Lord's move, we need to respect him.

A BATTLE BETWEEN GOD AND SATAN

There are a number of other matters in 12:1-24 that we need to consider. First, when Peter was in prison, "prayer was being made fervently by the church to God concerning him" (v. 5). This indicates that behind the scene there was a battle between spiritual forces, a battle between God and His enemy, Satan. Apparently the conflict was between Herod and Peter; actually it was between God and His enemy. No doubt, Herod was instigated by Satan. Satan was behind him and even within him. Therefore, the church fought the battle with God against Satan, the evil one.

This battle was fought not by the flesh but by prayer. The church prayed, and the weapon used by the church to defeat Herod and the spiritual force behind him was not of the flesh but of the Spirit.

THE SISTERS TAKING THE LEAD TO PRAY

Second, in 12:12 we see that in the house of Mary a considerable number were assembled together praying. This indicates that the prayer concerning Peter was

offered mainly in the home of a sister. From this we see that in the church life the sisters should take the lead in the matter of prayer. According to the basic principle in the Word, the activities should be carried out by the brothers, and for the most part the sisters should do the supporting work behind the scene. The main supporting work is to pray. This was exactly the situation in Peter's case. After he was released, he went to Mary's house, where many of the saints were still praying.

In Acts 12 we see that the Lord is truly the Lord; He is the Ruler of the kings. Herod the king was arrogant, but Jesus the Ruler was above him. The Lord Jesus exercised His lordship to send an angel to deal with Herod, one who had been instigated, usurped, and used by Satan. Here we clearly see that the Lord fought the battle and won.

THE WORD OF GOD GROWING AND MULTIPLYING

Finally, 12:24 says, "But the word of God grew and multiplied." The previous verse says that Herod was eaten by worms and expired. Then this verse begins with "but." Herod expired, but the word of God grew. The word of God is actually the Lord Himself because the word is the container of the Lord. Therefore, for the word of God to grow actually means that the Lord grew.

Acts 12:24 says that the word of God not only grew but also multiplied. The word does not grow and multiply in itself. Rather, the word grows with the believers and multiplies with the church. When the believers grow, the word within them grows. When the churches multiply, the word multiplies within the churches. The fact that the word of God grew and multiplied indicates that in ancient times the believers and the churches were filled with the word and were one with the word. This is a strong sign of the Lord's victory in His battle against the evil one.

The growth and multiplication of the word in 12:24 was the result, the issue, of Peter's ministry. Therefore, this verse indicates that Peter's ministry concluded in a victorious way. The last word concerning his ministry in

Acts is that the word of God grew and multiplied. This is a glorious and victorious ending of Peter's ministry.

Furthermore, this verse is a declaration of the Lord's move on earth from Jerusalem, through Samaria, to the Gentile world. The Lord's move from chapter two to the end of chapter twelve was altogether victorious over the situation. His move in His ministry for the propagation of the resurrected Christ was victorious not only over Jewish religion but also over Roman politics.

Since the record concerning Peter's ministry in Acts concludes in a victorious way, we should not belittle Peter. The New Testament says clearly that Peter was appointed only for the circumcision, whereas Paul was appointed for the uncircumcision. They were in two regions of the New Testament ministry. As an insertion into the record in Acts, 12:1-24 proves that God's move is victorious in all circumstances.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE THIRTY-FIVE

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(1)

Scripture Reading: Acts 12:25--13:12

The section of Acts concerned with propagation (2:1--28:31) has two main parts: the propagation in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria through the ministry of Peter's company (2:1--12:24) and the propagation in Asia Minor and Europe through the ministry of Paul's company (12:25--28:31). In this message we shall first consider the initiation in 12:25 and then begin to consider 13:1-12.

THE INITIATION

Acts 12:25 says, "And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, having completed the dispensing, taking along with them John who was surnamed Mark." Acts 12:1-24 is a parenthetical section, a record of Peter's persecution. Acts 12:25 is a continuation of 11:30, which, with the preceding verses from 11:22, is a narration of Paul's full initiation into his apostolic ministry. We have seen that Paul was saved by the Lord directly (9:3-6) and was brought into the identification with the Body of Christ through Ananias (9:10-19). Later he was introduced to practical fellowship with the disciples in Jerusalem through Barnabas (9:26-28). Later, also through Barnabas, he was initiated into the Lord's move in spreading the gospel of His kingdom to the Gentile world (11:25-26; 13:1-3). The passage from 11:19 to 12:25 is a transitional record between Peter's apostolic ministry to the Jews in chapters two through eleven and Paul's apostolic ministry to the

Gentiles in chapters thirteen through twenty-eight (see Gal. 2:7-8).

A NEW TURN IN THE LORD'S MOVE

In 13:1-12 we see the Lord's move among certain of His gifted ones. Here we do not have a new beginning--we have a new turn in the Lord's move. The beginning had already taken place in Jerusalem, and the stream flowed from there to Antioch. Now at Antioch there is a new turn.

Jerusalem was a center of the Jewish religion. Antioch, however, was a center for the Gentile world. As such a center, Antioch was strategic. Therefore, this city was chosen by the Lord for a new turn of His move on earth, the turn to the Gentile world.

THE PROPHETS AND TEACHERS IN ANTIOCH

Acts 13:1 says, "Now there were in Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen, foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul." Prophets are those who speak for God and speak forth God by God's revelation. They sometimes speak with inspired prediction (11:27-28). Teachers are those who teach the truths according to the apostles' teaching (2:42) and the prophets' revelation. Both prophets and teachers are universal as well as local (Eph. 4:11).

When the flow started with the one hundred twenty in Jerusalem, only typical Jews were involved. But according to the record in 13:1, the prophets and teachers in the church in Antioch were from a number of different sources. Barnabas was a Levite, a Cyprian by birth (4:36). Niger, whose name means black and should denote a Negro, was probably of African origin. Lucius the Cyrenian was from Cyrene in North Africa. He may have been a Jew if he was the Lucius in Romans 16:21, who was Paul's kinsman. Manaen was the foster brother of Herod and was governmentally related to the Romans. Hence, Manaen must have been Europeanized. The Herod in 13:1 was the one who killed John the Baptist (Luke 9:7-

9). It was the Lord's sovereign doing that the foster brother of John the Baptist's murderer became one of the leading functioning members in the church. Finally, 13:1 mentions Saul, a Jew born in Tarsus and taught by Gamaliel according to the law of Moses (22:3).

The five prophets and teachers recorded here were composed of Jewish and Gentile peoples with different background, education, and status. This indicates that the church is composed of all races and classes of people regardless of their background, and that the spiritual gifts and functions given to the members of the Body of Christ are not based upon their natural status.

Here in 13:1 the Lord set up a pattern. From Antioch the Lord's move turned to reach the Gentile world, and in the Gentile world there are many different kinds of people, people of different cultures, races, and status. Therefore, at the very beginning of this turn the pattern was established to indicate that the churches are composed of all races and classes of people.

Among Christians today, boards and committees are appointed to raise funds to support certain activities. In addition, there is a great deal of organization. But in Acts 13 the situation is very different. Here we do not see boards, committees, fund raising, or organization.

THE PRODUCING OF THE PROPHETS AND TEACHERS

According to 13:1, there were prophets and teachers in the church in Antioch. We need to find out in what way these prophets and teachers were produced. There was neither seminary nor ordination. How, then, were Barnabas, Niger, Lucius, Manean, and Saul produced as prophets and teachers?

Gradually Manifested

In Ephesians 4:11 Paul says that Christ, the Head of the Body, has given four categories of gifts to the Body: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. These gifts are raised up by the Head and given by Him to the Body. They are not produced in a human

way by education, selection, or ordination. Rather, among the saints who love the Lord and seek Him, some are gradually manifested to be evangelists, prophets, or teachers. They are produced by their manifestation in their Christian life and living. For example, in chapter seven Stephen was manifested to be a great teacher, and in chapter eight Philip was manifested to be an evangelist. Then in chapter nine Paul was manifested first as an evangelist and then as a teacher. However, when he was in the church in Antioch, he was not carrying out an evangelical work but was doing a teaching work. Acts 11:26 says that he and Barnabas "were gathered in the church and taught a considerable number." This indicates that both Barnabas and Saul were teachers. Perhaps the other three named in 13:1--Niger, Lucius, and Manean--were prophets. Paul, of course, also had the gift of preaching, but in Antioch he functioned as a teacher.

The five mentioned in 13:1 were not produced as gifts in a human way. On the contrary, they were produced by their gradual manifestation among the saints. Eventually, the saints recognized that these ones had certain gifts. Then by their gifts they became gifted persons.

The Organic Way of the Body

In the Lord's recovery today we should follow the pattern in Acts 13 not to have a human way of producing preachers. We do not take the way of human selection or organization. Instead, we look to the Lord that He would produce something out from His Body. The way we take is not organization--it is organic. If some brothers and sisters serve the Lord full time, this should be done not in the way of organization, but in the organic way of the Body.

Recently, hundreds of saints in Taipei consecrated themselves to serve the Lord full time. We told these saints that we do not follow the way of organization. Our way in the Lord's recovery is organic; it is the way of life. What matters is how the saints grow in the Lord and how the divine life develops within them to produce a certain

ability for functioning. This is the organic way based on the growth and development of the divine life within us. We all need to see this.

No Human Methods of Fund Raising

It would be degradation to leave this organic way and take the organizational way. To do that would be to fall back into the practice of traditional Christianity. Therefore, we should abandon that organizational way, the way of human control and methods of raising money. The Lord's ministry is to be carried out apart from organization and human methods of finance.

Not long ago, I told the saints in Taipei who had given themselves to serve the Lord full time not to discuss the matter of finances or fund raising. In 1949 when the co-workers under the leadership of Brother Nee decided to send me away from mainland China, no funds were given to me, and I did not know where to go. Eventually, according to the Lord's leading, I went to Taiwan, and I went there without any human means of support.

The situation was very similar when I came to the United States. When I came to this country, no one supported me financially. In fact, some of the brothers in the United States thought I was being supported by the saints in the Far East, and those in the Far East thought I was being supported by the saints in the United States. As proof that I was not supported by human means, the brother who helped me to prepare my income taxes in 1964 told me that during the entire year the church in Los Angeles gave me a total of six hundred dollars. Perhaps you are wondering how I lived. I can simply testify that I lived. How did I live? I lived in the way of the sparrows and the lilies. My point in sharing this is that in serving the Lord full time, we should not be concerned about finances. The Lord will not allow us to starve.

In chapter thirteen of Acts there is no discussion about fund raising or about how much to pay Barnabas and Paul. Barnabas did not say, "Brother Paul, be assured that I will take care of your living expenses." Likewise,

Paul did not say, "Brothers, you lay your hands upon me, but how about my traveling expenses? How will I be able to live? You send me out, but who will support me? How will you send money to me?" The way in Acts 13 is certainly much different from the practice of many Christian groups today.

Allow me to give you a testimony concerning the publishing work in this country. In 1963 we began to publish a little magazine *The Stream*. We began this work with only two hundred dollars. During the past twenty-one years, there has been a great development in this publication work. The Lord has used this publication ministry, and many have enjoyed the printed materials. Today this work has three offices--one in Anaheim, one in Irving, and one in Taipei--and many saints work for this publication ministry full time. All this is the Lord's doing; it was accomplished without organization or fund raising.

If the Lord leads you to serve Him full time, be encouraged to take His way. Do not talk about money or organization, and do not consider your position, rank, or title. Forget all such things and be assured that the Lord will take care of everything.

THE NEED FOR FULL-TIME WORKERS

For the Lord's move in carrying out His recovery today, there is the need for a good number of full-time workers. This is especially true in the United States. In this country there may be as many as nearly one hundred churches, but we do not have enough full-time workers to meet the need. The Lord's move has been severely restricted by this shortage. There certainly is the need for full-time workers.

How will the needed full-time workers be produced? Certainly not by the way of human selection. Rather, they will be produced through the saints growing in life and then being manifested according to what they are. Then certain ones will be led of the Lord to serve Him full time, and they will take His leading by faith. Those who follow the Lord in this way should not be concerned about their living expenses. They should simply leave this with the Lord. Moreover, they should not care for position, rank, or title.

They should be concerned only for the Lord's move and desire to be in His move.

As one who has been serving the Lord full time for more than fifty years, I can testify that such a serving one should not be concerned for either finances or position. From the time I gave up my job in 1933 to serve the Lord, I can testify that I never considered my position, rank, or title. Throughout the years I have known only one thing--to labor day and night. I do not care who I am, and I do not care for position, rank, or title. I want others to refer to me simply as "Brother Lee." This name is sufficient. I am only a laboring brother. Our desire is to follow Paul to labor for the Lord's interest and to care for all the churches.

I hope that those who read this message will pray concerning the need for full-time workers. Will the Lord lead you to serve Him full time? Perhaps He will lead you in this way.

There is a great need for full-time workers not only in the United States but also in Latin America and Europe. Many countries in Central and South America have been opened to the Lord's recovery. There are many churches in Mexico and Brazil; there are also churches in Guatemala, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Paraguay. Although there are so many churches in Latin America, there are very few full-time workers. Surely there is the need for a good number of saints to be willing to serve the Lord full time, trusting in Him to meet the need. There also is the need for full-time workers in Europe.

We all need to bring this matter to the Lord. Do not make any decision in a light way. Rather, pray, open to the Lord, and seek His will. May the Lord meet the need for full-time workers for the spread of His recovery on the earth today.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE THIRTY-SIX

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(2)

Scripture Reading: Acts 13:1-12

In this message we shall continue to consider 13:1-12. In 13:1-4a we see that Barnabas and Paul were set apart and sent by the Holy Spirit. Acts 13:4b-12 describes their journey to Paphos of Cyprus.

SET APART AND SENT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Ministering to the Lord

Acts 13:1 and 2 say, "Now there were in Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen, foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Here we see that these prophets and teachers were not conferring with men and organizing; rather, they were ministering to the Lord and fasting.

These five were ministering to the Lord directly. This means that, spiritually speaking, they were not at the altar in the outer court, but were at the incense altar in the Holy Place. In the Old Testament the priests ministered at two places. When they served the people, they ministered at the altar in the outer court, offering sacrifices to God for the people. But when they served the Lord directly, they were at another place--at the altar in the Holy Place burning incense. These five brothers in

Antioch were at the incense altar in the Holy Place ministering directly to the Lord through their prayers.

The Speaking of the Lord as the Spirit

As they were ministering to the Lord in this way, He as the Spirit came in and spoke to them, saying, "Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul." This indicates that here the Holy Spirit is the Lord.

However, many Christians think that the Spirit is separate from the Lord. Some even say that the Spirit is the agent or representative of the Lord. If the Spirit is merely the Lord's representative, then in 13:2 the Holy Spirit should not have said, "Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul." Instead, the Spirit should have said, "I, the Spirit, am an agent of the Lord. I represent the Lord and work for Him. Therefore, I do not say that you should set apart Barnabas and Saul unto Me. I tell you to separate Barnabas and Saul unto the Lord, for whom I am working."

In 13:2 we have the Lord, the Holy Spirit, and "Me." Who is this Me? Is this Me only the Holy Spirit and not the Lord? Surely the Me in this verse is the Lord.

The five prophets and teachers were ministering to the Lord. As they were ministering, the Lord as the Holy Spirit spoke to them. This corresponds to Paul's word: "And the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17). Hence, the Spirit could tell them to separate Barnabas and Saul "for Me." This Me is both the Lord and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we should not think that the Holy Spirit is separate from the Lord. No, the Holy Spirit is the Lord to whom we minister. When we minister, we minister to the Lord. But when the Lord responds to us, He responds as the Holy Spirit. Because He is the Lord, He could say as the Holy Spirit, "Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul."

A Great Step Taken by the Lord for the Spread of the Gospel to the Gentile World

In 13:2 the Holy Spirit as the pneumatic Christ, the Head of the Body, told the five to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which He had called them. This was a giant step taken by the Lord for the spread of the gospel of

His kingdom to the Gentile world. It was begun from Antioch, a Gentile center in Syria, without organizing a mission, without raising funds, without human ordination, and without any human plan and method. It was initiated by five faithful and seeking members of the Body, who afforded an opportunity, through their ministering and fasting, to the Head of the Body that He, as the Spirit, might set them apart to carry out His great commission to spread His kingdom for the establishment of His church in the Gentile world through the preaching of His gospel.

This major step had nothing to do with the church in Jerusalem organizationally, and it was not under the authority and direction of Peter and the other eleven apostles in Jerusalem. It was begun solely and purely from a Gentile center, far away from the atmosphere and influence of any Judaic background and practice, and even from the practice and influence of the church in Jerusalem. It was absolutely a move by the Spirit, in the Spirit, and with the Spirit through the coordination of the faithful and seeking members of the Body on earth with the Head in the heavens. This was not a religious movement with a human schedule. From Antioch the Lord's move on the earth for God's New Testament economy had an entirely new start. Although the flow of the Lord's move began from Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and later came to Antioch and went on from Antioch to the Gentile world, it had a purified start by the Spirit at its turn in Antioch.

The Laying On of Hands

Acts 13:3 continues, "Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." Here we see that they fasted and prayed; we are not told that they discussed and decided.

In 13:3 the laying on of hands denotes identification. It signifies that they who laid their hands were one with those on whom they laid their hands. By this they declared to all that they were one with the sent ones in their going to carry out the Lord's great commission.

The first part of 13:4 says, "They therefore, having been

sent out by the Holy Spirit." In verse 3 Barnabas and Saul were sent by the other three. But here it says that they were sent out by the Spirit. This proves that the three were one with the Spirit in the Lord's move, and the Spirit honored their sending as His.

The laying on of hands in 13:3 has nothing to do with ordination. The three who laid hands on Barnabas and Saul were not members of a mission board or religious organization who were assuring the sent ones of their financial support. That is the practice in many Christian groups today. Someone who is being sent out to the mission field may think that unless the members of the board lay hands on him, he will not be assured of their financial support. But if they lay hands on him, he will know that he will have the money he needs. Such a situation is common today.

If we lay our hands upon the sent ones, it should never be as a pledge of financial support. Rather, in the laying on of hands we should be one with the Triune God not to ordain the sent ones but to identify ourselves with them. Therefore, the laying on of hands signifies that our spirit, our prayers, and all that is within us go out with the sent ones. This is not ordination--it is identification.

Whenever we lay our hands upon someone in the Lord's recovery who is being sent out by the Lord, we must do it in this way. Otherwise, we should not practice the laying on of hands.

The laying on of hands is not a ritual or a matter related to ordination. The laying on of hands is a matter of life in the Spirit. In Acts 13 the three were burdened to share in the commission of Barnabas and Saul. This was the reason they laid their hands upon them. Through the laying on of hands they indicated that they would go with Barnabas and Saul in their prayers and in the Spirit. They would be one with them and go with them at any cost.

Because of the influence of the religious background and because of the damage caused by the laying on of hands in the way of ritual, we have been reluctant to practice the laying on of hands. Sometimes I have had the burden to lay hands on a particular one. However, I

hesitated to do this because many regard this as a ritual or as something related to ordination. We should not have ordination or any rituals. What we need is the genuine and proper identification. There is the need of the laying on of hands. But we should never do this ritualistically. If we practice the laying on of hands, it should be according to the inner leading and with a genuine burden in the Spirit. Our practice should be different from that of traditional Christianity, which is far off from the pattern presented in Acts 13.

An Excellent Pattern

In Acts 13 we see an excellent pattern. We do not have such a pattern in Jerusalem because the church there was in the initial stage. What the Lord did in Jerusalem actually began with His calling of the disciples. As He walked beside the sea of Galilee, the Lord Jesus saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, and He called them to follow Him (Matt. 4:18-19). As He went on from there, He saw two other brothers, James and John, and He also called them (Matt. 4:21-22). After calling these four and the other disciples, the Lord brought them with Him for three and a half years. He brought them through His crucifixion and into His resurrection. Then in resurrection He appeared to them during a period of forty days. Following that, the Lord brought them all to the Mount of Olives and in their sight visibly ascended to the heavens. With such a background and spiritual education, the disciples prayed for ten days. Then on the day of Pentecost Peter's ministry began.

What the Lord did with the disciples in the Gospels and in the first two chapters of Acts cannot be repeated. The Lord will not call followers today as He called Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Therefore, with the disciples in Jerusalem we do not have a pattern that can be repeated among us today. However, the pattern in Acts 13 can be repeated.

When the Lord Jesus called Peter and Andrew, He said to them, "Come, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). But when He called Saul of Tarsus, the

Lord indicated to him through Ananias that He would make him not a fisher of men but a vessel. In Acts 9:15 the Lord said to Ananias concerning Saul, "This man is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before both the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel." Peter was made a fisher of men, but Paul was made a vessel. There is quite a difference between a fisherman and a vessel.

The new turn in Acts 13 is not a turn with fishermen but with vessels. When Paul was sent out, he was sent out as a vessel. This means that he was sent to be a vessel containing Christ and bearing Him to the Gentile world. Wherever Paul went his ministry was to impart to others the very Christ he contained. He was a vessel containing Christ, and he ministered this Christ to others.

The start in Antioch is very different from that in Jerusalem. The start in Jerusalem is not a pattern for us today. But the start, the turn, in Antioch surely is our pattern, and we need to follow it.

THE JOURNEY TO PAPHOS OF CYPRUS

Acts 13:4b tells us that Barnabas and Paul "went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed away to Cyprus." This was the start of Paul's first ministry journey, which ended in 14:27.

Announcing the Word of God in the Synagogues

Acts 13:5a says, "Having come to Salamis, they announced the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews." Barnabas and Paul did not go to attend the Jewish synagogue gathering, but to take advantage of their gathering to announce the word of God, just as the Lord did in His ministry on earth (Matt. 4:23; Luke 4:16). As in Acts 13:14, their purpose in going to the synagogue was to grasp the opportunity to preach the gospel.

We have seen that the word "synagogue" is an anglicized form of the Greek word *sunagogue*. This Greek word is composed of *sun*, together, and *ago*, to bring. Hence, it denotes a collecting, gathering, congregation,

assembly. By transition it came to mean the place of gathering. It is used in the New Testament to denote the congregation (Acts 13:43; 9:2; Luke 12:11) and the congregating place (Luke 7:5) of the Jews, where they sought the knowledge of God by studying the holy Scriptures (Luke 4:16-17; Acts 13:14-15).

Having John as Their Attendant

According to 13:5b, Barnabas and Paul had John as their attendant. This is actually a defect in the pattern caused by the lack of experience. Barnabas and Paul should not have brought John with them. Eventually he left them and returned to Jerusalem (v. 13). The reason for John's leaving may have been his inability to bear the hardships of the journey.

When Barnabas and Paul were about to go on their second journey, "Barnabas intended to take John, who is called Mark, along with them also" (15:37). However, "Paul did not consider it suitable to take with them this one who withdrew from them in Pamphylia and did not go with them to the work" (v. 38). As we shall see, there was a sharp contention between Barnabas and Paul concerning this. Because John was Barnabas' cousin, he wanted to bring him along with them, but Paul did not agree. The point we would make here is that the problem began with the mistake in taking Mark along with them the first time.

Those who serve the Lord full time should be careful in bringing someone else along with them. Not everyone is able to endure all the hardships of serving full time. If you lightly take someone along with you, there may be trouble. The mistake made by Barnabas and Paul in taking Mark with them on their first journey eventually led to the separation between Paul and Barnabas. It was a serious matter for them to make such a mistake.

Barnabas and Paul on the Island of Cyprus

Acts 13:6 and 7 say, "And having passed through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a certain man, a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Barjesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called Barnabas and Saul to

him and sought to hear the word of God." This proconsul was the governor of a local government in the Roman Empire.

Verse 8 continues, "But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith." This is the objective faith, referring to the contents of the gospel in which the believers in Christ believed.

Acts 13:9 goes on to say, "But Saul, who is also Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him." The change of name may indicate the change in life. In any case, from this point on Paul, being filled with the Holy Spirit, took the lead in the apostolic ministry all the way. The filling with the Holy Spirit here is the outward filling for power, as in 2:4; 4:8, 31; and 9:17.

According to 13:10, Paul said to Elymas the magician, "O son of the Devil, full of all deceit and all villainy, enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?" The straight way is the way of truth and the way of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:2,15,21).

Acts 13:11 and 12 conclude, "And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind, not seeing the sun for a time. And instantly a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul, when he saw what took place, believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord." Elymas the magician was punished and put to shame. Then the Lord showed His straight way to the proconsul, and the proconsul believed and was saved. As a result, a testimony was raised up in that locality.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE THIRTY-SEVEN

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(3)

Scripture Reading: Acts 13:13-43

We come in this message to 13:13-52. In this portion of Acts Paul and his companions came to Antioch of Pisidia, where they preached the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ as the Savior (vv. 13-43). However, as we shall see, they were rejected by the Jews (vv. 44-52).

Acts 13:13 says, "And putting out to sea from Paphos, Paul and his companions came to Perga of Pamphylia; and John left them and returned to Jerusalem." Based upon 15:38, the reason for John's leaving must have been negative and hence a discouragement to Paul and his companion. However, he was recovered to Paul in his later ministry (Col. 4:10-11; 2 Tim. 4:11).

GOING INTO THE SYNAGOGUE

Acts 13:14 says, "And passing through from Perga, they arrived at Antioch of Pisidia; and going into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, they sat down." The purpose of the apostles' going to the synagogue on the Sabbath day was not to keep the Sabbath. Rather, their purpose was to grasp the opportunity for preaching the gospel. As in 13:5, they did not go to attend the Jewish synagogue gathering, but to take advantage of the gathering to announce the word of God, just as the Lord Jesus did in His ministry (Matt. 4:23; Luke 4:16).

Here in Acts 13 we see a complete pattern for us to follow today. In going to the synagogue, Paul was

following in the steps of the Lord Jesus, who taught in the synagogue. If there was a synagogue in a particular city, Paul would go there, not because he was Judaic or intended to keep the Sabbath or learn the word of God. On the contrary, Paul went to the synagogue to take advantage of the opportunity to speak the word of God's gospel. In every synagogue the holy Scriptures were taught, and there were a number of people, both Jews and Gentiles, who were seeking God. Therefore, it was wise of Paul to go to the synagogues.

In 13:15 we see that in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia Paul was given the opportunity to speak: "And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent to them, saying, Men, brother, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." Literally, the Greek words translated "if you have any word" mean "if there is in you any word." When Paul rose up to speak, he addressed those in the synagogue, saying, "Men, Israelites, and those who fear God" (v. 16). Here the ones who fear God are Gentile seekers after God.

Paul's going to the synagogue also matches the basic principle that God's gospel should go first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16).

In John 10 the Lord Jesus indicates that of both Jews and Gentiles are sheep that make up the unique flock. In John 10:16 He says, "I have other sheep which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one flock, one shepherd." Here the other sheep are the Gentile believers (Acts 11:18). The one flock signifies the one church, the one Body of Christ (Eph. 2:14-16; 3:6), brought forth by life, which is the Lord imparted into His members through His death (John 10:10-18). In John 10:16 the fold is Judaism, and the flock is the church. Outside the fold of Judaism, there were other sheep, the Gentile believers, who would be gathered together to be one flock with the Jewish believers. As we have pointed out, this one flock is the church.

Certain hymns have been written in which the church is regarded as the fold. This is a mistaken concept. The

church is not a fold that keeps the sheep. Rather, the church is a flock, that is, the totality of the sheep. The fold and the flock are two things, but the church and the flock are one thing. Judaism was a fold used by God to keep His sheep temporarily. A fold is used to keep sheep during the winter, bad weather, and the night. The Old Testament time was the nighttime. The Lord's sheep were kept in this fold until the day dawned with the coming of the Lord Jesus (Luke 1:78-79). As the Shepherd, the Lord Jesus called the sheep out of the fold; that is, He called them out of the Jewish religion.

Christians today may regard denominations as churches. Actually, the denominations are folds that keep the believers, who are members of the church. Whereas every denomination is a fold, the church is the flock.

In the ancient times the synagogues in Judaism were folds, and many of God's sheep were kept in these folds. When the Lord Jesus came, He called God's chosen people out of the fold of Judaism. Paul followed Him to do the same thing. Whenever he came to a city, he would go to the fold, the synagogue, in that place, for he knew that a number of God's sheep were held there. For this reason, when Paul preached in a synagogue, a number of the people believed. Among the believing ones were some Greeks. The ministry of the Apostle Paul was not only to call out God's chosen people from the Jewish religion, but also to gain Gentile believers. Then the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers were put together to form the church, the one flock. Today in the Lord's recovery we are not building up a fold; rather, we are taking care of God's flock.

Paul's going to the synagogues is an aspect of the pattern portrayed in Acts 13. We may learn of Paul to go to those places where God's chosen people meet.

PREACHING AND TEACHING THE WORD FROM THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

A synagogue was a place where people who sought God

studied the holy Scriptures. Whenever Paul went to a synagogue, he preached and taught from the Bible, which at that time, of course, consisted only of the Old Testament. Paul and Barnabas did not preach and teach any kind of human knowledge or anything of themselves. On the contrary, they preached and taught the word from the holy Scriptures. Whenever they went into a synagogue, they preached from the Bible.

Paul's word in 13:17-22 was based entirely on the Scriptures. In verse 17 he said, "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people during their sojourn in the land of Egypt, and with a high arm He led them out of it." Here "high" means uplifted. In verses 18 and 19 Paul went on to say, "And for about forty years' time He carried them as a nurse in the wilderness; and when He had overthrown seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance (for about four hundred and fifty years)." The four hundred fifty years extends from the people's sojourn in Egypt (v. 17) to the judges (v. 20).

In 13:20-22 Paul continued, "And after these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. And then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when He had removed him, He raised up David for them as king, to whom also He testified and said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man according to My heart, who will do all My will." David was a man according to God's heart, that is, according to the desire of God's heart, not only according to God's words. Such a man will do all God's will.

PREACHING CHRIST

Centered on Christ

We have seen that Paul's preaching and teaching were based on the Old Testament. The Old Testament, however, contains many things: history, the law, types, and prophecies. The Jews studied the Old Testament week by week, but they did not pay attention to Christ. They had some thought concerning the Messiah, but they did not have any understanding of Christ. When Paul went into

the synagogues to preach and teach, he did not care for anything other than Christ.

When some hear that Paul preached Christ and Christ alone, they may say, "Did Paul not begin his preaching with an account of the history in the Old Testament? Did he not speak of God's bringing His people out of Egypt, and about Saul and David?" Yes, Paul spoke about those things, but he did so in order to prepare the way to preach Christ. In verse 22 Paul quoted the word about David being a man according to God's heart. Then in verse 23 he went on to say, "From this man's seed, God, according to promise, brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus." Here we see that after a short introduction, he came to his crucial message, which is altogether centered on Christ. After beginning with the history until the time of David, Paul went on to point out that from David's seed God brought forth a Savior, Jesus Christ. With Him there is salvation.

In 13:24 and 25 Paul refers to John the Baptist: "John having previously proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. Now as John was completing his course, he said, What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, One is coming after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie." Literally, the Greek words rendered "before His coming" mean "before the face of His entrance." Here Paul points out that before Christ's coming, John proclaimed a baptism of repentance. Repentance is to change the mind, and baptism is to bury the repentant ones, terminating them, so that the Savior may germinate them by regeneration (John 3:3, 5-6).

As Paul went on to speak concerning "the word of this salvation," he emphasized Christ's crucifixion. He pointed out that the people of Israel had Him put to death. In verse 27 he says, "For those dwelling in Jerusalem and their rulers, being ignorant of this One and of the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by judging Him." They judged the Lord Jesus by sentencing Him to death (Luke 24:20). "And when they had accomplished all that was written concerning Him,

they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb" (v. 29).

Raised from among the Dead

Beginning with verse 30, Paul went on to speak of Christ's resurrection: "But God raised Him from among the dead." We have seen that Acts tells us both that God raised up Jesus (2:24, 32) and that He rose from the dead (10:40-41). Regarding the Lord as a man, the New Testament says that God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 8:11). But considering Him as God, it tells us that He Himself rose from the dead (Rom. 14:9).

The Firstborn Son of God in Resurrection

After pointing out that the resurrected Christ "was seen by those who had come up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now His witnesses to the people" (v. 31), Paul went on to say, "We bring to you good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fully fulfilled this promise to us their children in raising up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, You are My Son; today I have begotten You." Resurrection was a birth to the Man Jesus. He was begotten by God in His resurrection to be the firstborn Son of God among many brothers (Rom. 8:29). He was the only begotten Son of God from eternity (John 1:18; 3:16). After incarnation, through resurrection, He was begotten by God in His humanity to be God's firstborn Son.

If it were not for Paul, I do not think that we would be able to see that Psalm 2 speaks of the resurrection of Christ. Paul was able to see the Lord's resurrection in the word, "You are My Son; today I have begotten You." Paul applied the word "today" to the day of the Lord's resurrection. This means that Christ's resurrection was His birth as the firstborn Son of God. Jesus, the Son of Man, was born to be the Son of God through being raised up from the dead. Therefore, God's raising up of Jesus from the dead was His begetting of Him to be His firstborn Son. We need to realize that the Lord's resurrection was His birth. This is a crucial matter.

The Lord's Two Births

The Lord Jesus has had two births. First, He was born of Mary to be the Son of Man. Then thirty-three and a half years later He was crucified, buried, and raised from among the dead. Through resurrection He had a second birth, for as a man He was born in His resurrection to be the Son of God. Therefore, in His first birth He was born of Mary to be the Son of Man, and in His second birth He was born in resurrection to be the Son of God.

The Only Begotten Son and the Firstborn Son

When some hear that Christ was born to be the Son of God in resurrection, they may have a problem and say, "Was not our Lord the Son of God from eternity?" Yes, from eternity He was the Son of God. Before His first birth, that is, before He was born of Mary to be the Son of Man, He was already the Son of God. The Gospel of John emphasizes the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and He is the Son of God eternally. Since He was already the Son of God before His incarnation, why was it necessary for Him to be born the Son of God in His resurrection? If we would answer this question, we need to study the Bible carefully.

Romans 8:29 and Hebrews 1:6 both speak of Christ as the Firstborn. In His second birth the Lord Jesus was born to be the firstborn Son of God. According to the New Testament, He is the Son of God in two aspects. First, He was God's only begotten Son; second, He is now God's firstborn Son. The words "only begotten" indicate that God has only one Son. John 1:18 and 3:16 speak of the only begotten Son of God. Eternally speaking, Christ was the only begotten Son of God. This was His eternal status. But through resurrection He, as a man, was born to be the firstborn Son of God. The word "firstborn" indicates that God now has many sons (Heb. 2:10). We who believe in Christ are the many sons of God and the many brothers of the Lord, the many brothers of the firstborn Son of God (Rom. 8:29).

The Embodiment of Life and the Propagation of Life

As the only begotten Son of God, the Lord is the embodiment of the divine life. The Gospel of John emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and as the Son of God He is the very embodiment of the divine life (John 1:4). Through resurrection Christ became the firstborn Son of God as the life-dispenser for the propagation of life. First, He was the only begotten Son as the embodiment of life; now He is the firstborn Son for the propagation of life. Through His becoming the firstborn Son of God in resurrection, the divine life has been dispensed into all of His believers to bring forth the propagation of the very life which is embodied in Him. We all need to see this.

Here in Acts 13 Paul was not preaching Christ as the only begotten Son of God, as the Gospel of John does. Rather, here Paul was preaching Christ as the firstborn Son of God for propagation. For this reason, he preached the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as His second birth. Through His second birth, His birth in resurrection, Christ became the firstborn Son of God for the propagation of the divine life.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE THIRTY-EIGHT

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(4)

Scripture Reading: Acts 13:13-52

In this message we shall continue to consider Acts 13. We have seen that Paul went to the synagogue to speak the word of God to both the Jews and the Gentile seekers after God. Paul's speaking is focused on Christ. In 13:27-35 he speaks in particular concerning Christ's death and resurrection. We have seen that resurrection was a birth to the Lord Jesus. Although He was the only begotten Son of God from eternity (John 1:18; 3:16), after incarnation and through resurrection He was begotten of God in His humanity to be God's firstborn Son. As the only begotten Son Christ is the embodiment of the divine life, but as the firstborn Son He is the propagation of this life.

THE FAITHFUL AND HOLY THINGS OF DAVID

In 13:34 Paul speaks a further word regarding the resurrection of Christ: "And as to His having raised Him up from among the dead, no longer to return to corruption, He spoke in this way, I will give you the holy and faithful things of David." The phrase "the holy and faithful things of David" has bothered translators of the New Testament. Verses 33 and 34 are concerned with the resurrected Christ. Verse 33 says, "That God has fully fulfilled this promise to us their children in raising up Jesus, as it is also written in the second psalm, You are My Son; today I have begotten You." We have pointed out that Christ's resurrection was His second birth to bring Him forth as

the firstborn Son of God. God promised to give Him to His people, and this resurrected One is the holy and faithful things of David. The phrase "the holy and faithful things of David" indicates that Christ was of David, for it was out of David's seed that God raised up such a One. To God, the resurrected Christ is the firstborn Son, but to us He is the Savior. Moreover, He is a great gift given by God to His chosen people, and this gift is entitled "the holy and faithful things."

The Resurrected Christ

Literally, the Greek words rendered "the holy and faithful things" are the holy things (Gk. hosios, plural), the faithful or sure. The same word (hosios) is used for "Holy One" in the next verse, but in the singular. But it is not the regular word for holy, which is hagios. Hosios is a Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word chesed, which is translated "mercies" in Isaiah 55:3; 2 Chronicles 6:42; and Psalm 89:1, both in the Septuagint and in the King James Version. In Psalm 89 chesed in verse 1 for mercies in plural is the same word in verse 19 for Holy One is singular. This Holy One is Christ, the Son of David, in whom God's mercies are centered and conveyed. Hence, the holy and faithful things of David refer to the resurrected Christ. This is fully proved by the context, especially by "Your Holy One" in the following verse (Acts 13:35), and by the verse following Isaiah 55:3.

Paul's thought in 13:33 and 34 is very deep. The resurrected Christ, who is God's firstborn Son brought forth through His second birth, His resurrection, is the holy and faithful things. In verse 34 the word "faithful" means trustworthy. The resurrected Christ is the holy and trustworthy things God gives to us. Here Paul indicates that the resurrected Christ is not only our Savior bringing us God's salvation, and He is not only the firstborn Son of God. This resurrected One is also the holy and faithful things as a gift given to us by God.

It is easy for us to understand that Christ is our Savior. It is more difficult to understand that Christ is the firstborn Son of God. But it is very difficult to understand

that the resurrected Christ is the holy and trustworthy things. Many of us have never been taught that the resurrected Christ is the holy and trustworthy things given to us by God. The holy and faithful things cover a wide span, a span much wider than that covered by the titles "Savior" and "firstborn Son." The phrase "the holy and faithful things" is actually a divine title, a title of Christ. In these verses Christ is called the holy and trustworthy things. The Savior God raised up out of the seed of David has become the holy and trustworthy things.

All the Aspects of What Christ Is

What are these holy and trustworthy things? They are all the aspects of what Christ is. According to the New Testament, Christ is life, light, grace, righteousness, holiness, sanctification, and justification. He is also the bread of life and the living water. Furthermore, the holy and trustworthy things include all the aspects of Christ unveiled in 1 Corinthians: power, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, glory, the depths of God, the unique foundation of God's building, the Passover, the unleavened bread, the spiritual food, the spiritual drink, the spiritual rock, the Head, the Body, the firstfruit, the second Man, and the last Adam. We see many more aspects of Christ in the Gospel of John, such as the Shepherd and the pasture. Oh, how much Christ is to us as the holy and trustworthy things! As the resurrected One, He is the firstborn Son, the Savior, and all the holy and trustworthy things.

Christ as Mercies to Us

In the Old Testament the holy and faithful things are regarded as mercies. Isaiah 55:3 speaks of "the sure mercies of David." Second Chronicles 6:42 mentions "the mercies of David," the Lord's servant, and Psalm 89:1 says, "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever." Do you know what mercy is? Mercy implies both love and grace, but it reaches further than love. Where love and grace cannot reach, mercy can reach. All the holy and

faithful things are Christ Himself as mercies to us. Life is mercy, and light is also a mercy. Likewise, righteousness, holiness, justification, and sanctification are mercies. In chapter ten of the Gospel of John we have the door, the pasture, and the Shepherd, all of which are mercies. Try to count all the aspects of these mercies. If you took the time to count them, you would have a long list of mercies.

A husband's love for his wife and the wife's submission to her husband are Christ as mercies to us. If, in Christ, I love my wife, this surely is a mercy. My love for her is Christ Himself as a mercy to me. In a similar way, if a sister, in Christ, submits to her husband, that also is a mercy. Her submission is Christ Himself as a mercy to her.

I can testify that my speaking the word of God year after year is certainly a mercy. What a mercy that I can speak the word inexhaustibly. In the past I spent a few months every year in the Philippines ministering the word. An elderly sister, who was my hostess, was greatly surprised that I always had something new to say. She thought that after some years I would have nothing further to minister. One day after a conference meeting, she said, "I thought that by now you would be exhausted and have nothing to say. But your ministry is even fresher and richer now than before. Where do you get all these things to speak?" If I were asked this question today, I would say that my speaking the word is Christ as a mercy to me. This is not a matter of my ability or gift. It is altogether a matter of mercy.

Not only is it a mercy for me to speak the word of God, but even the dear Savior is my speaking. My speaking is Christ, and to me this speaking Christ is a mercy. I do not have an advanced degree, and my speaking is not eloquent. Nevertheless, this speaking is full of Christ. This is wholly due to Christ being a mercy to me in speaking the word of God.

The Christ Preached by Paul

We all need to see that the resurrected Christ is the firstborn Son of God, the Savior, and holy and faithful things of David. All genuine Christians know that Christ

is the only begotten Son of God, and some may realize that He is the firstborn Son of God. But have you ever heard that the resurrected Christ is all the holy and trustworthy things as mercies given to us by God as an all-inclusive gift? We may have never heard of this, but this was the Christ preached by Paul in Acts 13. I am very happy to see that Paul, in his gospel message, not only preached Christ from the Old Testament, but also preached the resurrected Christ as the holy and trustworthy things. Actually, what Paul proclaimed here in his preaching of the gospel requires all the Epistles written by him for its definition. Therefore, if you want to see more concerning Christ as the holy and trustworthy things, you need to study the fourteen Epistles of Paul.

In his preaching Paul set up an excellent pattern for us to follow in our gospel preaching today. Like Paul, we need to preach Christ in a rich and uplifted way.

In 13:35 through 37 Paul continues, "Wherefore He says also in another psalm, You will not allow Your Holy one to see corruption. For David indeed, when he had served his own generation by the counsel of God, fell asleep and was buried with his fathers and saw corruption; but He whom God raised did not see corruption." The word "served" in verse 36 indicates that David's reigning as a king was a service to his generation by the counsel of God. Literally, the Greek word translated "buried" means "added to." As in Acts 13:30, Paul again in verse 37 emphasizes the fact that God raised up the Man Jesus.

FORGIVENESS AND JUSTIFICATION

In 13:38 and 39 Paul goes on to say, "Therefore let it be known to you, men, brothers, that through this One forgiveness of sins is announced to you, and from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses, in this One everyone who believes is justified." To be forgiven of sins (v. 38) is negative, for our release from condemnation. To be justified (v. 39) is positive, for our reconciliation to God and acceptance by Him.

In both 38 and 39 Paul speaks of "this One." Who is this One? This is the One who has been resurrected to be God's firstborn Son, our Savior, and the many holy and trustworthy things. Therefore, through the One who is the holy and trustworthy things as God's mercies to us we are forgiven and justified. Have you ever heard such a gospel? Through the One who is the firstborn Son, the Savior, and the holy and trustworthy things, forgiveness of sins has been announced to us. And through this One we are justified from all the things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses.

The One by whom we are forgiven and justified is not only our Savior; He Himself is our forgiveness and justification. Both forgiveness and justification are mercies from God to us, and these mercies are aspects of the resurrected Christ. Today Christ in His resurrection is our forgiveness and our justification. Never consider forgiveness and justification as something apart from Christ. Both forgiveness and justification are aspects of Christ Himself as mercies from God to us, and these mercies are holy and faithful things.

Do you not regard forgiveness and justification as gifts that God has given to us? Do you not believe that this forgiveness and justification are holy and trustworthy things? To be sure, forgiveness and justification are gifts of God, and they certainly are holy and trustworthy things. If we have this understanding, we shall see that forgiveness and justification are not common. Rather, they are holy. Furthermore, they are faithful, sure, trustworthy.

I very much appreciate Paul's preaching of Christ in Acts 13. Through his preaching many were saved.

CONTINUING IN THE GRACE OF GOD

In 13:40 and 41 Paul spoke a word of warning: "Therefore beware, that what is spoken in the Prophets may not come upon you: Look, you despisers, and marvel, and vanish away; for I am doing a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though someone tells it to you in detail." Then as the people were going out of the synagogue, "they entreated that these words be

spoken to them on the next Sabbath" (v. 42). Verse 43 says, "When the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and the proselytes who were worshipping followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God." As in 2:10, the proselytes were Gentiles who were converted to Judaism (6:5). The grace of God, in which the Jews and proselytes who followed Paul and Barnabas were exhorted to continue, is the Triune God received and enjoyed by the believers and expressed in their salvation, change in life, and holy living.

We need to pay particular attention to the word "grace" in 13:43. We even need to analyze this grace. Although we may be familiar with this word, we need to realize that the grace in 13:43 is a compound formed of a number of elements. This grace is compounded of all the holy and faithful things.

If we would understand this, we need to see that verse 43 is part of the continuation from verse 34. In verse 34 we have the resurrected Christ as the holy and faithful things. According to both the promise and prophecy of the Old Testament, these holy and faithful things are mercies. We have pointed out that these mercies are different aspects of what Christ is. In verse 43 the expression is changed from "the holy and faithful things" to "grace." God has given us the resurrected Christ as the holy and faithful things, and we have believed in Him and have received all these holy and faithful things. But what do we experience in our daily life? We experience the compound, all-inclusive grace, which is the processed Triune God, the very God who went through the processes of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection. This is the reason Paul persuaded the believers to continue in the grace of God.

To continue in the grace implies that we have already received this grace. Having received the grace of God, we now need to continue in it. Actually, the believers received the holy and faithful things spoken of in verse 34. Then these holy and faithful things become the grace of God in

verse 43. Hence, the grace of God is compounded of all the holy and faithful things.

REJECTED BY THE JEWS

Unworthy of Eternal Life

In 13:44-52 we see that Paul and Barnabas were rejected by the Jews. Verses 44 through 46 say, "And on the coming Sabbath almost all the city was gathered together to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and contradicted the things spoken by Paul, blaspheming. And Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly and said, It was necessary for the word of God to be spoken to you first; since you thrust it away and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles." To thrust away the word of God proves that such a one, by his own judgment, is unworthy of eternal life.

In his preaching as recorded in this chapter Paul did not speak of eternal life. Rather, he spoke of the Son of God, the Savior, the holy and faithful things, and the grace of God. But now, with regard to the Jews who were rejecting them, Paul and Barnabas said that they judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. This is a strong proof that the totality of all that Paul preached concerning the resurrected Christ, the Son of God, the Savior, the holy and faithful things, and the grace of God is eternal life.

If we would have a proper understanding of eternal life in 13:43, we need adequate spiritual experience. From our experience we know that eternal life is the Savior, the firstborn Son of God, the holy and faithful things, and the all-inclusive grace. When the Jews rejected the word spoken by Paul and Barnabas, they judged themselves unworthy of eternal life, which is the Savior, the Son of God, the holy and faithful things, and the grace of God.

A Light of the Gentiles

In 13:47 Paul said to the rejecting Jews, "For so the Lord has commanded us: I have set you for a light of the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation unto the

remotest part of the earth." This word is a quotation from Isaiah 49:6, which refers to Christ as God's Servant, whom God makes a light to the Gentiles so that His salvation may reach to the end of the earth. The Apostle Paul, because he was one with Christ in carrying out God's salvation in Christ, applied this prophetic word to himself in his ministry of gospel preaching for the turning of the gospel from the Jews, because of their rejection, to the Gentiles. In His ministry on earth the Lord expressed the same thing to the stubborn Jews in Luke 4:24-27.

Those Appointed to Eternal Life

Acts 13:48 continues, "And the Gentiles, hearing this, rejoiced and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." The Greek word translated "appointed" also may be rendered "ordained." To reject the gospel is evidence of one's being unworthy of eternal life (v. 46); to believe it is proof of one's being appointed, or ordained, by God to eternal life. God's ordination or predestination for man's salvation is sovereignly of Himself. However, He still leaves man to his own free will. Whether man will believe or reject His salvation is left up to man's own decision.

Whether or not we are appointed to eternal life is made evident by our rejecting or believing the gospel. If you receive the word of the gospel, this is a proof that God has appointed you to eternal life. But if a particular person rejects the word of the gospel, this is a proof that he is not worthy of eternal life, that he has not been appointed to eternal life. Concerning this, God has His authority and jurisdiction, and man has a free will. On the one hand, God has the power to assign, to appoint; on the other hand, man has the ability to accept or refuse.

In these verses we have the Savior, the Son of God, the holy and faithful things, the grace of God, and eternal life. When we enjoy eternal life, we enjoy the grace of God. When we enjoy this grace, we enjoy the holy and faithful things. When we enjoy the holy and faithful things, we enjoy the firstborn Son of God and the Savior.

The Disciples Made full of Joy and of the Holy Spirit

Acts 13:49-52 say, "And the word of the Lord was carried through the whole country. But the Jews incited the worshipping women of high standing and the chief men of the city, and stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and cast them out from their districts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them and came to Iconium. And the disciples were made full of joy and of the Holy Spirit." In verse 52 the Greek word translated "made full" is *pleroo*, which means to be filled inwardly. According to its usage in Acts, *pleroo* denotes to fill a vessel within, as the wind filled the house inwardly in 2:2. In 13:52 the disciples were filled inwardly and essentially with the Spirit for their Christian living. This infilling is of the Holy Spirit essentially for life, not for power economically. Joy, being a matter of life, not of power, proves this.

In addition to the Savior, the Son of God, the holy and faithful things, the grace of God, and eternal life in verses 34 through 48, we now have the Holy Spirit in verse 52. The Savior, the Son of God, the holy and faithful things, the grace of God, and the eternal life are compounded in the one, all-inclusive, life-giving Holy Spirit. This all-inclusive Spirit is now the all-inclusive "sandwich" for our experience and enjoyment. When we partake of this "sandwich," we enjoy eternal life, grace, the holy and faithful things, the firstborn Son of God, and the Savior.

In this message we have seen the way to study the Bible and to preach the gospel. First we have Christ Jesus, and eventually we have the Holy Spirit. We have Christ Jesus as the Savior, the firstborn Son of God, the holy and faithful things, grace, and eternal life. Now we see that all this is in the Holy Spirit, and we are made full of this Spirit essentially. Thank the Lord that within the all-inclusive Holy Spirit we have forgiveness, justification, sanctification, righteousness, holiness, power, strength, authority, life, and light. Praise the Lord for all that is included in the all-inclusive Spirit!

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE THIRTY-NINE

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(5)

Scripture Reading: Acts 14:1-28

A BOOK OF GOD'S ECONOMY

It is not my burden in this Life-study of Acts to cover all the minor points contained in this long book. For example, I am not burdened to speak on such a matter as David being a man according to God's heart. Rather, my burden in this Life-study is to cover all the crucial points regarding God's New Testament economy. In other words, I am concerned with all the things in Acts that bear a dispensational significance.

I do not use the word "dispensational" to refer to an age or to God's way of dealing with people during a certain period of time. Rather, in these messages the word "dispensation" denotes the divine arrangement in God's eternal economy. In the book of Acts there is much to see concerning this divine arrangement. Acts, therefore, is a book of God's economy. Many Christians do not have this understanding of Acts. Acts is not merely concerned with acts. This is a book showing us God's dispensation, God's economy, God's arrangement in His eternal economy. My burden in these Life-study Messages is to cover the matter of God's economy in the book of Acts.

As I come to a particular chapter in Acts, my goal is to see something concerning the divine arrangement of God's economy in that chapter. This is my goal as we come to chapter fourteen. It may seem that in this chapter we cannot see anything concerning the divine arrangement in

God's economy. But if we study this chapter carefully, we shall be able to see some matters related to this divine arrangement.

TO ICONIUM

Acts 14:1 says, "Now it came about in Iconium that they entered together into the synagogue of the Jews and spoke in such a way that a great multitude believed, both of Jews and of Greeks." As in 13:5 and 14, they did not go to attend the Jewish synagogue gathering, but to take advantage of that gathering to announce the word of God's grace. Verse 2 continues, "But the Jews who disobeyed stirred up and poisoned the minds of the Gentiles against the brothers." Here the Greek word rendered "minds" literally means "souls."

The Word of God's Grace

Acts 14:3 goes on to say, "Therefore they stayed a considerable time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who testified to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done through their hands." As we have pointed out, the Lord's grace is the Triune God received and enjoyed by the believers and expressed in their salvation, change in life, and holy living.

As the Lord testified to the word of His grace, He granted signs and wonders to be done through the hands of Paul and Barnabas. Wonders and signs are not part of God's central testimony of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ; neither are they part of His full salvation. Rather, signs and wonders are only evidences that what the apostles preached and ministered was absolutely of God, not of man.

The phrase "the word of His grace" denotes certain dispensational points. In the synagogues the Jewish people did not read the Old Testament in order to know the word of the Lord's grace. Rather, they read the Scriptures in order to know the word of God's law, a word belonging to the old dispensation, to the former divine arrangement of God's economy. But the word of the Lord's

grace replaces the law. The minds of the Jewish people in the synagogues were occupied with the law. But Paul preached Christ as grace to them. They edified the new believers by testifying the word of life and the word of the Lord's grace. The word "testified" in verse 3 implies that the word of grace already existed and that it had already been preached. Because the word of grace had been preached, testimony was borne to it.

The Word of Grace in the Old Testament

The apostles could testify of the word of the Lord's grace even though they had only the Old Testament. Can we find the word of grace in the Old Testament? Instead of finding the word of grace, the Jewish people paid attention to the word of the law with all the commandments. What they had was the word of God's law, not the word of the Lord's grace. Nevertheless, the word of the Lord's grace existed already in the Old Testament. This made it possible for the apostles to testify concerning it.

Let us consider some examples of the word of the Lord's grace found in the Old Testament. Consider Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Here we see that the seed of the woman will bruise the serpent's head. Is this not a word of the Lord's grace? Certainly it is. After Adam and Eve had eaten of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they tried to hide from God. The voice of the Lord sounded out to Adam and said, "Where art thou?" (Gen. 3:9). Adam and Eve were frightened, perhaps thinking that God would sentence them to death. But instead of speaking a word of condemnation or judgment, the Lord spoke a word of grace. In Genesis 3:15 He condemned the serpent and gave Adam and Eve a word of grace. Adam and Eve must have been very happy when they heard the Lord's word in Genesis 3:15. They must have hated the serpent, and now the Lord was telling them that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent. This surely is a word of grace.

Another example of a word of grace found in the Old Testament is Genesis 12:2 and 3, where God says to Abraham, "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing... and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." This certainly is not a word of law; it is a word of grace. The Jews in the synagogues were spiritually blind and could not see the word of the Lord's grace in the Old Testament.

Other examples of the word of the Lord's grace are found in the book of Isaiah. Consider Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." This is a word of grace. Another word of grace is in Isaiah 9:6: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." This also is an example of the many words of the Lord's grace in the Old Testament.

The Preaching of Peter and Paul

We have seen that in chapter thirteen of Acts Paul applied the "holy and faithful things of David" to the resurrected Christ (vv. 33-35). Paul understood these as referring to Christ in resurrection. Who other than Paul would be able to understand that the holy and faithful things of David refer to the resurrected Christ? To be sure, Paul was the best "miner," the one most able to dig into the depths of the Old Testament in order to find the riches of the word of the Lord's grace.

In Acts 2 Peter gave an excellent message concerning the resurrected Christ. When you read chapter two of Acts, you may be quite impressed with Peter's message. But have you previously had an adequate appreciation of Paul's preaching in Acts 13? Many readers of Acts do not appreciate this message properly because they have not seen what is revealed in it concerning Christ in resurrection. Yes, Peter's preaching in chapter two is excellent but it is somewhat superficial. But Paul's preaching in Acts 13 is very deep and marvelous.

In his preaching in Acts 13 Paul indicates that in resurrection Christ became the firstborn Son of God. He applies Psalm 2:7 to the resurrected Christ to indicate that to Christ resurrection was a birth. We may not realize that Christ's resurrection was His birth. Have you ever heard this? According to the Bible, in resurrection Christ in His humanity was begotten of God to be His firstborn Son. Whereas the only begotten Son of God is for the embodiment of the divine life, the firstborn Son of God is for the propagation of this divine life. Actually, we were born with Christ in His resurrection. In this sense, therefore, Christ's resurrection was a universal birth. The point we are emphasizing here is that Paul dug out from the Old Testament the truth that Christ in His resurrection was born to be the propagating factor of the divine life. In resurrection He was born to be the firstborn Son of God for the propagating reproduction of the divine life.

In his "mining" of the Word Paul also found that Christ in His resurrection became all the holy and faithful things, the trustworthy and sure things, of David. Paul realized that "the sure mercies of David" (Isa. 55:3) refer to the Christ in His resurrection. Today some enjoy singing Psalm 89:1: "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations." However, those who sing this psalm may not have an adequate understanding of what mercy is. They may think that mercy is simply a feeling of pity that God has towards us. But according to Paul's understanding, the mercies of the Lord are Christ in His second birth, that is, Christ in His resurrection. Paul's digging into the Word is marvelous, and we admire his study of the Scriptures. In digging into the Word no one can compare with him. In Acts 13 Paul preached the all-inclusive Christ.

For generations the Jews read the Old Testament in the synagogues. But what they heard was the word of God's commandment, not the word of the Lord's grace. However, when the Lord Jesus proclaimed the New Testament jubilee in Luke 4, He selected a word of grace from the book of Isaiah.

We need to see the significance of the expression "the word of His grace" in Acts 14:3. This phrase is a strong indication of a change of dispensation, of a change of God's arrangement in His economy.

In chapter thirteen Paul's preaching to the Jews was mainly based on the revelation in the Old Testament concerning Christ. His preaching in chapter fourteen however, is to the Gentiles. As we consider this chapter, we shall see Paul's wisdom in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. His preaching to the Gentiles in this chapter is based not on the revelation of the Old Testament concerning Christ; it is based on God's creation.

TO LYSTRA AND DERBE OF LYCAONIA

The Reaction of the Crowds

When the apostles became aware of a "hostile intention of both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers to treat them outrageously and to stone them" (v. 5), they "fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding country; and there they were bringing the good news" (vv. 6-7). Paul saw a certain lame man and said to him, "Stand upright on your feet! And he leaped up and walked" (v. 10). According to verses 11 and 12, "when the crowds saw what Paul did, they lifted up their voice in Lycaonian, saying, The gods have become like men and have come down to us! And they called Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, since he was the leading speaker." The Latin equivalent of Zeus, the leading god in Greek mythology, and Hermes, the messenger of the gods, is Jupiter and Mercury respectively. In verse 12 the Greek words rendered "the leading speaker" literally mean "the leader of the discourse." In verse 13 we are told that "the priest of Zeus, whose temple was before the city, brought bulls and garlands to the gates, and wanted to sacrifice with the crowds."

The Reaction of the Apostles

When Barnabas and Paul heard this, "they tore their

garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men of like feeling with you, and bring good news to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all the things in them" (vv. 14-15). The "vain things" here refer to idols and idolatry. Here Paul and Barnabas were saying, "Do not regard us as gods and worship us! We are men like you. You should turn from these vain things, these idols, to the living God, who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all things in them." Here we see that Paul's preaching to these Gentiles is based on God's creation.

The Difference in Paul's Preaching of the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles

In verse 16 Paul and Barnabas went on to say that God "in the generations gone by allowed all the nations to go their ways." Then in verse 17 they uttered a touching word, a word to touch the hearts of the listeners: "And yet He did not leave Himself without witness, doing good, giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness." This was very good gospel preaching. It was based on God's creation, and eventually it touched the hearts of the hearers. This word is brief, but it is revealing and touching.

We all need to learn of Paul in the preaching of the gospel. In this chapter he did not tell stories. Rather, he gave a brief message that unveiled God as the creator of the entire universe. He also spoke an inspiring word that touched the heart of the people. Paul seemed to be saying, "Throughout the generations, God allowed you to go your own way. He did not punish you, but He did many good things for you. He gave you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, and He filled your hearts with food and gladness." Let us all learn of Paul and follow his way of preaching the gospel.

In chapter thirteen of Acts Paul preached according to the Old Testament known for generations by the Jewish

people. Instead of pointing out God's creation and the good things God did for them, he spoke to them concerning Christ in resurrection. From this we see that if we are preaching the gospel to those who know the Old Testament, there is no need for us to tell them that God is the Creator. If we say this, they may reply, "We already know that God is the Creator. We are able to teach you concerning this."

It is very important for us to see that Paul's preaching of the gospel in chapter fourteen is different from his preaching in chapter thirteen. Whereas he was speaking to Jews in chapter thirteen, he was preaching to Gentiles in chapter fourteen. In preaching to them, he told them that God is the Creator and that He has always been good to them, giving them rain and harvests so that their hearts might be filled with joy. Here we see that Paul preached the gospel in a wise and excellent way.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FORTY

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(6)

Scripture Reading: Acts 14:21-28

In this message we shall consider 14:21b-28.

ESTABLISHING THE DISCIPLES AND APPOINTING ELDERS IN EVERY CHURCH

After Paul and Barnabas brought the good news to the city of Derbe and made a considerable number of disciples (vv. 20-21a), "they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch" (v. 21b). This is not the Antioch from which they were sent out on this journey of ministry (13:1); rather, it is the Antioch in Pisidia, the Antioch in Asia Minor.

Establishing the Souls of the Disciples

Acts 14:22 says that Paul and Barnabas were "establishing the souls of the disciples, and entreating them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God." Here their concern was not for the spirits of the disciples but for their souls. Man's soul is composed of man's mind, emotion, and will. To establish the souls of the disciples is to establish them in their mind, that they may know and understand the Lord and the things concerning Him (1 Cor. 2:16; Phil. 3:10); in their emotion, that they may love the Lord and have a heart for the Lord's interest (Mark 12:30; Rom. 16:4); and in their will, that they may be strong to remain with the Lord and do

the things that please the Lord (Acts 11:23; Col. 1:10; 1 Thes. 4:1). Therefore, to establish the souls of the disciples is to establish them in their mind, emotion, and will.

Entreating the Disciples to Continue in the Faith

According to Acts 14:22, Paul and Barnabas entreated the disciples to continue in the faith. In 13:43 they appealed to the believers to continue in the grace of God, but here they entreated them to continue in the faith. To continue in the faith is more difficult than to continue in the grace of God.

As in 6:7, the faith in 14:22 is the objective faith. It refers to what the believers believe in concerning Christ's Person and work. The entire revelation of the New Testament concerning Christ and His redemptive work is considered the faith of God's New Testament economy (Rom. 16:26).

If we understand what the faith is, then we shall realize that continuing in the faith is a deeper matter than continuing in the grace. To continue in the grace of God is to enjoy the Triune God. But in order to continue in the faith, we need not only to exercise our spirit to enjoy the Triune God, but we also need to exercise our minds to study the New Testament revelation, all of which is included in the objective faith.

Today many Christians do not know what is the entire revelation of the New Testament concerning God's economy. How poor is the situation concerning this! If we do not know what the objective faith is, we certainly cannot continue in it.

The apostles' entreaty in 14:22 is an improvement over that in 13:43. We have seen that in 13:43 the believers were persuaded to continue in the grace of God; that is, they were encouraged to continue in the enjoyment of the Triune God as grace. Now in 14:22 they are entreated to continue in the faith; that is, they are encouraged to know and continue in the full revelation concerning God's New Testament economy, a matter that is very deep and profound.

The believers at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch had been believers less than a year. When Paul and Barnabas first visited those cities, churches were raised up. Then Paul and Barnabas left for other places and eventually returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. As we have seen, they entreated the disciples there to continue not only in the grace but also in the faith. The word about continuing in the grace of God was given in chapter thirteen to new converts. Immediately after they were saved, they were persuaded by the apostles to stay in the enjoyment of the Triune God. The believers at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch must have continued in the grace of God for some time. According to what is indicated in Acts 14, they must have learned quite much of God's New Testament economy during that period of time. What they learned became for them the knowledge of the faith. Based upon this, the apostles entreated them to continue in the faith.

Entering into the Kingdom of God through Many Tribulations A Kingdom of the Divine Life

In 14:22 we see that Paul and Barnabas told the disciples that "through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God." Many think that the kingdom of God is merely a sphere where God may rule over people as the King. According to this understanding, the kingdom of God is simply a realm where God rules over His people. I do not say that this understanding is wrong, but it is superficial and natural.

The kingdom of God was a main subject of the apostles' preaching in Acts (8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). It is not a material kingdom visible to human sight, but a kingdom of the divine life. It is the spreading of Christ as life to His believers to form a realm in which God rules in His life.

Christ as the Seed of Life Sown into the Believers

In the Life-study of Mark we have pointed out that the kingdom of God is the Savior Himself (Luke 17:21) as the

seed of life sown into His believers, God's chosen people (Mark 4:3, 26), and developing into a realm in which God may rule as His kingdom in His divine life. Its entrance is regeneration (John 3:5), and its development is the believers' growth in the divine life (2 Pet. 1:3-11). It is the church life today, in which the faithful believers live (Rom. 14:17), and it will develop into the coming kingdom as an inheritance reward (Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5) to the overcoming saints in the millennium (Rev. 20:4, 6). Eventually, it will consummate in the New Jerusalem as the eternal kingdom of God, an eternal realm of the eternal blessing of God's eternal life for all God's redeemed to enjoy in the new heaven and new earth for eternity (Rev. 21:1-4; 22:1-5, 14).

In Acts 14:22 Paul entreated the believers who were continuing in the faith to realize that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God. Do you think that Paul regarded the kingdom of God only as a realm where God's people are under His ruling, and that to enter into this realm we must pass through tribulation? Paul may have had the thought that the kingdom of God is a realm in which God rules over His people, but this certainly was not his main thought concerning the kingdom of God. We need to remember that Paul was entreating disciples who were somewhat advanced. They were continuing not only in the grace of God but also in the faith. The charge to continue in the faith is both deeper and higher than that to continue in the grace. Therefore, those whom Paul was entreating in 14:22 were somewhat learned in divine things. In telling them that they must enter the kingdom of God through much tribulation, Paul certainly regarded the kingdom as something more than an objective realm in which God rules as the King.

What, then, was Paul's main thought concerning the kingdom of God? If we would know this, we need to realize that according to the New Testament the kingdom of God is not a visible, material realm. Actually, the kingdom of God is a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. When He was questioned by the Pharisees about the kingdom, "He answered them and said, The kingdom of God does not

come with observation; nor will they say, Look, here! Or, There! For behold, the kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:20-21). As the context proves, the kingdom of God is the Savior Himself, who was among the Pharisees. Wherever the Savior is, there is the kingdom of God. This was the reason He could say that the kingdom was among the Pharisees. As the Lord's word in Luke 17:20 indicates, this kingdom does not come with observation; that is, it is spiritual, not material and visible.

In the four Gospels the Lord Jesus sowed Himself as the seed of the kingdom into His disciples. The development of this kingdom seed begins in Acts and continues in all the Epistles. This development reaches its consummation--the harvest--in the book of Revelation. According to the Lord's word and Paul's understanding, the kingdom of God is not a material realm. Rather, the kingdom is spiritual, divine, and even personal. The kingdom is Christ as the seed sown into the hearts of His chosen people. Our hearts are the soil into which the kingdom seed is sown and in which this seed develops. As we have pointed out, the seed of the kingdom is sown in the Gospels, it develops in Acts and the Epistles, and it consummates with the harvest in Revelation. This is the proper definition of the kingdom of God.

Entering into the Full Enjoyment of the Resurrected Christ as the Kingdom of God

Now that we have seen that the kingdom of God is Christ as the seed that is sown into us, develops, and consummates in a harvest, we need to ask what it means to enter into the kingdom. To enter into the kingdom of God is to enter into the full enjoyment of Christ as the kingdom. However, we may not understand what it means to enjoy Christ as the kingdom. The whole world opposes the entering of God's people into the full enjoyment of Christ as the kingdom. Judaism, for example, has been usurped and utilized by Satan to frustrate the believers from entering this enjoyment. Throughout the centuries, other forms of religion--Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam--have also been used by God's enemy to keep God's

people from entering into the full enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ as the kingdom of God.

Acts 1:3 tells us that through a period of forty days the resurrected Christ appeared to the apostles and spoke to them "the things concerning the kingdom of God." Peter and all of the one hundred and twenty had been brought to the Lord, and they had received the essential Spirit for their life, living, and existence. They were truly followers of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, in chapter one of Acts they had not yet entered into the full enjoyment of Christ as the kingdom of God, as God's ruling realm. It was still necessary for them to enter into the realm of the full enjoyment of the resurrected Christ as God's kingdom. On the day of Pentecost Peter and all the others surely entered into this realm--the realm of the full enjoyment of the resurrected and ascended Christ as the sphere in which God rules over His people. As Peter was preaching the gospel in Acts 2, we see with him and the other apostles a picture of the kingdom of God. In Acts 2 the one hundred and twenty were in the full enjoyment of the resurrected and ascended Christ as God's ruling realm. Such a realm is the kingdom of God.

Very soon after the believers entered into the full enjoyment of Christ as the kingdom of God, the Jewish religion came in to frustrate this enjoyment. If in chapters three, four, and five, Peter, John, and the other believers had shown any weakness, they would have lost the full enjoyment of the resurrected Christ, and as a result they would have missed the kingdom of God.

In the light of what we have seen concerning the kingdom of God, let us now come back to Acts 14 and ask if the disciples whom Paul was entreating had entered into the realm of the full enjoyment of Christ as the kingdom of God. No, those believers had not yet entered into that enjoyment; they were still on the way. Therefore, Paul charged them to enter into the realm of the full enjoyment of the resurrected and ascended Christ as the kingdom of God. Here he seemed to be saying, "I have

preached to you the resurrected Christ as the holy and faithful things, as the grace of God, as eternal life, and even as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. The full enjoyment of grace, eternal life, and the Spirit is a realm, and this realm is God's kingdom. You have not yet entered into this realm--you are on the way. Therefore, I entreat you through many tribulations to enter into the kingdom of God. You should expect opposition and be prepared for it. You will face much tribulation. But through all these tribulations you must endeavor to enter into the realm of the full enjoyment of the resurrected and ascended Christ as the kingdom of God. When you have the enjoyment of such a Christ, you will be under the divine rule. Then you will become the kingdom of God, which is the proper church life."

Today's Church Life

Romans 14 indicates that today's church life is the kingdom of God. In this chapter Paul speaks concerning the church life. Then in verse 17 he says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Righteousness, peace, and joy all are the issue of the enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ as the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the church life, and the church life is a realm of the enjoyment of the resurrected and ascended Christ.

Appointing Elders in Every Church

Acts 14:23 says, "And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fastings, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed." The Greek words rendered "in every church" contain the preposition *kata* with the distributive usage--according to church. The phrase "in every church" in 14:23 equals "in each city" in Titus 1:5. The comparison of these phrases indicates not only that the jurisdiction of a local church is that of the city in which it is located, but also that in one city there should be only one church. The eldership of a local church should cover the entire city where that church is. Such a unique eldership in a city

preserves the unique oneness of the Body of Christ from damage. One city should only have one church with one eldership. This practice is illustrated, beyond any question and doubt, by the clear pattern in the New Testament (Acts 8:1; 13:1; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2 Rev. 1:11), and it is an absolute prerequisite for the maintenance of proper order in a local church.

All the churches in which the elders were appointed respectively by the apostles in Acts 14:23 were established within less than one year. Hence, the elders appointed in these churches could not have been well matured. They must have been considered elders because they were comparatively the most matured among the believers. They were not voted in by their congregation; they were appointed by the apostles according to their maturity of life in Christ. They were charged by the apostles to care for the leadership and shepherding in their churches.

BACK TO ANTIOCH, ENDING THE FIRST JOURNEY

Having Been Commended to the Grace of God

According to 14:26, from Attalia Paul and Barnabas "sailed away to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled." We have pointed out that this grace is the resurrected Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) to bring the processed God in resurrection into us to be our life and life supply that we may live in resurrection. Thus, grace is the Triune God becoming life and everything to us. It was by this grace that Saul of Tarsus, the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15-16), became the foremost apostle laboring more abundantly than all the apostles (1 Cor. 15:10). His ministry and living by this grace were an undeniable testimony to Christ's resurrection. The grace that motivated him and operated in him was not some matter or some thing. Rather, it was a living Person, the resurrected Christ, the embodiment of God the Father becoming the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, who dwelt in him as his everything.

A Gathering for Fellowship

Acts 14:27 and 28 conclude, "And having arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and that He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed with the disciples no little time." In verse 27 we have the end of Paul's first ministry journey, which began in 13:4.

When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Antioch, they gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them. This gathering was for fellowship regarding God's move in the spreading of His gospel; it was not for a report of duty.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FORTY-ONE

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(7)

Scripture Reading: Acts 15:1-34

Chapter fifteen of Acts is very crucial in relation to God's dispensation, God's economy. As we consider this chapter, we shall not pay attention to minor points, as many others have done. Rather, we shall concentrate on the important points concerning dispensational matters.

Acts 15:1-33 records trouble that arose concerning circumcision. In verses 1 through 21 we have an account of a conference of the apostles and elders held in Jerusalem. Then in verses 22-33 we have a description of the solution. In this message we shall begin to consider 15:1-33.

A HERESY CONCERNING CIRCUMCISION

Acts 15:1 says, "And certain men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." The men who came down from Judea had a strong purpose to exercise Judaic influence on the Gentile believers.

The claim that unless one is circumcised according to the custom of Moses he cannot be saved is an annulling of the faith in God's New Testament economy, and it is a real heresy. Hence, the "certain men" who taught the Christian brothers this heresy might have been those who were considered by Paul false brothers in Galatians 2:4.

Circumcision was an outward ordinance inherited by the Jews from their forefathers, beginning from Abraham (Gen. 17:9-14). This ordinance made the Jews distinct and

separate from the Gentiles. Circumcision became a dead traditional formality, a mere mark on the flesh without any spiritual significance, and it became a great obstacle to the spread of God's gospel according to His New Testament economy (Gal. 2:3-4; 6:12-13; Phil. 3:2).

Circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and a particular diet are the three strongest ordinances according to the law of Moses that caused the Jews to be distinct and separate from the Gentiles, who are regarded by them as unclean. All these scriptural ordinances of the Old Testament dispensation became an obstacle to the spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles according to God's New Testament dispensation (Col. 2:16). To be circumcised in God's New Testament economy is to make Christ of no profit to the believers (Gal. 5:2).

Acts 15:1 speaks of the custom of Moses. To keep the custom of Moses, that is, to practice the outward ordinances of the law, is not only to nullify the grace of God and make Christ's death of no effect (Gal. 2:21), but also to bring the believers, whom Christ has set free, back to the slavery of law (Gal. 5:1; 2:4).

PAUL AND BARNABAS CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

The teaching that one must be circumcised in order to be saved annuls Christ's redemption, God's grace, and the entire New Testament economy of God. Therefore, Paul and Barnabas could not tolerate this heresy, and they "had no little dissension and discussion" (Acts 15:2) with those who had come down from Judea and taught it to the Christian brothers. In verse 2 Paul and Barnabas were contending for the faith (Jude 3) against one of the greatest heresies so that the truth of the gospel might remain with the believers (Gal. 2:5).

JERUSALEM, THE SOURCE OF THE PROBLEM

Actually, the problem of this heretical teaching should have been solved by Peter and James in Jerusalem. That heresy should never have reached Antioch. Before those

heretical teachers went to Antioch, they must have spread their teaching in Jerusalem. But there is no indication that Peter and James did anything to deal with that heresy.

The Responsibility of Peter and James

The source of the trouble described in Acts 15 was Jerusalem. The first group of apostles and elders in Jerusalem should have taken care of this heretical teaching before it had the opportunity to spread to the Gentile churches. The fact that it was not dealt with in Jerusalem indicates that there were certain shortcomings with Peter and James. They must be held responsible for the situation. By the time this heresy spread to Antioch, it was too late for Paul and Barnabas to deal with it. This made it necessary for them to go up to Jerusalem in order to touch the source of the problem.

As we read the book of Acts, we may not have an accurate concept concerning Peter and James. We may regard Peter and James too highly. We may uplift Peter too much, and consider James very godly and pious. If we have such a concept of Peter and James, we shall not have the proper view of the situation recorded in chapter fifteen. In other words, because of our inaccurate concept and understanding, we shall not have the proper insight into the heart of the problem in Acts 15. Actually, the heart of the problem is not with the heretical Judaizers that went down to Antioch; it is with Peter and James. To say this is fair.

Peter was present in Acts 1 when the Lord Jesus gave the apostles further preparation for their ministry. As part of that preparation, He said to them, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the remotest part of the earth" (1:8). Here the Lord appointed them to be His witnesses not only to those in Jerusalem and Judea and to the people of mixed blood in Samaria, but also to the remotest part of the earth, indicating all the lands of the Gentiles. The Lord's word is very clear. If James, a flesh brother of the

Lord Jesus, was not present when this word was spoken, he certainly must have been familiar with it. Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, came to know this word. Surely James knew about it before Luke did. Peter and James should have taken the Lord's word concerning being witnesses to the remotest part of the earth as the basis to deal with the heretical teaching that the Gentiles must be circumcised in order to be saved. Since the Lord had spoken this word, there was no need for discussion or argument. Peter and James should have done a thorough job to eliminate the heretical teaching, killing it at the source in Jerusalem.

If we are fair-minded and have the proper insight as we read chapter fifteen, we shall realize that the trouble was due to the negligence of Peter and James. They did not do their duty; they did not carry out their responsibility. As a result, this heretical teaching existed in Jerusalem and was even prevailing there. If it had not been prevailing in Jerusalem, how could it have spread to Antioch? In ancient times communication to a faraway city was very slow. Hence, it was a great matter for something to spread from Jerusalem to Antioch.

Not Guarding the Truth

The Judaizers were so zealous that, in spite of the difficulty in traveling, they went down to Antioch for the purpose of spreading their heretical teaching. They boldly taught the people, saying, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (15:1). As we have pointed out, this kind of teaching nullifies the entire New Testament. It nullifies Christ's redeeming death, His resurrection, His ascension, and everything He taught.

It is very difficult to understand how Peter and James could have tolerated such a heresy in Jerusalem. If we read Galatians 2 along with Acts 15, we shall be helped to understand what the situation was at that time. Peter and James deserve to be blamed for the problem, for they did not guard the truth and contend for it adequately. Because

of this shortage, the problem of heresy existed in Jerusalem and then spread to the Gentile churches.

GOING UP TO THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS IN JERUSALEM

According to 15:2, "Paul and Barnabas had no little dissension and discussion" with the Judaizers. We should not think that Paul was too strong in having dissension as well as discussion. The situation made dissension necessary. How could Paul agree with the heretical teaching that the Gentiles could not be saved unless they were circumcised? He had to raise up dissension with those who taught this heresy.

Because of the dissension with the heretical teachers, Paul and Barnabas and certain others were appointed "to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this question" (15:2). According to verse 26, Paul and Barnabas were regarded as those who had "given up their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." The church in Antioch decided to send them to Jerusalem.

It was not because Jerusalem was the headquarters of God's move, nor because the church in Jerusalem was the head church controlling other churches, that Paul, Barnabas, and certain others went to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. It was because Jerusalem was the source from which the heretical teaching concerning circumcision came. In order to solve the problem and uproot the trouble, they needed to go to the source. According to God's New Testament economy, there is no headquarters for His move on earth and no head church, like the Church in Rome, that controls other churches. The headquarters of God's move in His New Testament economy is in the heavens (Rev. 4:2-3; 5:1), and the One who rules over all the churches is Christ the Head of the church (Col. 1:18; Rev. 2:1).

Acts 15:3 and 4 say, "They therefore, having been sent forward by the church, passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, telling in detail the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brothers. And when

they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them." The going up to Jerusalem of Paul, Barnabas, and certain others was the move of the church, not the move of themselves as individuals. They did not act individualistically apart from the church, but corporately in and with the church. This was the move of the Body of Christ.

Acts 15:5 says, "But certain men from the sect of the Pharisees who had believed rose up from among them, saying, It is necessary to circumcise them and to charge them to keep the law of Moses." The Pharisees were the strictest religious sect of the Jews (26:5), formed about 200 B.C. They were proud of their superior sanctity of life, devotion to God, and knowledge of the Scriptures. As we have pointed out, the teaching of the Pharisees in 15:5 nullified God's New Testament economy.

Suppose you were an elder in the church in Jerusalem at the time of Acts 15. What would you have done with those who taught that believers in Christ must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses? Would you have risen up and said boldly that such heretical teaching is not allowed in the church? This is what the elders in Jerusalem should have done.

The most influential elder in the church in Jerusalem was James. There is a hint concerning this in 12:17, where Peter says, "Report these things to James and the brothers." This indicates that James was a leader among the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Furthermore, in Galatians 2:12 Paul speaks of certain ones coming from James. Instead of saying that they came from Jerusalem, Paul said that they came from James. This shows that James was very prominent in Jerusalem, that he was the leading elder.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ELDERS REGARDING HERESY

At this point, I would like to ask a question of those who are elders in the churches today. Suppose certain ones in the church begin to teach that the believers today should be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. What

would you do? In a proper way you should say, "We ask you not to speak in the church meetings and not to spread this teaching among the saints. You are teaching heresy. If you continue to spread this heresy, we will not allow you to remain in the church."

To tell believers to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses nullifies God's New Testament economy. It also nullifies the death of Christ. It makes both Christ and His death of no effect. This is exactly what Paul says concerning such teaching in Galatians 2:21. In this verse Paul tells us that he does not nullify the grace of God.

Any who teach the heresy that believers must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses should be told to have a change in their understanding. Otherwise, the church cannot receive them. The church can receive only those who believe in our Savior Jesus Christ, in His redeeming death, in His resurrection and ascension, and in God's New Testament economy. The law of Moses is dispensationally over.

Acts 15:6 says, "And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to see about this matter." This verse mentions the apostles and the elders. The apostles are universal, and the elders are local.

Why were Paul and Barnabas sent from Antioch to Jerusalem, when the problem they were facing was in Antioch? They went to Jerusalem because the source of the problem was there. We may say that the "flow" of the problem reached Antioch, but the source was in Jerusalem. It would not have been right to deal with the flow without dealing with the source. Even if the flow had been dealt with, the source would still have remained. Therefore, they went to Jerusalem to deal with the source; they did not go there because the church in Antioch regarded the church in Jerusalem as the head church.

NO HIERARCHY BUT THE PRESIDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Likewise, Paul and Barnabas did not regard Peter and James as high officials. If such had been the case, then a

hierarchy would have been in existence. But there was not any hierarchy, and Peter in particular was not a "pope," as Catholicism falsely claims.

Here in Acts 15 we have the unique conference held by the apostles of the universal church and the elders of the local church in Jerusalem. Both were the leading ones in the Lord's New Testament move on earth. There was no chairman. This conference was under the presiding of the Spirit (v. 28), the pneumatic Christ, the Head of the church (Col. 1:18) and the Lord of all (Acts 10:36). Acts 15:7 says, "Much discussion had taken place." This indicated that everyone in the conference had the freedom to speak. The decision made was based on the testimony shared by Peter (vv. 7-11), the facts related by Barnabas and Paul (v. 12), and the concluding word given by James, who was the leading one among the apostles and elders in Jerusalem (12:7; 21:18; Gal. 1:19; 2:9) because of the influence he exercised over the believers through his piety.

A RECORD OF FELLOWSHIP

Some think that the conference in Acts 15 was the first church council. This is a mistaken understanding. Here we do not have a council but a gathering for fellowship, with the Holy Spirit as the One presiding. Later, it was said, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..."(v. 28). There was no voting, and there was neither autocracy nor democracy. Autocracy and democracy should not exist in the church life. Instead, in the church life there should simply be fellowship in the Spirit. Acts 15 is a record of this kind of fellowship.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FORTY-TWO

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(8)

Scripture Reading: Acts 15:1-34

Acts 15:1-34 records the trouble caused by those who insisted that one cannot be saved without being circumcised according to the custom of Moses (v. 1). Concerning this matter a conference of the apostles and elders was held in Jerusalem (vv. 1-21). In this message we shall consider what took place at this conference and what was the solution to the problem (vv. 22-33).

PETER'S TESTIMONY

The Cleansing of Our Hearts by Faith

"When much discussion had taken place, Peter rose up and said to them, Men, brothers, you know that from the early days God chose among you that through my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, the Knower of hearts, bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit even as also to us; and He made no distinction at all between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith" (vv. 7-9). Peter's word about the cleansing of our hearts by faith indicates that God does not care for outward legalistic ordinances which cannot cleanse man's inward being; rather, He cares for the inward cleansing of man's heart. This corresponds to the Lord's emphasis in Mark 7:1-23. The cleansing of man's heart can only be by the Holy Spirit with the divine life, not by outward ordinances of dead letters.

Testing God

In Acts 15:10 Peter continues, "Therefore why are you now testing God by placing a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" This yoke is the yoke of the law, which was a bondage under slavery (Gal. 5:1). The yoke in slavery in Galatians 5:1 is the bondage of law, which makes the lawkeepers slaves under a binding yoke. To require people to keep the law of slavery not only enslaves them but also tests God. Even God could not and would not make man keep the law of letters.

Saved by Grace

In Acts 15:11 Peter goes on to say, "But through the grace of the Lord Jesus we believe that we are saved, in the same way also as they are." This grace comprises the Lord's Person and His redemptive work (Rom. 3:24). Peter and the Jewish believers were saved by this grace, not by keeping the law of Moses. As far as God's salvation is concerned, to keep the law means nothing either to the Jews or the Gentiles.

The Shortcomings of Peter's Testimony

According to 15:7, Peter spoke only after much discussion had taken place. Actually, Peter should not have allowed all that discussion. Immediately he should have said, "Brothers, let me remind you of what the Lord Jesus said to us. He told us that we would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and even unto the remotest part of the earth. Do you think that the Lord meant that we need to circumcise all the Gentiles? Certainly He did not mean this." If Peter had spoken in this way, those attending the conference would have listened to him.

Peter's speaking in 15:7-11 was good, but it was not strong enough. Why did he not refer to the Lord's word in 1:8? Why did he simply remind them that God had chosen that through him the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe? Peter should have said, "You know that from the early days the Lord Jesus told us that we should be

His witnesses even to the remotest part of the earth." In Acts 15 Peter may still have been somewhat fearful. He was not bold, and he did not exercise the authority assigned to him by the Head. If Peter had exercised this authority, he would have solved the problem and cut off the flow of the "poison" of heresy. He would have dealt with the very source of this flow. Peter, however, failed to do his job adequately.

In 15:8 Peter refers to God as the Knower of hearts. This is a rather weak expression. Peter should have said that God is the Planner of His economy, the One who formed His economy, His dispensation. Paul, who was bolder than Peter, spoke of God in this way in his Epistles. Was God's giving the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles only due to the fact that He knew their hearts? Was this the only reason that He cleansed their hearts by faith? Did the Lord give Peter the keys merely that God may come in to cleanse the hearts of the Gentiles? No doubt, Peter makes a number of good points here, but his presentation is too weak. This weakness may cause us to question whether he really knew God's economy adequately.

In 15:10 Peter asked, "Why are you now testing God?" Actually, they were not only testing God--they were nullifying God's economy. Once again, Peter's word in verse 10 was good, but it was still weak. Peter was the leading apostle, and the Lord had given him a measure of authority. However, in Acts 15 he did not exercise this authority. Nevertheless, we praise the Lord for Peter's testimony and fellowship.

We have pointed out that Peter should have reminded those at the conference of the Lord's word in 1:8. Peter should also have testified to them concerning the vision he saw in Joppa (10:9-16). He should have said, "Let me tell you what happened to me in Joppa. While I was praying, I saw a vision of a vessel like a great sheet in which were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and birds of heaven. Then the Lord told me to slay and eat. When I refused to do this, the Lord told me a second and a third time to slay and eat. The Lord told me that what God has cleansed I should not consider common. After seeing this

vision, I went to Caesarea. As I was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon those in the house." Peter should have testified concerning the Lord's word in 1:8, the vision he saw, and what happened in the house of Cornelius. Peter should have taken these things as the ground to tell those at the conference to forget about the law, circumcision, and the Levitical dietary regulations. But Peter lacked the boldness to do this.

When the Lord Jesus referred to the cases of the widow of Sarepta of Sidon and of Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4:25-27), implying that His gospel would turn to the Gentiles, those in the synagogue were filled with anger and wanted to kill Him. In contrast to the Lord in Luke 4, Peter was very cautious, not daring to mention the vision he had seen. The fact that Peter did not mention the vision given to him by the Lord may indicate not only that he was lacking in boldness but also that the atmosphere in Jerusalem was very heavy.

Actually when this heresy concerning circumcision arose at Jerusalem in the very beginning, Peter should have exercised the gift that the Lord had given him to clear up the cloudy situation in Jerusalem concerning God's New Testament economy, according to the revelation that the Lord had given him and the other apostles in Acts 1:8 and the vision he had received at Joppa in Acts 10 concerning the Gentiles. If he had done this, the Judaic heresy would have been cut off at the very beginning in Jerusalem and would not have spread to the churches in the Gentile world. But he failed to do this, so Paul had to rise up to perform the surgery to cut off the racial cancer that could have destroyed God's New Testament economy and killed the Body of Christ.

THE FELLOWSHIP GIVEN BY JAMES

When Peter finished his testimony, those attending the conference were silent. Then "they listened to Barnabas and Paul relating all the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them" (v. 12). Following this, we have the fellowship given by James (vv. 14-21).

His Use of the Old Testament

In 15:13-14 James said, after all were silent, "Men, brothers, listen to me. Simeon related how God first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name." Here the name "Simeon" denotes Simon (John 1:40, 42).

In verses 16 and 17 James quotes from the book of Amos to show that the words of the prophets agree with taking out of the Gentiles a people for God's name: "After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen; and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will erect it again, so that the rest of mankind may seek out the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom My name has been called." The tabernacle of David refers to the kingdom of Israel. To rebuild the tabernacle of David is to restore the kingdom of Israel.

Uplifting the Nation of Israel

The use of this Old Testament quotation by James uplifts the nation of Israel. In Acts 1:6 the apostles asked the Lord Jesus, saying, "Lord, are You at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?" The kingdom of Israel, which the apostles and other devout Jews were looking for, was a material kingdom. It differed from God's kingdom of life, which Christ is building up through the preaching of His gospel. When the apostles asked the Lord about the restoring of the kingdom of Israel, He replied, "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father has placed in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the remotest part of the earth" (vv. 7-8). Although the Lord had spoken such a word, James, in order to take care of the situation in Acts 15, uplifted the nation of Israel once again. The words "so that" in 15:17 indicate that first the Lord will rebuild the nation of Israel and then the Gentiles, the rest of mankind, will seek out the Lord.

A Prophecy concerning the Coming Age

Actually, the portion James quotes from the Old Testament does not apply to the situation in Acts 15. Rather, it is a prophecy related to the Lord's rebuilding the nation of Israel after His coming back. At that time, according to the prophecy, all the nations will seek after the Lord. A similar prophecy is found in Zechariah 8. According to that chapter, when the nation of Israel is restored, "many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord" (Zech. 8:22). If we study the Scriptures carefully, we shall see that such portions of the Word are not concerned with the present age of grace but with the time after the Lord's coming back. In the coming age the Lord will rebuild the fallen tabernacle of David; that is, He will restore the nation of Israel. Then the Gentiles will come to Israel in order to seek the Lord.

When we point out that the portion used by James in Acts 15 applies to the coming age, some may say, "You should not interpret the verses used by James in this way. Instead, you should only interpret it according to principle. Here James was saying that in principle sooner or later the Lord will take in the Gentiles." But concerning the situation in Acts 15 it is not adequate to say that sooner or later the Gentiles will come in. In this chapter James used a quotation from the Old Testament without discernment. He quoted verses that refer not to the present age but to the coming age. James, therefore, actually borrowed a quotation from the Old Testament.

Compared with the Use of the Old Testament by the Lord Jesus and Paul

At this point it is helpful to compare James' use of the Old Testament with that of the Lord Jesus in Luke 4. By citing the cases of the widow and of Naaman the Lord was indicating that God was about to set the nation of Israel aside and turn to the Gentiles. In referring to these cases the Lord Jesus was bold, and those in the synagogue were offended and wanted to put Him to death. James, by

comparison, was trying to please the Judaizers by telling them not that God would set the nation of Israel aside, but that He would first rebuild the nation of Israel and then turn to the Gentiles. If we compare James' use of the Old Testament with the Lord's, we shall see that James quotes the Scriptures in a very weak manner.

Like the Lord Jesus, Paul was also bold in his use of the Old Testament. Consider what he did in Acts 13. When the Jews rejected the word of the gospel, Paul said boldly, "It was necessary for the word of God to be spoken to you first; since you thrust it away and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles" (v. 46). Then Paul quotes Isaiah 49:6: "I have set you for a light of the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation unto the remotest part of the earth." As we have pointed out, this quotation refers to Christ as God's Servant, whom God makes a light to the Gentiles that His salvation may reach to the end of the earth. Because he was one with Christ in carrying out God's salvation, Paul applied this word to himself in his ministry of gospel preaching for the turning of the gospel from the Jews, because of their rejection, to the Gentiles. In His ministry on earth the Lord expressed the same thing to the stubborn Jews in Luke 4:24-27. In Acts 13 Paul did not say that they turned to the Gentiles because God had rebuilt the nation of Israel. On the contrary, he declared that they turned to the Gentiles because the Jews had rejected the word of God.

In Acts 15 James' quotation from the Old Testament was warmly welcomed. If James had been as strong as the Lord Jesus and Paul, quoting the proper portions from the Old Testament concerning God's setting aside Israel and visiting the Gentiles, the Judaizers would have opposed him strongly.

Our examination of James' use of the Old Testament should help us learn the proper way to study the Bible. We need to see into the depths of the written word. If we truly know the Bible, we shall rightly criticize James' quoting of the Old Testament. I really wonder why James didn't quote the Lord's clear and emphatic word in Acts 1:8

instead of quoting some indirect word from the Old Testament. This shows he was much more of the Old Testament and not so much of God's New Testament economy.

Giving His Judgment

In 15:19 and 20 James went on in fellowship to give his judgment: "Wherefore I judge that we do not harass those from the Gentiles who turn to God. But that we write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and fornication and what is strangled and blood." This word is much inferior to the charge Paul gave to the believers in chapters thirteen and fourteen. Suppose someone said to you, "Dear saints, you know that we are living in a crooked and perverted generation that is full of idol worship and fornication. I charge you to abstain from pollutions of idols, fornication, from anything that has been strangled and from blood." To be sure, the saints today would not be pleased to hear such an exhortation. Nevertheless, this was James' fellowship in Acts 15.

In verse 21 James gives the reason for his judgment concerning the matter: "For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who proclaim him in the synagogues, being read every Sabbath." Here we have the basis for James' fellowship. He tells us that in solving the problem caused by the heretical Judaizers we need to take care of the fact that the law of Moses is read in the synagogues every Sabbath. This is the reason James gives for charging the Gentiles to abstain from pollutions of idols, fornication, anything strangled, and blood. This solution could not have been satisfactory to Paul, who says in Galatians 2:19, "I through law have died to law that I might live to God." In contrast to such a word, James' fellowship causes the New Testament believers to return to considering the law. This indicates that the concluding word given by James was still under the influence of the Mosaic law, due to his heavy Judaic background. As we shall see, the influence of this background still remained even at the time Paul paid his last visit to Jerusalem (Acts 21:20-26).

According to what he says in his Epistle, James must have been very religious. It might have been due to this and his practical Christian perfection that he was reputed along with Peter and John to be a pillar, even the first, in the church at Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9). However, he was not strong in the revelation of God's New Testament economy in Christ, but was still under the influence of the background of the old Judaic religion--to worship God with ceremonies and live a life in the fear of God. This is proved by Acts 21:20-24 and James 2:2-11.

James 2:8-11 indicates that the Jewish believers at the time of James were still practicing and keeping the Old Testament law. This corresponds to the word in Acts 21:20 spoken by James and the elders in Jerusalem to Paul. James, the elders in Jerusalem, and many thousands of Jewish believers remained in a mixture of the Christian faith and the Mosaic law. They even advised Paul to practice such a semi-Judaic mixture (Acts 21:17-26). They were unaware that the dispensation of law was altogether over and that the dispensation of grace should be fully honored. They were also unaware that any disregard of the distinction between these two dispensations would be against God's dispensational administration and would be a great damage to God's economical plan for the building up of the church as the expression of Christ.

I feel very sorry that James' judgment was altogether based upon his piety, his godly living, as indicated by the items of idol worship, fornication, what has been strangled, and from blood, which he referred to; but not at all based upon the administration of God's New Testament economy. This shows he was altogether under the cloudy atmosphere of his Judaic background, not under the clear sky of God's New Testament economy.

THE SOLUTION

Acts 15:22-33 describes the solution to the problem. Actually, this solution was a compromise, but it was better than nothing.

Verses 23 through 29 give an account of the letter that

was written by those in Jerusalem and sent with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch. In verse 26 we are told that Barnabas and Saul were "men who have given up their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Literally, the Greek word rendered "lives" means "souls." This word refers not only to their lives, but also to their very being, which they had given up for the name of the Lord.

Verses 30 and 31 say, "So when they were dismissed, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the multitude together, they handed them the letter. And when they read it, they rejoiced at the consolation." On the one hand, the believers in Antioch rejoiced because it was not necessary for them to be circumcised. On the other hand, they still had to observe certain requirements of the law. The "fox" of the law had been buried, but the "tail" was still visible. The solution, therefore, was actually a compromise.

According to chapter eighteen of Acts, not even Paul was fully free from the Judaic influence. Verse 18 says, "Paul, having remained there yet a considerable number of days, took leave of the brothers and sailed away to Syria and with him Priscilla and Aquila, having shorn his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow." This was a private vow that could be performed in any place by the Jews for thanksgiving with the shearing of the hair. It differed from the Nazarite vow, which had to be carried out in Jerusalem with the shaving of the head. Paul was a Jew and he kept the vow, but he did not impose it on the Gentiles. According to the principle of his teaching concerning God's New Testament economy, Paul should have given up all the Jewish practices which belonged to the Old Testament dispensation. However, he still had such a private vow. I find it hard to believe that Paul, the writer of Romans and Galatians, could still keep this vow. In principle, Paul was wrong in this matter. Of course, he was not nearly as wrong as James was in Acts 21. As we shall see, the Lord did not tolerate Paul's joining those who had made a Nazarite vow.

The point we are emphasizing here is that the solution to the problem in Acts 15 was a compromise. The problem

was solved, and the turmoil was calmed. However, the root of the poison was not cut. Because the root was allowed to remain, it appears again in chapter twenty-one. The mixture we see in Acts 21 was already present in Acts 15. This is a religious mixture, a mixture of God's New Testament economy with the Judaic religion of the old dispensation. This mixture was the result of compromise. Because of this compromise, the problem in Acts 15 was not fully solved. Nevertheless, this partial solution was better than nothing.

LEARNING TO FACE TODAY'S COMPROMISING SITUATION

In principle, the situation today is the same as that in the book of Acts. There is still a great deal of compromise. Therefore, we are studying the Bible not merely to learn doctrine, but also to be warned and to be trained to face the present situation.

In 1964 I wrote some hymns on Christ being the Spirit. One day a friend of mine, who was a co-worker, said to me, "Yes, the New Testament does say that Christ is the Spirit. But if we teach this, Christians will not accept it. It is better for us not to teach that Christ is the Spirit." I said to this brother, "Justification by faith was recovered through Martin Luther. The Catholic Church was opposed to this. If Luther had decided not to teach justification by faith because the Catholic Church was not willing to accept it, how could there ever have been the recovery?"

Some who were once among us in the Lord's recovery have compromised Brother Nee's teachings. They know what he taught, but because they are afraid of traditional Christianity, they do not dare to teach the same thing. Instead, they compromise. In translating certain of Brother Nee's books, the translator has even changed some of his words in order not to be condemned.

In 1964 I was invited to speak, for the fourth or fifth time, to a particular Christian group in Dallas. My host warned me saying, "Brother Lee, please do not talk about the church. The people here will not accept your teaching

concerning the church. However, we welcome you to minister on Christ as life. We like this, and we are helped by it." Without saying either yes or no to this brother's request, I replied, "Brother, as long as I minister Christ as life, the issue will be the church. How can you ask me to minister Christ and expect that this will not issue in the church?" I went on to tell him that my ministry is a ministry of Christ, and the issue of this ministry will always be the church.

I spent a week ministering to that Christian group in Dallas. I did not speak on the church until the last night of the conference. My speaking spirit could no longer bear for me to be silent regarding the church. I did not care whether I would be invited back again. I knew I had to say a word about the church. When I asked those attending the meeting to turn to Romans 12, my host knew that I intended to speak concerning the Body of Christ, the church. Those who invited me were disappointed. Nevertheless, I went on to give a strong word concerning the church, and through that message someone was gained for the Lord's recovery.

All these cases teach us to beware of compromise. May we all learn from our study of Acts how to face today's compromising situation.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FORTY-THREE

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(9)

Scripture Reading: Acts 15:35--16:5

In this message we shall cover 15:35--16:5. Acts 15:35-39 records Paul's contention with Barnabas. In 15:40 we have the beginning of Paul's second ministry journey. In verses 40 and 41 Paul and Silas passed through Syria and Cilicia, and in 16:1-5 they went to Derbe and to Lystra.

THE CONTENTION WITH BARNABAS

In 15:36 Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return now and visit the brothers throughout every city in which we announced the word of the Lord, and see how they are getting along." Barnabas intended to take with them John who was called Mark, but Paul "did not consider it suitable to take with them this one who withdrew from them in Pamphylia and did not go with them to the work. And there arose a sharp contention, so that they separated from each other; and Barnabas, taking along Mark, sailed away to Cyprus" (vv. 38-39). Barnabas and Paul were men who had given up their lives for the name of the Lord (v. 26), yet immediately after their victory in contending for the faith against the heresy concerning circumcision, there arose such a sharp contention between them concerning a relative of one of them that they separated from each other.

The Responsibility of Barnabas

The responsibility for the problem should rest with

Barnabas, because after this incident he no longer appears in the divine record in Acts of the Lord's move in God's New Testament economy. The reason for his failure may have been his natural relationship with Mark, his cousin (Col. 4:10), who had left Barnabas and Paul in their first ministry journey in a negative way (Acts 13:13). Mark was later recovered to Paul's ministry (2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24), but not Barnabas.

Regarding Mark, Paul was very strict. Mark may have left during the first ministry journey because he was not able to bear the hardships of that evangelical work. However, Barnabas, whose name means son of encouragement (4:36), wanted to take Mark with them on the second journey. Barnabas who may have been a very kind and patient person, wanted to give Mark another opportunity. Furthermore, because Mark was Barnabas' cousin, he and Barnabas had a relationship in the flesh. Because Paul was strict in not letting Mark go on the second journey, there arose a sharp contention between Paul and Barnabas.

Lessons to Be Learned

We need to learn from the case of Paul's contention with Barnabas regarding Mark not to exercise our natural virtues in relation to the Lord's work. You may be very kind and patient, but when you come into the Lord's work, you need to forget your natural kindness and patience and take care of the strict, divine regulations and principles. You should not sacrifice the divine principles for the sake of your natural being. If you are naturally nice, kind, patient, and tolerant, this will cause problems in the Lord's work. If you hold on to such natural virtues, you will sacrifice the divine principles for the sake of your virtues.

In 15:35-39 we see something even worse than exercising our natural virtues in the Lord's work, and this is the serious matter of allowing a fleshly relationship to creep into this work. It is a terrible thing for this to take place. Barnabas was mistaken both in the matter of exercising his natural virtues in the Lord's work and

probably also in allowing the fleshly relationship with Mark to come into the work.

At the time of 15:35-39 Paul was not a young man. He certainly was one who had much experience in the Lord. Surely there must have been some basic principles involved with the question of taking Mark along with them on the second ministry journey, and Paul felt that he could not break these principles. Eventually, Barnabas went his way, taking Mark with him. After this, there is no further mention of Barnabas in the divine record of God's move in His New Testament economy. This indicates that Barnabas was wrong.

TO SYRIA AND CILICIA

Acts 15:40 and 41 say, "But Paul, having chosen Silas, went out, being commended to the grace of the Lord by the brothers. And he passed through Syria and Cilicia, establishing the churches." This was the start of Paul's second ministry journey, which ended in 18:22. The fact that Paul was commended to the grace of the Lord by the brothers indicates that he, and not Barnabas, had taken the right way.

TO DERBE AND LYSTRA

Circumcising Timothy

In 16:1-5 we see that Paul came to Derbe and Lystra. "And behold, a certain disciple was there named Timothy, a son of a believing Jewish woman, but of a Greek father, who was well attested by the brothers in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this one to go forth with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek" (vv. 1b-3). Paul's circumcising Timothy because of the Jews indicates the strong influence of the Judaic background that still remained among the Jewish believers. This disturbed and frustrated the move of the Lord's gospel.

In chapter fifteen of Acts the solution to the problem regarding circumcision was put in writing (15:20, 23-30),

and Paul carried this letter with him. Acts 16:4 indicates this: "Now as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem." Why, then, did Paul circumcise Timothy? Considering Timothy good material for the work, Paul wanted him to go forth with him (16:3). We are told that Paul "took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places." In circumcising Timothy Paul may have been exercising his wisdom to make the situation easier for him to preach the gospel. Otherwise there was no reason for Paul to have Timothy circumcised.

The Circumcision of Timothy Considered in the Light of the Book of Galatians

We need to consider Paul's circumcising of Timothy in Acts 16 in the light of what Paul says concerning circumcision in the book of Galatians. Galatians 2:1-3 say, "Then after a period of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus with me also. And I went up according to revelation, and I laid before them the gospel which I proclaim among the nations, but privately to those of reputation, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain. But not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised." These verses refer to what is recorded in Acts 15. In Acts 15 there is no mention of Titus, but in Galatians 2 Paul tells us that he took Titus with him to Jerusalem. Furthermore, Paul says that Titus was not compelled to be circumcised. Since Titus in Galatians 2 was not circumcised, why did Paul in Acts 16 circumcise Timothy when he was on his second ministry journey? Here we see that Paul acted in two ways. On the one hand, Titus was not circumcised; on the other hand, Paul had Timothy circumcised.

Galatians 5:2 says, "Behold, I Paul say to you that if you are circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing." How does this word apply to the circumcision of Timothy? Since Timothy was circumcised, did Christ profit him nothing?

In Galatians 5:4 Paul goes on to say, "You have been

brought to naught from Christ, you who are justified by law; you have fallen from grace." This is a serious word. To be brought to naught from Christ is to be reduced to nothing from Christ, deprived of all profit from Christ and so separated from Him, making Him void of effect.

In Galatians 6:14 Paul says, "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world." In this verse the "world" is not the world in general but the Jewish, religious world. As the following verse indicates, here Paul is saying that the religious world has been crucified to him, and he to the religious world. In Galatians 6:15 he goes on to explain, "For neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." As we have pointed out elsewhere, circumcision is an ordinance of the law, whereas the new creation is of the divine life with the divine nature.

Paul also speaks of circumcision in Galatians 5:6: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision, but faith operating through love." Here the word "avails" indicates force or practical power. Circumcision is merely an outward ordinance and has no power or life.

How can we reconcile Paul's having Timothy circumcised with what he says regarding circumcision in the book of Galatians? When he wrote Galatians, his attitude towards circumcision was altogether negative. In that Epistle he tells us that if we are circumcised Christ will profit us nothing, and that in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything. Since this was Paul's attitude toward circumcision, why did he have Timothy circumcised?

Paul's Flexibility

In chapter eighteen of Acts we see that he still had a Jewish vow (v. 18), a private vow that could be performed in any place by the Jews for thanksgiving, with the shearing of the hair. Paul knew that there were Jews in all the leading cities of Asia Minor. He realized that as he

traveled through these cities to work among the people, he would first carry out a work among the Jews. He may have thought that it would be a great frustration to his gospel work to have with him an uncircumcised young co-worker. Therefore, it may have been for the sake of his gospel work that Paul had Timothy circumcised. He may have done this in order to be able to carry out his work where the Jewish atmosphere and environment were still prevailing. However, when Paul went to Jerusalem to fight for the truth and against the heresy of circumcision, he purposely brought Titus with him, one who had not been circumcised.

As we study Acts 16 and Galatians 2 we may be impressed with Paul's flexibility. When he went to Jerusalem to fight against circumcision, he brought with him a co-worker who was not circumcised. Paul may have done this in order to show that he was strongly opposed to circumcision. As we have seen, Galatians 2:1-3 was included in the events of Acts 15. Then immediately after the conference in Acts 15, Paul, when he was about to go forth to preach the gospel on his second journey of ministry, took Timothy and had him circumcised. If we had been Silas, we might have said, "Paul, what are you doing? You are not stable. First you oppose circumcision, and now you are having Timothy circumcised." On Paul's behalf, however, we may say that he was being flexible, not unstable. His having Timothy circumcised may not have been wrong. The word he wrote in Galatians regarding neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availing anything may be interpreted as applying to the case of Timothy in Acts 16. We may understand this word to mean that Paul covered both the side of circumcision and the side of uncircumcision.

The Influence of Tradition

Once a tradition gets into people, it is very difficult to remove it. Furthermore, it is hard for people to escape the influence of a strong religious atmosphere. Paul was working in the Gentile world, mainly among the Greek community. But the Jews living in the different cities in

Asia Minor still maintained the Judaic atmosphere, and it was difficult even for Paul to be free from this influence.

Should Paul in Acts 16 have had Timothy circumcised? It can be said fairly that eventually the Lord will take the way of not circumcising anyone. The best we can say regarding Paul's having Timothy circumcised is that he was being flexible in a particular kind of environment.

A Dispensational Book

The book of Acts is very dispensational. If we do not have the insight that comes from knowing God's economy, God's dispensation, it will be difficult for us to understand this book. We praise the Lord that the book of Acts is being opened to us so that we may see all the crucial dispensational points contained in it. Seeing these matters will help us in our study of the New Testament.

The Churches Strengthened and Increasing

Acts 16:4 and 5 say, "Now as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number daily." All these churches were local churches, that is, churches in various cities. A local church is a church established in a locality, within the jurisdiction of a city. Such a local church is indicated by the Lord's word in Matthew 18:17. The record of the New Testament concerning the establishment of a church in its locality is consistent throughout (Acts 8:1; 13:1; 14:23; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 8:1; Gal. 1:2; Rev. 1:4, 11).

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FORTY-FOUR

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(10)

Scripture Reading: Acts 16:6-10

In this message we shall begin to consider 16:6-10, which describes how Paul and his co-workers were led of God to go forth into Macedonia, a province of the Roman Empire in southeastern Europe. We shall pay particular attention to the Holy Spirit in verse 6 and the Spirit of Jesus in verse 7.

THE HOLY SPIRIT FORBIDDING

Acts 16:6 says, "And they passed through the country of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia." The move of the Apostle Paul and his co-workers for the spread of the gospel was not according to their decision and preference, nor according to any schedule made by human council, but by the Holy Spirit according to God's counsel, as in the mission of Philip (8:29, 39). They intended to speak the word in Asia, but the Holy Spirit forbade them. Forbidding is also a part of the Holy Spirit's leading.

THE SPIRIT OF JESUS NOT ALLOWING

Acts 16:7 continues, "And when they had come down to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them." The Holy Spirit's forbidding and the Spirit of Jesus' not allowing indicated that Paul and his co-workers should go directly forward. If we look at a map, we shall see that such a forward direction would

be toward eastern Europe, in particular, toward Macedonia and Achaia. Paul, however, did not have the thought of going there. This made it necessary for the Lord to give him a vision during the night, and in this vision a Macedonian call came to Paul (v. 9).

The Holy Spirit's forbidding Paul to go to the left, to Asia, and the Spirit of Jesus' not allowing him to go to the right, Bithynia, indicates a straightforward direction for the apostle and his co-workers. Thus they went in a direct course to Macedonia through Mysia and Troas (v. 8).

TWO DIVINE TITLES NOT FOUND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

We need to pay careful attention to two divine titles in verses 6 and 7: the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus. The interchangeable use of the Spirit of Jesus with the Holy Spirit in the preceding verse reveals that the Spirit of Jesus is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a general title of the Spirit of God in the New Testament. The Spirit of Jesus is a particular expression concerning the Spirit of God, and refers to the Spirit of the incarnated Savior who, as Jesus in His humanity, passed through human living and death on the cross. This indicates that in the Spirit of Jesus there is not only the divine element of God, but also the human element of Jesus and the elements of His human living and His suffering of death as well. Such an all-inclusive Spirit was needed for the apostle's preaching ministry, a ministry of suffering among human beings and for human beings in the human life.

We have seen that in Acts 16 Luke first speaks of the Holy Spirit and then of the Spirit of Jesus. In the Old Testament we read of the Spirit of God in Genesis 1:2b: "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." There the Spirit of God brooded over the death waters. Elsewhere in the Old Testament the Spirit of God is called the Spirit of Jehovah (Judg. 3:10; Ezek. 11:5). The title "the Holy Spirit" is not used in the Old Testament. In Psalm 51:11 and in Isaiah 63:10-11 the "Holy Spirit" should be translated "the Spirit of holiness." The main

titles of God's Spirit in the Old Testament, therefore, are the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jehovah. God's Spirit is never called the Spirit of Elijah or the Spirit of David. From this we see that in Acts 16 Luke uses two titles for the Spirit of God that are not found in the Old Testament.

The title "the Holy Spirit" was used for the first time at the time of the conception of the Lord Jesus. It was when the time came to prepare the way for Christ's coming and to prepare a human body for Him to initiate the New Testament dispensation that the term the Holy Spirit came into use (Luke 1:15, 35; Matt. 1:18, 20). In order to understand the first usage of the title the Holy Spirit, we need to see that this title is involved with the Lord's incarnation. Hence, according to the principle of first mention, the Holy Spirit is related to Christ's incarnation and birth.

In Acts 16:7 Luke turns from the Holy Spirit to the Spirit of Jesus. As a man, Jesus was first living a human life and then was crucified and resurrected, and He ascended to the heavens and has been made Lord and Christ. The Spirit of Jesus involves more than the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Spirit involves only the incarnation and birth of the Lord Jesus, but the Spirit of Jesus involves His humanity, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension.

A NEW MOVE IN GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

In Acts 16 we see that the move of the apostles in their evangelistic work was strictly speaking not by the Spirit of God. Rather, it was by the Holy Spirit, who was involved with the Lord's incarnation and birth, and by the Spirit of Jesus, who was involved with the Lord's humanity, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension. These two divine titles indicate strongly that Paul's move in his evangelical work was not something in the way of the old dispensation. If it had been a move in the old dispensational way, then the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Jehovah should have been mentioned. But in Acts 16

there is no mention of the Spirit of God nor of the Spirit of Jehovah. Instead, we are told that Paul and his co-workers were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia and were not allowed by the Spirit of Jesus to go into Bithynia. The fact that Luke speaks of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus indicates that the evangelical work of the apostles was a new move in God's New Testament economy. As we have pointed out, it is not our burden in this Life-study of Acts to consider all the minor points. Our burden is to see God's move on earth for His New Testament economy and all the crucial dispensational turning points related to this move.

God's New Testament economy is carried out through the Lord's incarnation, humanity, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension. The Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus include these matters. This means that the Spirit who is now called the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus is the totality and ultimate consummation of Christ's incarnation, humanity, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension. When we have this Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus, we have Christ in His incarnation, in His humanity and human living, and in His death, resurrection, and ascension.

Elsewhere we have pointed out that after His resurrection and in His resurrection Christ has become the pneumatic Christ. The pneumatic Christ is identical to the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). The Holy Spirit, who is also the Spirit of Jesus, is the totality of this pneumatic Christ. The pneumatic Christ is constituted of certain elements: incarnation, humanity, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension. In the entire universe He is the only one who possesses these six qualifications. Only He is qualified with incarnation, humanity, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension. Hence, the Spirit of Jesus is the realization of this qualified Jesus. The Spirit of Jesus is the totality of such an all-inclusive One. In Acts 16 Paul and his co-workers were moving under the direction of such a Spirit, the Spirit who is the totality of the all-inclusive Christ.

THE TRUTH IN THE DEPTHS OF THE WORD

What I have been ministering in this message regarding the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus is not a product of my imagination. Rather, it is the result of more than a half century of studying the holy Word and the writings of others, plus observing the experience of the saints and my own experience. My fellowship concerning these two titles of the divine Spirit, therefore, is based upon years of study, observation, and experience.

If we see the significance of the titles the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus, we shall mourn and lament over the pitiful situation among Christians today with respect to understanding these matters. Who knows that the Spirit of Jesus is the totality and realization of Christ as the unique qualified One, the One qualified through incarnation, humanity, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension? We certainly are not proud of what the Lord, in His mercy, has shown us. But we are burdened to tell the truth to God's seeking people. The depths of the truth regarding the Spirit is not found in traditional theology; on the contrary, it is in the depths of the Word. If we would know these depths, we should not be content to "skate on the ice" of the surface of the Word. We in the Lord's recovery should no longer stay on the surface in such a way.

We surely need to consider the two divine titles in Acts 16:6 and 7. Paul and Silas were forbidden to speak the word in Asia not by the Spirit of God nor by the Spirit of Jehovah, but by the Holy Spirit, who carried out the conception of the Savior. When they tried to go into Bithynia, it was not the Spirit of God nor the Spirit of Jehovah who did not allow them--it was the Spirit of Jesus who did not allow them to go there. The Spirit of Jesus is the Spirit of the One with humanity, who lived a human life on earth for thirty-three and a half years, who died an all-inclusive death, who resurrected from among the dead to propagate the divine life by imparting it into all His believers, and who ascended to the heavens to be made

Lord and Christ. The Spirit who did not allow the apostles to go into Bithynia was the Spirit of this Jesus. This Spirit is the totality and the full realization of the all-inclusive Jesus. These verses prove that the apostles were moving under the direction and guidance of such an all-inclusive Spirit. May we all see the revelation here and not be satisfied with a superficial understanding of the Word of God.

CONSTITUTED OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE SPIRIT OF JESUS

The kind of work we do for the Lord depends on the kind of Spirit by whom we are guided, directed, instructed, and constituted. Paul was not constituted of the Spirit of God nor of the Spirit of Jehovah but of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus. As a vessel containing the Triune God, Paul was fully constituted of the Holy Spirit, who was involved with the Lord's incarnation and birth, and of the Spirit of Jesus, who was involved with the Lord's humanity, human living, all-inclusive death, life-imparting resurrection, and ascension. Paul was a person constituted of this all-inclusive Spirit. Thus, when he came out to preach, he could truly preach Jesus Christ.

We need to be impressed with the fact that the kind of work we do for the Lord depends on the Spirit by whom we are guided and of whom we are constituted. Actually, this Spirit should become our constitution. Then our work will be the expression of this Spirit. For example, do you think it would have been possible for Elijah to be led by the Holy Spirit or for him to do a work for Jesus as the incarnated One with humanity, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension? No, Elijah did not have this Spirit. He had only the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jehovah. Elijah may have had a powerful Spirit, but he was not constituted of the Spirit of Jesus. For this reason, he could never do the work of ministering Jesus as the all-inclusive One or convey Him as such a One to others.

SEEING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE SPIRIT OF JESUS

In reading Acts 16 it is easy to consider the matter of the leading of the Spirit in a general way. As we have seen, Paul did not carry out his work for the spread of the gospel according to his decision, preference, and schedule but by the Spirit. This understanding is also general. We need the heavenly vision to see what is implied by the two divine titles the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus. In order to understand these titles we need to dig into the depths of the Bible concerning the Spirit. We need to study the Spirit throughout the Scriptures, considering the Spirit of God in Genesis and the Spirit of Jehovah elsewhere in the Old Testament. Then we need to see why the term the Holy Spirit is not used until it was time for God to become incarnated. When we see this, we shall realize that the title "the Holy Spirit" is involved with God's New Testament economy. In particular, this title indicates God's coming into man to be one with man in incarnation. In the New Testament the title the Holy Spirit indicates that God is now mingling Himself with man.

We also need the insight to see the significance of the Spirit of Jesus. This title of the Spirit refers to the Lord as the all-inclusive One who was a man, who lived a human life in His humanity, who went to the cross and died an all-inclusive death, who was resurrected for the propagation of the divine life, and who ascended into the heavens to be made Lord and Christ. If we dig into the Scriptures and have the heavenly vision concerning the Spirit, we shall see that the Spirit of Jesus implies the Lord's humanity, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension.

It is very easy to acquire a superficial understanding of the Bible. Even by reading the Bible through once you can gain some superficial knowledge. But to see the heavenly revelation requires that we dig into the depths of the Scriptures. We also need insight to see what is revealed in the Word. The Lord Jesus had such a deep understanding

of the Scriptures when He pointed out that the title "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" implies resurrection (Matt. 22:31-33).

May we all learn to dig into the depths of God's Word to know the deeper truths that have been buried for centuries. In particular, may we all learn the meaning of the two divine titles found in Acts 16:6 and 7--the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FORTY-FIVE

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(11)

Scripture Reading: Acts 16:6-40

In 16:6-40 we have the journey of Paul and his co-workers to Philippi of Macedonia. Verses 6 through 10 record Paul's vision of a Macedonian; verses 11 through 18, the preaching and its fruits; and verses 19 through 40, the imprisonment and the release.

THE VISION OF A MACEDONIAN

Paul and his co-workers were "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (v. 6), and "the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them" to go into Bithynia (v. 7). After they had come down to Troas, "a vision was seen by Paul during the night: a certain man, a Macedonian, was standing and entreating him and saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us!" (v. 9). This vision seen by Paul was neither a dream nor a trance. This is different from Peter's experience in 10:9-16, when "a trance came upon him" (v. 10). In the vision in 16:9 a Macedonian man urged Paul to come over into Macedonia. Macedonia was a province of the Roman Empire in southeastern Europe between Thrace and Achaia on the Aegean Sea.

Acts 16:10 goes on to say, "And when he had seen the vision, we immediately endeavored to go forth into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to bring the good news to them." This verse indicates that after seeing the vision from God, there was still the need to conclude, that is, to understand what the vision meant, by exercising the mind according to the actual situation and

environment. The mind that is capable of understanding such a vision from God is a mind saturated and directed by the spirit (Eph. 4:23).

In 16:10 the pronoun "we" is used for the first time to include the writer, Luke. This indicates that from Troas Luke joined the Apostle Paul in his ministry journey.

After concluding that God had called them to bring the good news to the Macedonians, Paul and his co-workers endeavored to go forth into Macedonia. This was a major step in the Lord's move for the spreading of His kingdom to another continent, to Europe. It explains the intention of the Holy Spirit forbidding them, the Spirit of Jesus not allowing them, and also the coming of the vision in the night. To carry out this particular leading in the Lord's strategic move required the endeavoring of the apostle and his co-workers. This they did immediately.

THE PREACHING AND ITS FRUITS

Acts 16:11 and 12a say, "And putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the following day to Neapolis; and from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of that part of Macedonia, a colony." Troas was a seaport at the northwest corner of Asia Minor opposite to Macedonia on the Aegean Sea. Samothrace was an island in the Aegean Sea between Troas and Philippi, and Neapolis was a seaport of Philippi. Acts 16:12 says that Philippi was a colony. This means that it was a fortified outpost of the Roman Empire in a foreign country, where the citizens had equal rights with those at the capital, Rome. Hence, Philippi was a strategic point for the spread of the gospel at its beginning in Europe.

A Place of Prayer

Verse 13 says, "And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by a river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together." Here the word "Sabbath"

indicates how widespread Judaism and its influence was, even in Europe. This verse also speaks of a place of prayer. Man's prayer to God affords Him an opportunity for His move among men on earth.

In 16:13 Paul followed his principle of seeking out God's chosen people. Here in Philippi he did not go to the synagogue; instead, on the Sabbath he went to a place of prayer. It is likely that Jews and Greek proselytes who were seeking God gathered at this place. This was Paul's reason for going there.

The Salvation of Lydia

Acts 16:14 goes on to say, "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple-dyed goods, from the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God, was listening, whose heart the Lord opened to give heed to the things spoken by Paul." The Lord here, who opened the heart of Lydia to give heed to the gospel preaching, must be the Spirit, who is the Lord Himself (2 Cor. 3:17). We do not know whether Lydia was a Jewish lady or a God-seeking Greek, since many of the Greek women, especially of the upper class, were seeking God. The first person gained by the Lord in Europe was not a man but a woman.

Acts 16:15 says, "And when she was baptized and her household, she entreated us, saying, If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and remain there; and she urged us." Here we see that baptism immediately followed believing, as the Lord commanded in Mark 16:16. Lydia, after believing and being baptized, entered into fellowship with the apostle and his co-workers, the fellowship of the Body of Christ, as evidence of her salvation. At her invitation, they came into her house and remained there. This was the first house the Lord gained in Europe through His gospel and for His gospel (v. 40).

An Evil Spirit Cast Out

Acts 16:16 goes on to say, "And it came about that as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain maiden having a spirit of Python met us, who brought her masters

much profit by divining." The spirit in this verse was not a fallen angel but a demon (Mark 1:23, 32, 34, 39; Luke 4:33), one of the spirits of the living creatures who lived in the preadamite age and were judged by God when they joined Satan's rebellion (see Life-Study of Genesis Message 2). The fallen angels work with Satan in the air (Eph. 2:2; 6:11-12), and the unclean spirits, the demons, move with him on earth. Both act evilly upon man for the kingdom of Satan. The possession of people by demons signifies Satan's usurpation of man, whom God created for His purpose.

In Acts 16:16 the maiden had a spirit of Python and brought profit to her masters by divining. The name "Python" was used to denote a prophetic demon, and was also used of fortune tellers. Divination is the art or practice that seeks to foresee or foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge by the aid of supernatural powers.

According to verses 17 and 18, "This woman followed after Paul and us and cried out, saying, These men are slaves of the Most High God, who are announcing to you a way of salvation. And she was doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly disturbed, and turning, he said to the spirit, I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out from her! And it came out that very hour." The woman with this evil spirit became a frustration to Paul's preaching. Paul tolerated the situation for some time. But eventually he cast out the evil spirit. As verse 19 indicates, after the demon had been cast out from the woman, she could no longer bring profit to her masters.

THE IMPRISONMENT AND THE RELEASE

Acts 16:19 says, "When her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they laid hold of Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers." Literally, the Greek word rendered "gone" here means "gone out." To be sure, the woman's masters were Gentiles, who were angry that their means of making a profit was gone. They caused trouble to Paul and his co-workers, stirring up the city against them. "And having brought

them to the magistrates, they said, These men who are Jews are throwing our city into confusion, and they are announcing customs which it is not lawful for us who are Romans to accept nor to do" (vv. 20-21). The magistrates in verse 20 were the Roman praetors.

Verses 22 through 24 say, "And the crowd rose up together against them, and the magistrates tore off their garments and ordered them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them securely, who, having received such a charge, threw them into the inner prison, and secured their feet in the stocks." Literally, the Greek word translated "stocks" means "timber" and denotes an instrument of torture with holes to hold the prisoner's wrists, ankles, and neck. The same word is used for the cross in 5:30; 10:39; Gal. 3:13; and I Pet. 2:24.

When the apostles were put into the inner prison, the Lord had an excellent opportunity to vindicate Himself as the Lord of the kings. Verses 25 and 26 say, "And about midnight Paul and Silas, while praying, were singing hymns of praise to God; and the prisoners were listening to them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and instantly all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened." While Paul and Silas were praying and singing, the Lord shook the prison, and all the prisoners were released from their bonds. When the jailer saw the doors of the prison opened, he "drew his sword and was about to do away with himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped" (v. 27). But Paul shouted out to him, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" (v. 28).

The Salvation of the Jailer and His Household

In verse 30 the jailer said to Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?" They replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household" (v. 31). The word "household" indicates that the family of the believer is a complete unit for God's salvation, like the family of Noah (Gen. 7:1), the families

partaking of the Passover (Exo. 12:3-4), the family of the harlot Rahab (Josh. 2:18-19), the family of Zaccheus (Luke 19:9), the family of Cornelius (Acts 11:14), the family of Lydia (16:15), the family of the jailer here, and the family of Crispus in 18:8.

Paul and Silas "spoke the word of God to him together with all those in his house" (v. 32). Then "taking them with him in that very hour of the night, he washed their stripes" (v. 33a). Literally, the Greek words rendered "washed their stripes" mean "washed them from their stripes." According to 33b, "he was baptized immediately, he and all his household." As in the case of Lydia, baptism was practiced immediately after the jailer and those in his household had believed, that they might be saved.

Verse 34 continues, "And he brought them up into his house and set a table before them; and he exulted, having believed in God with all his household." The jailer, after believing and being baptized, also came into fellowship with the apostles, the fellowship of the Body of Christ, as a token of his salvation.

It may seem strange to us that the jailer and his household believed, were baptized, and were brought into the fellowship of the apostles all in the same night. What a wonderful conversion! I hope that we shall see such conversions today where people believe and are baptized and brought into the fellowship of the Body of Christ.

Paul Claiming His Rights as a Roman Citizen

Acts 16:35 says, "Now when day came, the magistrates sent the deputies, saying, Release those men." Here the "deputies" were the Roman lictors, those who held the rod to clear the way for the magistrates and to execute punishment on the criminals.

In verse 36 the jailer reported to Paul the words of the magistrates: "The magistrates have sent that you may be released. Now therefore come out and go in peace." In verse 37 we have Paul's strong reply: "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Romans, and

have thrown us into prison; and now they are thrusting us out secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out." Here Paul did not behave like a lamb that was being brought to the slaughter. On the contrary, he claimed his rights as a Roman citizen. Some who read Paul's word here may say, "It seems that in this situation Paul was not very spiritual. He acted like a lion, not like a lamb. We may also say that he was not a 'dove' but a 'hawk.' " For years I could not understand Paul's behavior at this point in Acts 16.

Gradually through my own experience of suffering persecution, criticism, and opposition, I came to realize that we should not always give in. We have tried to be faithful and honest followers of Jesus. We have tried to walk in His footsteps, suffering persecution as He did. Eventually I learned that this is not always wise, and that it is not always God's intention that we react to persecution and opposition in this way.

Actually, in 16:35-39 the question is not whether Paul should have been a dove or a hawk. The important matter here was Paul's evangelical work. Paul realized that for the sake of the future of this evangelical work it was necessary for him to claim his rights as a Roman citizen. The Roman government was a government of law, and this government protected its citizens. Therefore, Paul was wise in having the attitude described in verse 37, for this was a help to the future of his work. This attitude made it impossible for the Roman officials to think that they could treat Paul in any way they desired because he was a Jew.

In verse 37 Paul seemed to be saying, "No, we are not willing to go out secretly. We are Romans, and we have not been judged guilty of any crime. First you put us into the inner prison, and now you ask us to go out secretly. We refuse to do this. Let the magistrates come and escort us out of the prison. We shall not slip away like escaped criminals. We want to be brought out of the prison in a way that is worthy of Roman citizens. Therefore, ask the magistrates to come and accompany us out of prison."

The record of Acts 16 indicates that the Roman

magistrates had no choice except to fulfill Paul's request. "The deputies reported these words to the magistrates. And they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and entreated them, and bringing them out, they asked them to depart from the city" (vv. 38-39). Here we see that the magistrates accompanied Paul and Silas out of prison as Paul had asked. Verse 40 concludes, "And they went out from the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they saw the brothers, they encouraged them and went out."

In 16:35-39 Paul was not spiritual in a religious way. In this situation he was not a religious dove; instead, he was a right-claiming hawk. For the future of his evangelical work, Paul claimed his rights as a Roman citizen. Without vindicating ourselves in any way, we can testify that we have learned of Paul to claim our rights as citizens and to appeal to today's "Caesar"--the law of this democratic country--to deal with evil books that libel us. We live in a country of law, and in this constitutional country there are laws against defamation. For the sake of his evangelical work, Paul claimed his rights as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar. In like manner, for the Lord's interest, not for our personal profit, we claim our rights as citizens and appeal to the law as our "Caesar" today.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FORTY-SIX

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(12)

Scripture Reading: Acts 17:1-34

In this message we come to 17:1-34. In verses 1 through 9 Paul comes to Thessalonica; in verses 10 through 13, to Berea; and in verses 14 through 34, to Athens.

TO THESSALONICA

In 16:11-40 we have an account of the raising up of the church in Philippi. This church was raised up through two rather unusual persons. The first was "a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple-dyed goods, from the city of Thyatira" (16:14). The second was a jailer. According to our experience and observation, churches are often raised up through unusual persons such as these.

After staying in Philippi Paul and his co-workers traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia and then "came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews" (17:1). Thessalonica was another leading city, sitting on a gulf in the middle of the shoreline of the province of Macedonia.

Reasoning from the Scriptures concerning Christ

In Thessalonica there was a synagogue of the Jews, a place where the Jews sought the knowledge of God by studying the Holy Scriptures. According to his custom, Paul "went in to them, and on three Sabbaths he reasoned with them from the Scriptures" (v. 2). Concerning what did Paul reason with those in the synagogue from the Scriptures? Concerning theology and the law of Moses?

Concerning types and prophecies? No, he did not reason from the Scriptures concerning any of these things. Rather, he reasoned concerning Christ, "opening and setting before them that the Christ must suffer and rise from among the dead, and saying, This is the Christ, Jesus, whom I announce to you" (v. 3).

In my Christian life I have seen people reason concerning many things other than Christ. For example, many have reasoned about immersion. Some have argued that believers should be immersed frontward; others argue that they should be immersed backward or straight downward. Each of the parties gave reasons for their opinions. Others have reasoned concerning whether a believer should be immersed once or three times--the first time in the name of the Father, the second in the name of the Son, and the third in the name of the Holy Spirit.

When Paul was in the synagogue in Thessalonica, he did not reason concerning the law. Rather, from the Scriptures he reasoned with those in the synagogue concerning Christ. He set before them that Christ must suffer and rise from among the dead. Then he said to them, "This is the Christ, Jesus, whom I announce to you."

According to His Spiritual Constitution

Because Paul was constituted of the Spirit of Jesus, he was led, guided, and directed by this Spirit. He did not have the heart to reason concerning genealogies, prophecies, or types. He had just one burden, and this burden was according to his spiritual constitution. Paul's constitution was fully of the Spirit of Jesus. Therefore, in Thessalonica Paul ministered nothing other than the all-inclusive Christ. Many rabbis studied the Old Testament without seeing anything of Christ. Paul, however, could see Christ revealed in the Scriptures.

We need to learn to study the Bible and use the Bible the way Paul did. We should also seek to minister divine

things according to Paul's way. I have observed much reasoning, debate, and contention about certain biblical truths, but I have seen very few reasonings concerning the all-inclusive Christ. Let us learn to reason for the all-inclusive Christ based upon both the New Testament and the Old Testament.

Ministering the All-inclusive Christ

In 17:3 Luke indicates that Paul simply announced Christ to those in the synagogue. Actually, Paul must have reasoned concerning Christ in a lengthy and detailed way. I believe that he reasoned about Christ being God and man. According to verse 3, Paul told them that it was necessary for Christ to suffer. Christ's suffering implies His incarnation, and His incarnation implies His dual status, that is, His deity and His humanity. Furthermore, Christ's suffering implies His death. In 17:3 Paul explicitly spoke of Christ's resurrection, saying that "the Christ must suffer and rise from among the dead." Therefore, Paul must have reasoned concerning the incarnated Christ in His deity, humanity, human living, suffering, death, and resurrection.

The fact that Paul reasoned in detail concerning Christ is indicated by the fact that on three Sabbaths he reasoned with those in the synagogue from the Scriptures. It is not likely that on these Sabbaths Paul reasoned only for an hour. It is much more likely that he spent several hours, even half a day, reasoning with them concerning Christ.

Paul's reasoning in the synagogue concerning Christ corresponds to his being led by the Holy Spirit and regulated by the Spirit of Jesus. Paul was this kind of person. Because he was under the leading of the Holy Spirit and the regulation of the Spirit of Jesus, Paul carried on a work of presenting, conveying, and ministering the all-inclusive Christ to others. Paul did not minister law, genealogies, prophecies, or types--he ministered the living and all-inclusive Christ. This is the deeper significance of this portion of the Word. When we come to these verses in Acts, we need to read and study them in this way.

Many Joining Themselves to Paul and Silas

Acts 17:4 continues, "And some of them were persuaded and joined themselves to Paul and Silas, and of the worshipping Greeks a great multitude, and of the leading women not a few." These worshipping Greeks may have been Greeks that were converted to the Jewish religion. The great multitude that joined themselves to Paul and Silas included a number of leading women. It is significant that in Acts the leading women among the Greeks often were among the first to believe in the gospel. This indicates that many of the Greek women were seeking God.

The Opposition of the Jews

Acts 17:5-7 describes the opposition of the Jews: "But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some evil men who were loafers in the marketplace, gathered a crowd and set the city in an uproar; and coming upon the house of Jason, they sought to bring them before the populace. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brothers before the city officials, shouting, These men who have upset the world have come here also, whom Jason has welcomed; and these all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." Literally, the Greek word translated "world" in verse 6 means the inhabited earth. Probably the apostles did preach that Jesus is the King. The opposers used their word to accuse them and in a subtle way to involve Caesar. Opposers often have this ability, which may come from the training they have received from the Devil, the evil instigator.

In 17:5-7 we can see how strong was the influence of Judaism. This influence was prevailing not only in Jerusalem but also in the Gentile world, even in eastern Europe. According to verse 8, "they troubled the crowd and the city officials when they heard these things." Here we see their subtlety in joining with local politics and even

utilizing it to persecute the apostles. This indicates that the Jewish religion has been usurped by God's enemy, Satan, to oppose God's economy. In principle, the situation is the same today. Religion joins the worldly authorities to frustrate God's genuine move on earth.

TO BEREIA

Acts 17:10 says, "And the brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas during the night to Berea, who when they arrived, went into the synagogue of the Jews." Why did the brothers immediately send Paul and Silas to Berea? They sent them immediately because the apostles were in danger of being killed. If they had delayed even a little, they might have been put to death.

Once again, upon arrival in Berea, Paul and Silas "went into the synagogue of the Jews." As usual, their reason for doing so was to grasp the opportunity for preaching the gospel. Paul and Silas were bold, going into the Jewish stronghold. This was necessary in order for them to gain God's called ones who were held in the fold of Judaism.

Acts 17:11 and 12 say, "Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and there were not a few Greek women of high standing and men." Vine says that the Greek word rendered "more noble" indicates that the Bereans were more noble minded. F. F. Bruce says that the word means to be liberal, free from prejudice.

I believe that these Bereans were not stubborn, but were quite wise. Whenever we are stubborn we cannot be noble. A noble person is always wise. The Bereans were noble in receiving the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

Acts 17:13 tells us that the opposition spread from Thessalonica to Berea: "But when the Jews from Thessalonica knew that the word of God had been announced by Paul in Berea also, they came there as well,

agitating and troubling the crowds." It seems that these opposers became professionals, not doing any other business except to follow the apostles and to oppose God's economy. We do not know who hired them or who paid their expenses. Actually, they were "hired" by the Devil.

TO ATHENS

Sent by the Brothers

Because of the opposition that had come to Berea, "immediately the brothers sent Paul off to go as far as the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there" (v. 14). As in verse 10, the word "immediately" is used to describe the brothers sending Paul away from the city.

Verse 15 continues, "And those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as quickly as possible, they went off." Athens was the capital of Achaia, a province of the Roman Empire, the center of enlightenment in science, literature, and art for the ancient world. Through the Apostle Paul's visit to such a center, the gospel of the kingdom of God reached the people of the highest culture.

Reasoning with the Jews and Confronting the Epicurean and Stoic Philosophers

Paul's Spirit Provoked by the Idolatry in Athens

Acts 17:16 says, "Now while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was provoked in him as he beheld that the city was full of idols." The "spirit" here was Paul's human spirit (Zech. 12:1; Job 32:8; Prov. 20:27), regenerated by the Spirit of God (John 3:6), indwelt by the Lord the Spirit (2 Tim. 4:22; Rom. 8:10-11), and witnessing with the Spirit (Rom. 8:16), in which he worshipped and served God (John 4:24; Rom. 1:9). Such a spirit was provoked by the many idols in Athens.

Even the highest culture did not prevent the people in Athens from worshipping idols, because within them, as in

all mankind, was a God-worshipping spirit created by God for man to seek and worship Him (cf. Acts 17:22). However, due to their blindness and ignorance, they took the wrong objects for their worship (v. 23). Now the true God, who created the universe and them, sent His apostle to announce the true object whom they should worship (vv. 23-29).

Why was idol worship prevailing in Athens, the most cultured city? The reason is that in every human being there is a God-seeking and God-worshipping spirit. Of course, many do not seek the true God or worship the true God. Instead, they have the wrong object of worship. Nevertheless, the fact that people worship something or are seeking something to worship is a strong proof that man needs God. There is a need in man, especially in man's spirit, for God as the true object of worship.

Reasoning in the Synagogue and in the Marketplace

Acts 17:17 goes on to say of Paul, "He was reasoning therefore in the synagogue with the Jews and those who worshipped, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there." Here we see that in the synagogue Paul reasoned with the Jews and with those who worshipped, who probably were Greeks who worshipped God. In addition to reasoning in the synagogue, Paul reasoned every day in the marketplace with whomever happened to be there. From this we see that Paul reasoned in two places--in the synagogue with the Jews and in the marketplace with the Greeks.

Acts 17:18 says, "And some also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were confronting him, and some were saying, What does this babblers want to say? And others, He seems to be an announcer of strange demons--because he was bringing good news of Jesus and the resurrection." The Epicurean philosophers were the followers of the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 B.C.), whose philosophy was materialism, not recognizing the Creator and His providence over the world, but seeking sensuous

pleasures, especially in eating and drinking. Paul's word to the Philippians (Phil. 3:18-19) and the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:32) referred to them.

The Stoic philosophers were members of a school of philosophy founded by Zeno (340-265 B.C.). They were pantheists who believed that everything was governed by fate and that all happenings were the result of the divine will. Therefore, man should calmly accept them, free from all passion, grief, or joy. They emphasized that the highest good is virtue and that virtue is the reward to the soul. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians also referred to them (Phil. 4:11).

According to Acts 17:18, some said of Paul, "What does this babbler want to say?" Literally, the Greek word translated "babbler" means "seed picker": a bird that picks up seeds in the street and markets; hence one who picks up and retails scraps of news (M. R. Vincent).

Preaching Jesus and the Resurrection

Others in 17:18 said concerning Paul, "He seems to be an announcer of strange demons." They said this because he was bringing good news of Jesus and the resurrection. Paul's kind of preaching was a strong indication that he was constituted of Jesus and of His resurrection. Paul was constituted of the all-inclusive Jesus Christ and of His resurrection. He was a person saturated with the Spirit of Jesus. Therefore, he preached Jesus and the resurrection.

Led to the Areopagus

Verses 19 through 21 say, "And they took hold of him and led him to the Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new teaching is which is being spoken by you? For you are bringing strange things to our ears. We intend to know therefore what these things mean. Now all the Athenians and the strangers sojourning there spent their time for nothing other than telling or hearing something new." Areopagus was Mars' Hill, the seat of the ancient and venerable Athenian court, which judged the most solemn problems of religion. That Paul was led to the

Areopagus indicates that his preaching was very prevailing and that it stirred up the city, becoming the latest news. As we shall see, Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and addressed the Athenians. In the following message we shall consider the content of Paul's word spoken on the Areopagus.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FORTY-SEVEN

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(13)

Scripture Reading: Acts 17:16-34

In this message we shall study Paul's preaching on the Areopagus. The Areopagus was Mars' Hill, the seat of the ancient and venerable Athenian court, which judged the most solemn problems of religion.

VERY RELIGIOUS IN IDOL WORSHIP

Acts 17:22 says, "And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, Men, Athenians, I observe how in everything you are very religious." The Greek word rendered "very religious" literally means to fear a demon, a supernatural spirit, hence, given up to demon worship, very religious. The same word is used in noun form in 25:19 for religion. The Athenians were very religious not in relation to the true God but with respect to the worshipping of idols. We have seen that in verse 16 Paul's spirit "was provoked in him as he beheld that the city was full of idols."

In verse 23 Paul continued, "For while I was passing through and carefully observing objects of your worship, I found also an altar on which was inscribed, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I announce to you." Here Paul seemed to be saying, "I announce to you the One you worship as the unknown God. He may be unknown to you, but He is known by me."

THE CREATOR AND THE PROVIDER

In verses 24 and 25 Paul says, "The God who made the

world and all things in it, this One, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, neither is He served by human hands as though He needs anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things." The apostle's word in these verses was a very strong inoculation to both the atheistic Epicureans, who did not recognize the Creator and His providence over the world, and the pantheistic Stoics, who submitted themselves to the will of many gods concerning their fate (see v. 18). In verse 24 Paul speaks of the God who made the world and all things in it. This word was directed mainly against the Epicureans, who, as atheists, did not believe in God. They believed neither in the Creator nor in the divine provision. Therefore, continuing to speak against the Epicureans, Paul went on to say that God is the Lord of heaven and earth. This One was absolutely ignored by the Epicureans. Furthermore, Paul pointed out that God Himself gives to all life and breath and all things. These are the divine provisions. God provides all things so that man may live. The Epicureans did not believe in the Creator, the Lord of heaven and earth who provides all the necessities of life for human beings.

Paul's preaching in Acts 17 is very good. When he was reasoning with the Jews in the synagogues, he used the Scriptures. But when he was preaching to the philosophical Epicureans, he referred to the creation.

What Paul did in 17:2 and 17:24 and 25 is similar to what he did in chapters thirteen and fourteen. In chapter thirteen he used the Jewish Scriptures as the basis for preaching the resurrected Christ. But in chapter fourteen his preaching to the heathen was based on God's creation. However, there is a difference in Paul's use of the creation in his preaching in chapters fourteen and seventeen; his utterance in these chapters is somewhat different. In chapter fourteen he told the heathen that the "living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all the things in them... did not leave Himself without witness, doing good, giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and

gladness" (14:15, 17). There his word was not very philosophical. By contrast, Paul's word to counter the false teachings of the Epicureans in chapter seventeen is quite philosophical. Here Paul declares that there is a Creator, the Lord of heaven and earth, and that He provides life, breath, and everything necessary for man's living on earth.

ALL NATIONS MADE FROM ADAM

In 17:26 Paul goes on to say, "And He made from one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, determining their appointed seasons and the boundaries of their dwelling." The "one" here is Adam. God made from Adam every nation of men to dwell on the face of the earth.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE EARTH

In verse 26 Paul points out that God has determined the appointed seasons and the boundaries of dwelling of all nations. Here we see God's sovereign authority. God is sovereign over the entire earth. Not only did He create all nations out of one, Adam, but He determined the times and places of the nations. The migrations to America in its times and boundaries is a strong proof of this word and also of the first part of verse 27. Apparently Columbus opened the way from Europe to America; actually it was God who opened the way, for He determined the seasons for the discovery of the new land. Furthermore, it is He who draws the boundaries of all nations.

Paul's preaching here in chapter seventeen is very philosophical. From the creation of the heavens and the earth and God's provision for all of mankind, Paul goes on to speak of the existence of mankind. We need to learn of Paul in preaching the gospel. We may begin with creation, but we should not remain there. Rather, we should go on from creation to speak concerning man's life. When we do this, we touch the very point of man's need. In 17:26 Paul in his preaching came to man's life on earth.

THE OMNIPRESENT SPIRIT

According to verse 27, God formed the nations,

determining their appointed seasons and the boundaries of their dwellings, "that they might seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is surely not far from each one of us." Because God is the omnipresent Spirit, He is not far from each one of us. This involves the Trinity. The divine Spirit is triune. Do you think that this Spirit is only the Spirit and not the Father and the Son as well? The God who is not far from us is surely the omnipresent Spirit, and this Spirit is the Triune God. The Spirit is the entire God--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

ALL HUMAN BEINGS LIVING, MOVING, AND EXISTING IN GOD

In the first part of verse 28 Paul explains, "For in Him we live and move and are." This indicates that man's life and existence and even his actions are of God. This does not mean that man has God's life and lives, exists, and acts in God as do the believers in Christ, who are born of God, possess His divine life and nature, and live, exist, and act in God's Person. Rather, here Paul is pointing out that all human beings, including the Epicureans and all other unbelievers, live, move, and exist in God.

GOD'S OFFSPRING

In verse 28 Paul also says, "As even some poets among you have said, For we also are His offspring." These poets were probably Aratus (about 270 B.C.) and Cleanthes (about 300 B.C.) both of whom uttered the same words in their poems to Zeus (Jupiter), whom they considered the supreme God. In the writings of these two poets "His" refers to Zeus as the supreme God.

According to the poets to whom Paul refers in verse 28, we are God's offspring. Mankind is God's offspring just as Adam was supposed to be the son of God (Luke 3:38). To say that Adam was a son of God does not mean that he was born of God and possessed the life of God. Adam was created by God (Gen. 5:1-2), and God was his origin. Based upon this, he was supposed to be the son of God, even as

the heathen poets considered all mankind to be the offspring of God. They were only created by God, not regenerated of Him. This is absolutely and intrinsically different from the believers in Christ being the sons of God. The believers have been born, regenerated, of God and possess God's life and nature (John 1:12-13; 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:4). Since God is the Creator, the source, of all men, He is the Father of them all (Mal. 2:10) in a natural sense, not in the spiritual sense as He is the Father of all the believers (Gal. 4:6), who are regenerated by Him in their spirit (1 Pet. 1:3; John 3:5-6).

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE OFFSPRING OF GOD AND THE SONS OF GOD

We need to consider in detail what it means to say that all of mankind are God's offspring. Some theologians have taught that every human being is a son of God. They have taken as a basis for their teaching the word in Luke 3:38 concerning "Adam, the son of God." Then they reasoned that since Adam, the first of mankind, was a son of God, then all his descendants must also be sons of God. This concept, they believe, is strengthened by Paul's word in Acts 17 concerning all of mankind being God's offspring. However, if we study the Bible carefully, we shall see that this concept is incorrect.

Mankind Created and Produced by God

According to the Bible, God created man. As the Creator, God is the source of man. Genesis 2:7 says, "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." First God used the dust to form man's physical body, and then He breathed into that body the breath of life, which caused the body to become alive. As a result, man became a living soul. Here in Genesis 2:7 there is the strong indication that human life came from God. In this sense man was not only created by God but also produced by God. We are not told in the Scriptures that God breathed the breath of life into animals. Only in

creating man did He breathe into man the breath of life. Proverbs 20:27 uses for "spirit" the same Hebrew word rendered "breath" in Genesis 2:7. This reveals that the breath of life breathed into man by God is the element of man's spirit. Actually, this breath of life became man's spirit. The point we are emphasizing here is that the Bible indicates clearly that man was produced by God. We do not say that in creation man was born of God, but we do say confidently that man was produced by Him. God formed man's body, breathed into man the breath of life, and man became a living soul. In this way man was produced by God, and in this sense man is God's offspring.

The Believers Born of God

The Bible also reveals that when we repent and believe in the Lord Jesus, we are born of God. To be produced of God is one thing; to be born of God is another thing. All human beings are the offspring of God in the sense of having been produced of God. But the believers are the sons of God in the sense of having been born of Him. There is no indication in the Bible that the offspring of God, the human beings produced of God, have the divine life with the divine nature. But the New Testament says that the believers, who have been born of God, have the divine life and are partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Therefore, we must differentiate between the offspring of God and the sons of God. All human beings are the offspring of God produced of Him, but the believers are the sons of God born of Him through regeneration. This is clearly emphasized in John 1:12 and 13: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave authority to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Two Ways of Living, Moving, and Having Our Being in God

In Acts 17:28 and 29 Paul says that as the offspring of God we live, move, and exist in Him. In what sense do all

humans live, move, and have their being in God? This is true in the sense that their human life was produced of God from the breath breathed into the first of mankind. Because we have such a human life, all humans live, move, and have their being in God. But the believers, who have been born of God, who have God's life, and who have the divine nature, live, move, and have their being in God not only in the sense of having the breath breathed into man by God, but also in the sense of acting in the divine Person.

We need to be impressed with the fact that all humans are the offspring of God in the sense of having the breath of life from God. Therefore, they live, move, and have their being in God in this sense. But the believers have been born of God and have God Himself within as their life and nature. Thus, we live, move, and have our being in God not only in the sense of having the breath of life from God, but also in the sense of acting in God's Person. All human beings are the offspring produced of God, but we who believe in Christ are the sons of God regenerated by Him. We all need to be very clear concerning this distinction between the offspring of God and the sons of God.

NOT SUPPOSING THAT THE DIVINE BEING IS LIKE ENGRAVED WORK

In 17:29 Paul continues, "Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to suppose that the Divine Being is like gold or silver or stone, an engraved work of art and thought of man." The Greek word rendered "Divine Being" here is *theion* (cf. *theiotes*, divinity, in Rom. 1:20), meaning that which is divine, a vaguer, more abstract, and less personal word than *theotes*, which is translated "Godhead" in Colossians 2:9. In 17:29 *theion* indicates that man may know God's divinity from His works but not God Himself. God Himself can be known only from the revelation of His eternal Word, Christ incarnate, the very embodiment of the Godhead.

In verse 29 Paul told the Athenians that they should not "suppose that the Divine Being is like gold or silver or stone, an engraved work of art and thought of man." Here

"thought" also means imagination or device. Idols are the works of the art and thought of man.

REPENTANCE AND JUDGMENT

In 17:30 and 31 Paul goes on to say, "Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now charges all men everywhere to repent, because He has set a day in which He is about to judge the inhabited earth in righteousness by a Man whom He has designated, having furnished proof to all by raising Him from among the dead." The day set by God for the judgment of the inhabited earth will be the day when Christ will judge the living from the throne of His glory before the millennium (Matt. 25:31-36), probably not including the day when He will judge the dead at the great white throne after the millennium (Rev. 20:11-15). According to Acts 10:42, Christ has been designated by God "to be the Judge of the living and the dead." He will be the Judge of the dead after the millennium at the great white throne. Second Timothy 4:1 and 1 Peter 4:5 also say that Christ will judge both the living and the dead. The day in Acts 17:31 refers particularly to the day Christ will judge the living, because on this day He will judge "the inhabited earth," which should refer only to living men. This day of Christ's judgment on earth will be brought in by His coming back. He has been designated by God to execute this judgment, and God's raising Him from among the dead is strong proof of this. In their preaching to the Gentiles, both Peter in 10:42 and Paul here and in 24:25 stressed the coming judgment of God.

The Greek word rendered "proof" in verse 31 may also be translated faith, assurance, guarantee. The resurrection of Christ is proof and assurance of His coming back to judge all the inhabitants of the earth. This is guaranteed so that we may have faith in it and that it may lead us to repent (v. 30).

Paul's word regarding Christ as the Man designated by God and regarding His resurrection indicates that Paul was fully constituted of this One and of His resurrection.

Paul was led, guided, and directed absolutely by the Spirit of Jesus. Because he was constituted of the Spirit of Jesus, his goal, no matter what the subject in speaking, was to preach Christ and His resurrection.

THE RESPONSE TO PAUL'S WORD CONCERNING THE RESURRECTION

Acts 17:32-34 say, "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; others said, We will hear you yet again concerning this. So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them." From these verses we see that Paul gained not only certain leading ones from among the Jews but also a number of prominent ones among the Greeks. Although the New Testament does not mention a church in Athens, nevertheless Paul did a prevailing work in that city.

PAUL'S PREACHING AGAINST THE EPICUREANS

Paul's preaching in Acts 17 surely fit the situation of the Greeks in Athens. Much of what Paul said was directed at the Epicureans and also at the Stoics. We have seen that the Epicureans did not recognize the Creator and His providence over the world, but sought sensuous pleasures, especially in eating and drinking. The Stoics were pantheists who believed that everything was governed by fate and that all happenings were the result of the divine will. In his preaching on the Areopagus Paul first referred to God as the Creator in an objective way as the One outside of us and with whom we do not have a direct relationship. Then from the Creator Paul proceeded to point out that all humans are the offspring of God and that we have our living and our being in Him. Following this, Paul went on to speak of the day when Christ will judge the living. All these points were aimed at the Epicureans.

The Epicureans say that there is no Creator or Provider. They also claim that we should pursue sensuous pleasures without regard for the future. It is likely that

Paul had the Epicureans in mind when he said, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32). This appears to be a quote of a saying of that day, a maxim by the Epicureans. If there is no resurrection, we the believers shall have no hope in the future and become the most miserable of all men (1 Cor. 15:19). If so, we had better enjoy our life today, forgetting the future, like the Epicureans.

In his preaching in Acts 17 Paul seemed to be saying to the Epicureans, "There is a Creator, and He is the Provider who gives to all life, breath, and all things. You are God's offspring, for you were produced of Him and derive your human life from Him. Because you have a human life, you live, move, and have your being in Him. You also need to know that there will be a judgment in the future. This future judgment is related to the resurrection of the Man Jesus. God has designated Jesus to be the One to judge everyone, and He has furnished proof of this by raising Him from among the dead. In the past God allowed you to go your own way. But He has sent me here to tell you that you now need to repent." Paul's word must also have been unveiling to the pantheistic Stoics. How marvelous was Paul's preaching to the Athenians!

PAUL'S KNOWLEDGEABLE PREACHING TO JEWS AND GREEKS

In Acts 17 we see that Paul's preaching was full of the proper knowledge, for he was a person knowledgeable of both Hebrew culture and Greek culture. This enabled him to carry out a ministry in which he faced the situation among both Jews and Greeks. When Paul was facing the Jews, he used their Scriptures to preach Christ, pointing out where He is revealed throughout the Scriptures. He preached Christ not only as the Messiah, but also as the One who was God incarnate, who possessed humanity, who lived a human life on earth for thirty three and a half years, who died an all-inclusive death in order to solve the problems between man and God, who was resurrected in order to propagate the divine life by imparting it into His

believers, and who ascended to the heavens where He was made Lord and Christ. Paul faced the situation among the Jews by using their Scriptures in this way. Not only was he knowledgeable in the black and white letters of the Old Testament; he also had the revelation and the insight to see into the depths of the Old Testament concerning Christ in His dual status as God and man concerning His human living, His all-inclusive death, His resurrection for propagation, and His headship as the ascended One.

When Paul faced the situation among the Greeks, he did so according to Greek culture. His preaching was based upon God's creation. According to Acts 17, Paul pointed out that God created the heavens and the earth, that He provides life and all the necessities for its maintenance, that He produced mankind as His offspring, and that all humans live, move, and have their being in God. He told the Greeks of their need of God and that this God is Jesus Christ.

QUALIFIED TO PREACH CHRIST

Paul's way of preaching indicates that he was a learned vessel. In his ministry he could face the situation of the Jews according to the Scriptures and the situation among the philosophical Greeks according to God's creation of the universe and man. I do not think that a Galilean fisherman such as Peter could bear this responsibility. Only one like Saul of Tarsus could fulfill this responsibility, for he was trained in the Jewish religion, educated in Greek philosophical culture, and lived in an environment of Roman politics. Therefore, he was fully qualified to bear the kind of ministry recorded in Acts.

Although Paul was educated according to Hebrew, Greek, and Roman culture, his main qualification was not his education; it was his spiritual constitution. Paul had been constituted of the Holy Spirit and of the Spirit of Jesus. For this reason, Paul did not preach Hebrew religion or Greek philosophy. Paul preached the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. No matter how highly educated he was, he did not preach his

education. He preached the all-inclusive Christ realized as the all-inclusive Spirit.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FORTY-EIGHT

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(14)

Scripture Reading: Acts 18:1-22

In Acts 18 Paul goes to Corinth where he meets Aquila and Priscilla (vv. 1-4) and preaches to the Jews and encounters their opposition (vv. 5-17). In 18:18-21a Paul goes to Ephesus, and in 18:21b-22 he returns to Antioch, thus ending his second ministry journey.

TO CORINTH

Meeting Aquila and Priscilla

Acts 18:1 and 2 say, "After these things he departed from Athens and came to Corinth. And having found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy, and Priscilla his wife (because Claudius had directed all the Jews to depart from Rome), he went to them." Claudius was a Caesar of the Roman Empire. What he did here was used by the Lord for His ministry to build up His church, just as what Caesar Augustus did was used by God for the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the birth place of Christ (Luke 2:1-7).

Verse 3 says, "And because he was of the same trade, he remained with them and they worked; for they were tentmakers by trade." This indicates that while Paul was carrying out the ministry of the Lord, he still had a job. He refers to this in 1 Corinthians 4:12, "We labor, working with our own hands." Furthermore, in both 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:8 Paul says that he labored day and night so as not to be burdensome to the saints.

Paul's practice was different from that of many Christian workers today. Often when a person becomes a minister or a missionary, he will no longer do any other kind of work. But while Paul was ministering the word, he also worked with his hands in order to earn a living. This he did not only to support himself, but also to support his co-workers. Regarding this, he says in Acts 20:34 and 35, "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my needs and to those who are with me. I have showed you all things, that toiling in this way we ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus which He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." Once again Paul set up a good pattern.

According to a passage such as 1 Corinthians 9:3-15, the churches and the saints were not faithful in taking care of Paul as a servant of the Lord. Because they did not support him adequately, he was forced to work. Some of the Corinthians even accused Paul of trying to make a gain for himself from them. But Paul indicated that he would rather die than take anything from the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:15).

Those who serve the Lord full-time should not regard their work for the Lord as their profession. If necessary, some may still need to work in order to make a living for themselves. Whether or not we do this depends on how much our burden occupies us. If your burden occupies you in full and the environment affords you a living, then you should certainly spend all your time on the Lord's work. But if not, you should still work to support yourself, and not only yourself but also your co-workers, especially the younger ones.

If Paul did not receive proper financial support, how could his younger co-workers have received it? Because of the need to support himself and others, Paul was forced to work at his trade of tentmaking. This is a very good pattern for us today.

Concerning financial support, the situation of Paul and his co-workers in the New Testament was different from the priests and the Levites in the Old Testament.

According to the Levitical regulations, the priests and Levites were to live on the offerings of God's people. But in the New Testament this regulation is over.

According to Luke 8:1-3, a group of sisters ministered to the Lord Jesus and the twelve out of their possessions. The twelve disciples followed the Lord full time, and they all needed financial support. Certain women who loved the Lord and who had the substance to support the Lord and His followers met their need.

In the early years in the church in Shanghai, the financial support came mainly from the sisters. A number of sisters were nurses in a leading hospital, and these sisters supported the church and the co-workers in Shanghai. I have also observed this in other places.

In a very real sense, the sisters love the Lord much more than the brothers do. Among the twelve was a Judas, but there was no "Judas" among the sisters. Judas did not know how to love the Lord, but he certainly knew how to count money. Those who care for money in this way will never support others. The more they count their money, the more they love it and desire to keep it for themselves.

Under God's sovereignty certain of the women in the Bible married wealthy men. Consider the case of Esther, who married a Gentile king. By exercising influence over her husband, she was able to support all the Jews.

Among the women in Luke 8:1-3 was "Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward" (v. 3). Although Roman politics persecuted the Lord Jesus, the wife of a Roman official used her husband's money to support Him. I have known cases of sisters who have used their husband's money to support the Lord's work.

The point we are emphasizing regarding Acts 18:3 is that those who are burdened to serve the Lord full-time should do so if the environment and the financial situation allow. But if the environment does not permit one to serve full time, he should not give up his burden. Rather, he should carry out his burden and yet at the same time be diligent to work to meet his needs, as Paul did in Acts.

Reasoning in the Synagogue Every Sabbath

Acts 18:4 says that Paul "was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath, persuading both Jews and Greeks." Paul, of course, went to the Jewish synagogue gathering for the purpose of taking advantage of the opportunity to announce the word of God. He did not go there to keep the Sabbath, but to preach the gospel, persuading both Jews and Greeks. The mention of the Greeks in 18:4 indicates that some Greeks also attended the Jewish synagogues to listen to the word of God.

Preaching to the Jews and Encountering their Opposition

In 18:5-17 Paul preached to the Jews and encountered their opposition. Verse 5 says, "And when both Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was wholly occupied in the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ." The Greek words rendered "wholly occupied" may also be translated "pressed by" or "constrained by."

It was at this time in Corinth that, after the coming of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia with some information concerning the church in Thessalonica (1 Thes. 3:6), Paul wrote his first Epistle to the church there (1 Thes. 1:1). From Corinth Paul wrote that lovely letter to the dear saints in Thessalonica for their encouragement.

In Corinth Paul testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. "But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, Your blood be upon your head; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (v. 6). The situation with the Jews in Corinth was the same as that of the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia, who thrust away the word of God and judged themselves unworthy of eternal life (13:46). In that situation also Paul declared, "Behold, we turn to the Gentiles."

Acts 18:7 and 8 continue, "And he left there and went into the house of one named Titus Justus, who worshipped God, whose house was next to the synagogue. And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord

with his whole household; and many of the Corinthians, when they heard, believed and were baptized." As in 16:31, the word "household" in 18:8 indicates that the family of the believer is a complete unit for God's salvation, like the family of Noah (Gen. 7:1), the families partaking of the Passover (Exo. 12:3-4), the family of the harlot Rahab (Josh. 2:18-19), the family of Zaccheus (Luke 19:9), the family of Cornelius (Acts 11:14), and the family of Lydia (16:15).

According to 18:9 and 10, "The Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, Do not fear, but speak and do not be silent, because I Myself am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, because I have many people in this city." As in 16:9 and 10, the vision in which the Lord spoke to Paul during the night was neither a dream nor a trance. In a vision such as this definite objects are visible to human eyes.

Acts 18:11 tells us that Paul "settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them." As we shall see, Paul stayed in Ephesus for three years. This indicates that the church in Ephesus was the leading church in Asia Minor. Likewise, the fact that Paul remained in Corinth for a year and a half indicates that the church in Corinth was the leading church in Achaia. No doubt, during his time in Corinth Paul did a great deal of work.

As we read the book of Acts we see that the resistance, opposition, and attack from the Jewish people was very strong. We are told that the Jews wanted to do away with Paul (9:23; 23:12-15, 21; 25:3). Wherever Paul went, the Jews resisted and opposed him. In Thessalonica they "set the city in an uproar" (17:5). Concerning the opposition of the Jews in Corinth against Paul, 18:12 and 13 say, "While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews rose up against Paul with one accord and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, This man incites men to worship God contrary to the law." Using today's terms, the proconsul in verse 12 was the governor. The Jews brought Paul to Gallio and accused him of teaching others to worship God in a way that is not according to the Mosaic law.

When Paul was about to speak, "Gallio said to the Jews, If it were indeed a matter of wrongdoing or crime, O Jews, I would for that reason tolerate you; but if it be questions concerning words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves! I do not intend to be a judge of these things. And he drove them away from the judgment seat" (vv. 14-16). Here Gallio seemed to be saying, "If a crime has been committed, I will be the judge in this case. But I have no interest in disputes concerning names and terminology and your law. I do not have time for such things. You take care of this yourselves."

In a sense Gallio's attitude was helpful to Paul. But in another sense it put Paul in a dangerous situation. After Gallio expressed his attitude so clearly to the Jews, they became bold. "They all laid hold of Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. And Gallio was not concerned about any of these things" (v. 17). From this we see that the situation could have become very threatening to Paul.

The Sosthenes in 18:17 was probably not the same Sosthenes as in 1 Corinthians 1:1, because this Epistle was written in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8) not long after the apostle left Corinth, where the other Sosthenes was a ruler of the synagogue when Paul was persecuted there. The Sosthenes in 1 Corinthians 1:1, as a brother in the Lord, must have joined Paul in his traveling ministry.

TO EPHESUS

Acts 18:18 says, "But Paul, having remained there yet a considerable number of days, took leave of the brothers and sailed away to Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila, having shorn his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow." This was a private vow performed in any place by the Jews for thanksgiving, with the shearing of the hair. It differed from the Nazarite vow, which had to be carried out in Jerusalem with the shaving of the head (21:24; Num 6:1-5, 18; cf. 1 Cor. 11:6 where the difference between shearing and shaving is shown). Paul was a Jew and kept the vow, but he would not and did not impose it upon the Gentiles.

According to the principle of his teaching concerning God's New Testament economy, Paul should have given up all the Jewish practices which belonged to the Old Testament dispensation. However, he still had such a private vow, and it seems that God tolerated it, probably because, being a private vow accomplished in a place other than Jerusalem, it would not have much effect on the believers.

Some expositions of Acts have tried to explain why Paul had the vow mentioned in 18:18. For the duration of the vow, his hair was allowed to grow long. When the vow was completed, his hair was shorn. According to 18:18, Paul's vow was completed in Cenchrea with the shearing of his hair. Certain expositors say that Paul had this vow because he was grateful to the Lord for preserving his life. As a human being, Paul may have been afraid of losing his life at the hands of the Jews. He was constantly preaching and ministering. At the same time, he was always in danger of losing his life. On the one hand, Paul was willing to lose his life for the Lord's sake. On the other hand, he was still human and was frightened. Therefore, according to some expositors, Paul had a vow of thanksgiving.

This understanding of Paul's vow in 18:18 may be correct. When a Jew had something for which to thank the Lord, he could make a vow of thanksgiving. According to the context, Paul should have been thankful to the Lord for protecting him and preserving his life. Throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia, the Jews were opposing him and even seeking to do away with him. But all the way the Lord protected and preserved him. For this Paul must have been thankful.

When the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, He said to him, "Do not fear." This word indicates that there was a fear within Paul. Therefore, the Lord came to him in an extraordinary way by night. Some may say, "Did Paul not have the Lord within him? Did he not have the essential Spirit and the economical Spirit?" Of course, Paul had the Lord within him, and he also had the

essential Spirit and the economical Spirit. But there was still the need for him to be strengthened and assured. To meet this need the Lord came to Paul in a vision, saying, "Do not fear...I Myself am with you...." (18:9-10).

Paul may have had the vow because he was thankful for the Lord's protection and preservation. This may have been the reason that, as he was on the way from Achaia to Syria, he stopped at Cenchrea to complete his vow.

After the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision, he remained in Corinth a year and six months, teaching the word of God. He surely accomplished his commission in that city and eventually a sizable church was raised up and established there.

On the way to Syria Paul also stopped at Ephesus. As he did in many other places, "he entered into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews" (v. 19). They asked him to remain, but he did not consent. Instead, he took leave of them and said, "I will come back to you again, God willing" (v. 21).

BACK TO ANTIOCH, ENDING THE SECOND JOURNEY

Paul put out to sea from Ephesus (v. 21b). "And coming down to Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch." This verse indicates that Paul went to Jerusalem (cf. 21:15) and then went down to Antioch. His returning to Antioch was the end of his second ministry journey, which began in 15:40.

We may wonder why Paul did not go directly to Antioch from Caesarea instead of first going up to Jerusalem. He came down to Caesarea, and then he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church there. Why did Paul go up to Jerusalem and greet the church? He did this because of the problem that was solved in chapter fifteen. After the solution to that problem, Paul took his second journey of ministry. Now at the end of this journey he went to visit the church in Jerusalem.

Luke does not give us the details regarding this visit of Paul to the church in Jerusalem. But if we delve into the

depths of the Word, we shall realize that in making this visit Paul was endeavoring to keep the oneness of the Body and also to maintain a pleasant feeling between him and all the saints in Jerusalem, especially Peter and James.

Paul could have gone straight to Antioch. There was no apparent reason for him to go to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, from Caesarea he turned to the south in order to visit the church in Jerusalem. Then from Jerusalem he made the long journey to Antioch. In 18:22 Luke does not even mention Jerusalem by name. Probably Luke thought that everyone would understand what was indicated by the words "went up," that one went up to nowhere else except Jerusalem.

We need to be impressed that Paul went up to Jerusalem in 18:22 because he was endeavoring to keep the oneness of the Body in a happy and pleasant way. He was enthusiastic in doing everything possible in his sphere to maintain the oneness of the Body and also a pleasant feeling with the saints in Jerusalem. He knew that he was the factor that caused many Jewish believers to rise up and speak against his practice. He was a factor in causing an unpleasant situation. If there had not been such a person as Paul preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, then the vast majority of believers would have been Jewish, and there would have been no problem concerning circumcision. Because Paul was the factor in an unpleasant situation, he did his best to keep the oneness with all the saints. He especially endeavored to have a pleasant feeling with those in Jerusalem. Therefore, despite a long, hard voyage, he went up to Jerusalem to visit the church. Only then did he return to Antioch, thus ending his second journey. This is very enlightening, and we need to learn of Paul's endeavor to keep the oneness of the Body and to preserve a pleasant feeling among the saints regarding our practice in carrying out the Lord's ministry.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FORTY-NINE

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(15)

Scripture Reading: Acts 18:5, 11; 9:11, 22; 13:5; 14:1; 17:1-3

PAUL'S WAY OF PREACHING

The main thing we need to see in chapter eighteen of Acts is Paul's way of preaching. According to 18:5, "when both Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was wholly occupied in the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ." Acts 18:11 tells us that Paul settled in Corinth "a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them." In Corinth Paul first went to the synagogue to testify to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. When they resisted and blasphemed, "he shook out his garments and said to them, Your blood be upon your head; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (v. 6). Paul then remained in Corinth teaching the word of God.

Acts 18:5 indicates that when Paul was in the synagogue, he came directly to the matter of testifying that Jesus is the Christ. However, in our preaching of the gospel to unbelievers, we may think that they will not listen to us if we speak to them concerning the Lord immediately and directly. According to our concept, we may need some kind of opener for our gospel preaching, some way to open the listeners and gain their attention. I do not say that we should never use an opener in preaching the gospel. But we must always remember what our job is. Our job is not to do anything other than to present Christ to sinners and especially to minister Christ

to them. Some may say that it is very difficult to present Christ in a direct way to unbelievers. I agree that this is difficult. Therefore we need to learn how to have the power and impact necessary for this.

POWER THROUGH PRAYER, THE WORD, AND THE SPIRIT

If we would have power and impact in our gospel preaching, we need to pray. There is no need for us to pray until we speak in tongues in order to have the power. We may have genuine power through prayer without speaking in tongues. Furthermore, I have known a number of tongue-speakers who were not at all powerful in preaching the gospel.

At this point, let me relate to you a conversation I had many years ago with a Christian friend in Chefoo, my hometown. This friend was the leader of a certain Pentecostal group. I had known this brother for years, and the meeting hall for this Pentecostal group was very close to the church meeting hall. One day this brother came to me with the intention of convincing me to take the Pentecostal way. Because we were friends, I encouraged him to speak openly and frankly. I said to him, "Brother, you have come to see me for the purpose of convincing me to practice the Pentecostal things." When he told me that this was his intention, I indicated to him that I was happy to talk to him concerning this.

I asked this brother why he was so enthusiastic about the Pentecostal things. He said that the reason for his enthusiasm was his belief that through speaking in tongues we may have power. Then I said, "Brother, let us pay attention to the facts. I am not in favor of the Pentecostal things, but you are strongly for them and have been practicing them for years. I would ask you to compare the number in your congregation with the number in ours. You claim to be powerful because you speak in tongues, but you still only have about fifty meeting with you. We do not practice tongue-speaking,

but we have hundreds meeting with us, hundreds who have been brought to the Lord through our gospel preaching. Where, then, is your power? You speak in tongues, but you do not have power. We do not speak in tongues, but we have genuine power. Do you know where this power comes from? This power comes from prayer."

I went on to testify to this brother regarding our practice of preaching the gospel at the time of the Chinese new year. Instead of celebrating the Chinese new year, the saints in the church in Chefoo made preparations to preach the gospel to their relatives, neighbors, and friends. The last night of the year, which was a time of feasting according to Chinese custom, was for us a time of fasting and prayer. Then the next day, the first day of the year, we came together with our relatives, friends, and neighbors for the preaching of the gospel. That gospel preaching was carried on with much prayer. As I was preaching in the meeting hall, many saints were in different rooms praying until the message was over. The power we experienced in our gospel preaching came from such prayer. I told my friend in Chefoo that we trust in prayer, not in tongue-speaking.

In my talk with this brother, I went on to give him two further reasons for our power. I told him that our power is not only through prayer but also in the Word. We do not preach any strange or peculiar things. On the contrary, our preaching is according to the word in the Bible. This word is the truth, and the truth is prevailing. There is power in every word of God.

We preach only the Word, not Chinese ethics or philosophy. Furthermore, instead of using many stories in our speaking, we mainly preach Christ according to the revelation in the Scriptures. Because God's word is powerful, we have power in our gospel preaching.

I also told this brother that our power is in the Spirit and not in tongue-speaking. We believe that we have the Spirit within us and also upon us. Because we have the Spirit within us and upon us, we have power. Our power, therefore, is in prayer, the Word, and the Spirit.

At this juncture I would like to give you a testimony of what happened one day as I was speaking in Chefoo. I had the sense at a certain point that I was in a certain kind of atmosphere that had come upon me. Then I began to realize that my speaking was altogether out from the genuine power of God.

Whether or not the power in gospel preaching can be sensed by us is not important. What is vital is that in our gospel preaching we have genuine power.

Along with the elders of the church in Chefoo, I had a definite experience of the Lord's power during a revival that was taking place in the church in 1942. Many of the saints requested the laying on of hands. We laid hands on them one by one and also prayed for each one. In approximately an hour we prayed for more than two hundred saints. The prayer that was uttered during that time was actually one long prayer that continually bubbled forth. What is significant was that the prayer for each saint exactly fit the situation of that saint. Suddenly the prayer ceased, and we did not lay hands on anyone else. All the attendants at that meeting realized that what had taken place was truly a move of the Spirit and that we could not repeat it. I give this as a further illustration of the fact that our trust for power is in prayer, the Word, and the Spirit.

As we seek to have power and impact in our gospel preaching, we should not follow any strange or peculiar way. Let us take the way of prayer, the way of the Word, and the way of the Spirit.

We believe that today the Lord is the processed Spirit who dwells in us and also upon us. It does not matter whether this Spirit is sensed by us. We believe that while we are serving Him and speaking for Him, especially as we are speaking Him forth, He is with us. We have the Lord's presence within us as the anointing. Through prayer, the Word, and the Spirit, we can have true power and impact.

I practiced tongue-speaking for a year and a half. The more I spoke in tongues, the less power I had. Eventually,

I discontinued that practice and came back to the regular way of prayer. Although I did not have much time to kneel down and pray, all day long I had a praying spirit. From experience I can testify that prayer brings in power.

Furthermore, throughout the years my ministry has always been with the Word. During the years I have been preaching and teaching in this country, I have cared only for the Word. The Word is inexhaustible, and the Word is power.

OUR POWER--THE TRIUNE GOD AS THE SPIRIT

Actually, our power is the Triune God as the Spirit. Do you not believe that the Triune God is with us? I believe that He is with me in my speaking. When I am about to minister, I usually pray, "Lord, vindicate the fact that You are one spirit with me. Lord, I want to practice being one spirit with You. Lord, make it real that in my speaking You are one spirit with me. Lord, speak Your word in my speaking." This is the way I pray before giving a message. Therefore, I believe that while I am speaking, He is one spirit with me and that He is speaking in my speaking. This is the real power.

We should not trust in anything other than prayer, the Word, and the Spirit. Perhaps a certain professor will be able to give a message concerning science in order to convince students of science to believe in God. Although there is nothing wrong with this, we should not put our trust in it. On the contrary, we should put our trust wholly and absolutely in prayer, in the Word, and in the anointing, which is the Triune God Himself.

PAUL'S DIRECT SPEAKING OF THE WORD

In the book of Acts we see that the Apostle Paul did not use gimmicks in preaching the gospel. Rather, "he proclaimed Jesus, that this One is the Son of God" (9:20). When Saul was in Damascus, he was "empowered and confounded the Jews dwelling in Damascus, proving that this One is the Christ" (9:22). In a foregoing message we emphasized the fact that in Thessalonica Paul reasoned

with those in the synagogue from the Scriptures concerning Christ and saying, "This is the Christ, Jesus, whom I announce to you" (17:2-3). Likewise, we have seen that in Corinth Paul solemnly testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ (18:5). Therefore, instead of using gimmicks, Paul always spoke the word directly.

YOUNG SAINTS PREACHING WITH POWER

Perhaps you would say, "Brother Lee, you have been in the Word for over fifty years. How can we be powerful in preaching the gospel if we are still young in the Lord?" Let me testify to you that even when I was young my speaking was powerful because of these three matters of prayer, the Word, and the Spirit, the anointing. This indicates that even the young saints can preach the gospel with power and impact if they trust in prayer, the Word, and the Spirit.

Young saints, you can take a portion of the Word and preach it to others. Only do not trust in any eloquence you might have. Those who are eloquent in speaking may not have any power or impact. But those who are not eloquent, and who may even mispronounce words, may have impact and power in their gospel preaching. If we trust in prayer, the Word, and the Spirit, the Lord may even use speaking with the wrong pronunciation of words to save others.

THE EXAMPLE OF D. L. MOODY

As you may know, D. L. Moody was prevailing in preaching the gospel. He was a young apprentice in his uncle's shoe store when he became burdened to preach the gospel. One day, after giving a gospel message, Moody was approached by a learned person who was in the congregation. This person told Moody that he often used mistaken grammar in his speaking. Moody's reply was something like this: "Your grammar is correct. You go to preach and see what the result will be. I may use poor grammar, but through my preaching of the gospel people are saved."

CONSTITUTED OF THE ALL-INCLUSIVE CHRIST

Whether or not we have power in preaching the gospel

depends on our being, on our person. If we would have power, we need to be constituted of the all-inclusive Christ. Because Paul was constituted of Christ in this way, in his messages he always preached Christ. In 18:5 we see that Paul testified that Jesus is the Christ, and in verse 11, that during the year and a half he was in Corinth he taught the Word of God. We all need to learn of Paul to testify of Christ and teach the Word.

ONE SPIRIT WITH THE LORD IN PREACHING THE GOSPEL

There is no shortcut to having power in preaching the gospel. We need to pray, we need to learn the Word, and we need to be one spirit with the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 6:17 Paul says, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." We need to stand upon this word, claim the fact, and practice it. We should say, "Lord, this is Your word. I stand on Your word, Lord, and claim the fact that I am one spirit with You. Lord, I ask You to vindicate Your word that You are truly one with me. Lord, I intend to speak for You and even to speak You forth. Lord, vindicate the word and show that You are really one with Your followers." We all need to pray such a prayer. This is the prayer that will be heard in the heavens and by all the demons. If we are one spirit with the Lord in preaching the gospel, we shall have power and impact. Therefore, let us not trust in eloquence. Let us trust in prayer, in the Word, and in the Spirit.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FIFTY

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(16)

Scripture Reading: Acts 18:23--19:20

In 18:19-21 Paul made a short visit to the strategic city of Ephesus. When he took leave of them he said, "I will come back to you again, God willing" (v. 21). As we shall see, on his third ministry journey (18:23--21:17), Paul returned to Ephesus and stayed there for three years (18:24--19:41).

Acts 18:23 says, "And having spent some time there, he went off, passing through the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, establishing all the disciples." This was the start of Paul's third ministry journey, which ended in 21:17.

THE MINISTRY OF APOLLOS

Instructed in the Way of the Lord but Knowing Only the Baptism of John

Acts 18:24 and 25 say, "And a certain Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, an eloquent man, arrived at Ephesus, and he was powerful in the Scriptures. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, knowing only the baptism of John." In verse 25 "the way of the Lord" is not the doctrine concerning the Lord, but the practical way in which the New Testament believers should walk.

According to 18:25, Apollos knew only the baptism of John. This indicates that Apollos did not have a complete revelation of God's New Testament economy, although he

was instructed in the way of the Lord. Hence, there was a deficiency in the result of his ministry (19:2).

Verse 26 continues, "And this man began to speak boldly in the synagogue. And when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him to themselves and expounded the way of God to him more accurately." In Acts "the way" (9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) denotes the Lord's full salvation in God's New Testament economy. It is the way God dispenses Himself into the believers through Christ's redemption and the Spirit's anointing; it is the way the believers partake of God and enjoy God; it is the way the believers worship God in their spirit by enjoying Him and follow the persecuted Jesus by being one with Him; and it is the way the believers are brought into the church and built up into the Body of Christ to bear the testimony of Jesus.

Helping the Believers through Grace

Acts 18:27 and 28 go on to say, "And when he intended to pass through into Achaia, the brothers wrote, urging the disciples to welcome him; and when he arrived, he helped much through grace those who had believed; for he vigorously confuted the Jews publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ." Literally, the Greek words rendered "grace" in verse 27 mean "the grace," indicating the particular grace which Apollos enjoyed in the Lord. This grace is just God Himself in Christ as the portion to the believers in Christ. As we have pointed out elsewhere, this grace is the resurrected Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) to bring the processed God in resurrection into us to be our life and life supply so that we may live in resurrection. Therefore, grace is the Triune God becoming life and everything to us.

Learning from the Case of Apollos

We can see from the record in Acts 18 that Apollos was very good. Not only was he pious and godly like Gamaliel; he also knew the way of the Lord. However, although

Apollos knew the Lord's way, he did not know God's economy in full. This lack of knowledge is indicated by the fact that he knew only the baptism of John. Of course, John the Baptist testified to the Lord, and Apollos received the Lord and knew the way of the Lord to a certain extent. The Lord's New Testament way had been in practice for many years, but Apollos did not know God's economy further than the ministry of John the Baptist. Apollos was very knowledgeable in the Scriptures and was regarded as a great teacher, yet in his knowledge of the Lord's move he had not gone further than the ministry of John the Baptist.

There is a lesson for us to learn from the case of Apollos in Acts 18. We may think that we are in the way of the Lord, but we may not actually be up-to-date with the Lord's move. We may not have the vision concerning His present move on earth. Apollos was good, scriptural, and powerful in expounding the Word, yet he was backward concerning the Lord's move. This is the situation among many Christians today. They love the Lord and they know the Scriptures to some extent, but they are not up-to-date in the Lord's move. During my Christian life I have met a number of saints like this. These saints did not realize that the Lord had gone on further in His move. Their vision fell short of the Lord's move.

As we consider the case of Apollos, we all need to humble ourselves and empty our spirit. The Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens" (Matt. 5:3). To be poor in spirit is not only to be humble but also to be emptied in our spirit, emptied in the depths of our being. Many of the Jewish leaders knew of God's move in the Old Testament, but they did not see that God intended to have a new start for His New Testament economy. These religious leaders were full in their spirit. Therefore, the Lord Jesus pointed out that we all need to be poor in our spirit. We need to be poor in spirit so that we may see the Lord's up-to-date move.

If we read through the Bible carefully, we shall see that from the time of Genesis 4 onward the Lord has been

moving step by step. He moved in a particular way at the time of Enosh and Enoch; in another way at the time of Noah; and in still other ways at the time of Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, and Zechariah. The Lord had a further move through John the Baptist.

Because the Lord is always advancing in His move, we should not be content with where we are. Instead, we should humble ourselves and be unloaded of anything that is filling our spirit so that our spirit may be able to receive something new concerning the Lord's move.

FILLING UP THE DEFICIENCY IN THE MINISTRY OF APOLLOS

Acts 19:1 and 2 say, "Now it came about that while Apollos was in Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper districts, came to Ephesus and found some disciples, and said to them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said to him, No, we have not even heard if there is a Holy Spirit." Here we see the deficiency in the result of Apollos' ministry, which lacked a complete revelation of God's New Testament economy. Although Apollos was very good, there was a deficiency in the result of his ministry, and this caused a problem. Therefore, when Paul came to Ephesus, it was necessary for him to fill up the deficiency in the ministry of Apollos.

We need to learn from the situation in 19:1-7 that we may not be complete in our ministry, and this lack may cause a deficiency that will need to be filled up by others. However, before that deficiency can be filled up, trouble may be caused by our imperfect ministry. Because this may be the case with us in our ministry, we need to humble ourselves and pray that no ground will be given to the enemy to come in to damage the church life.

The Last Mention of John the Baptist

In 19:3-7 we see that the deficiency was filled up through Paul. In verse 3 he asked the disciples in Ephesus, "Into what then were you baptized? And they said, Into John's baptism." This is the last mention of

John the Baptist in the New Testament. "Here at last, he wholly gives place to Christ" (Bengel). There was in John's disciples a thought of rivalry between John and Christ (John 3:26). John's ministry was to introduce Christ (Acts 19:4). Once Christ had been introduced, John's ministry should have ceased and been replaced by Christ. He must decrease and Christ must increase (John 3:30).

In Acts 19:4 Paul said to those in Ephesus, "John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people that they should believe in the One coming after him, that is, in Jesus. " Here the Greek word translated "in" literally means "into."

Baptized into the Name of the Lord Jesus

When the disciples heard Paul's word, "they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus" (v. 5). To be baptized into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19), or into the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:16; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27), is to be baptized into a spiritual union with the all-inclusive Christ, who is the embodiment of the Triune God. The name denotes the person. To be baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus is to be baptized into the Person of the Lord, to be identified with the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ, to be put into an organic union with the living Lord.

Identified with the Body and Receiving the Holy Spirit Outwardly

Acts 19:6 and 7 say, "And when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. And there were in all about twelve men." Through the laying on of hands, Paul identified these disciples with the Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit honored this and came upon them, signifying their identification with the Body. The case of these twelve believers in Ephesus, like the cases of the Samaritan believers and Saul of Tarsus was extraordinary, needing a member of the Body of Christ to identify them with the Body by the laying on of hands.

According to 19:6, the Holy Spirit came upon these

disciples in Ephesus. The word "upon" here is economically different from the essential "in" in John 14:17. "In" is related to the intrinsic essence for life; "upon" is related to the outward element for power. Here the Ephesian believers received the Holy Spirit outwardly.

When the Holy Spirit came upon them, "they spoke in tongues and prophesied" (v. 6). This indicates that speaking in tongues was not the unique issue of receiving the Holy Spirit economically, because prophesying was also one of its issues in this case, as magnifying God was also one of its issues in the case of those in the household of Cornelius (10:44-46). Hence, speaking in tongues is not the only evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit economically, neither is it the necessary evidence, because there is at least one case of the receiving of the Holy Spirit economically, the case of the Samaritan believers (8:15-17), which does not mention speaking in tongues.

THE MINISTRY AND ITS FRUITS

In 19:8-20 we have a record of Paul's ministry in Ephesus and its fruits. According to the book of Acts, Paul did more work in Ephesus than in any other place.

Reasoning and Persuading concerning the Kingdom of God

Acts 19:8 says, "And entering into the synagogue, he spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them concerning the kingdom of God." As usual, Paul's purpose in going to the synagogue was to take advantage of the gathering to announce the word of God, to grasp the opportunity to preach the gospel. For three months Paul spoke boldly in the synagogue concerning the kingdom of God. It was sovereign of the Lord that an environment was arranged in the synagogue where Paul could minister for three months. To be sure, his ministry was not only a matter of preaching but also of teaching. For the most part, Paul spoke to Jews, but some Greeks may also have been present. Some of those in the synagogue eventually became members of the church in Ephesus.

In verse 8 we are told specifically that Paul reasoned and persuaded those in the synagogue concerning the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God was the main subject of the apostles' preaching in their commission after Pentecost (1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 20:25; 28:23, 31). The kingdom of God is not a material kingdom visible to human sight; rather, it is a kingdom of the divine life. It is the spreading of Christ as life to His believers to form a realm in which God rules in His life.

Reasoning in the School of Tyrannus

Acts 19:9 goes on to say, "But when some were hardened and disobeyed, speaking evil of the way before the multitude, he withdrew from them and separated the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus." The Latin name "Tyrannus" comes from Greek. Tyrannus might have been a teacher, and Paul might have rented his school and used it as a meeting hall, apart from the Jews' synagogue, to preach and teach the word of the Lord to both Jews and Greeks for two years (v. 10).

When the dissenting Jews spoke evil of the way of the Lord, Paul pulled all the believers out of the synagogue and then met in the school of Tyrannus for two years, "so that all those dwelling in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (v. 10). Here we have another pattern for us to follow today. At the beginning of his ministry, especially during his first journey of ministry, Paul did not stay very long in any particular place. But now, during his third ministry journey, he remained in Ephesus a much longer time. First he reasoned in the synagogue for three months. Then he met in the school of Tyrannus for two years. Acts 20:31 indicates that Paul was in Ephesus for three years. This may have been the reason that Paul could write the Epistle to the Ephesians and address it to this church. The church in Ephesus was the church that had received the most spiritual education from Paul, since he stayed there longer than in any other place. During his three years in Ephesus, Paul was able to accomplish much in his spiritual ministry.

We need to learn from Paul's three-year stay in Ephesus that sometimes we also may need to remain in a strategic place for the Lord's interest. Ephesus was a strategic city in Asia Minor. For this reason, the Apostle Paul stayed there for a long time in order to establish a strong testimony for the Lord.

The Lord honored Paul's stay in Ephesus and used him greatly. His ministry was prevailing, and many miracles were performed (vv. 11-17).

A Spontaneous Clearing of the Past

Acts 19:18 says, "And many of those who believed came, confessing and making known their practices." Here "confessing and making known" denote the fullest and most open confession. The Greek word translated "practices" also has the technical meaning of magic spells, and that may be the meaning here.

According to 19:19, spontaneously "a considerable number of those who practiced magic brought their books together and burned them before all; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver." The purpose of this burning was to clear up their sinful and demonic life in the past. The price of the books burned was fifty thousand pieces of silver. Since each piece of silver approximated a day's wage, we can see that these books were worth a great deal of money. Nevertheless, they were publicly burned.

Acts 19:20 concludes, "So the word of the Lord grew mightily and was strong." This verse can also be translated, "So by the might of the Lord the word grew and was strong."

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FIFTY-ONE

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(17)

Scripture Reading: Acts 19:21-22

PURPOSING IN SPIRIT TO GO TO JERUSALEM AND ROME

In 19:21 and 22 Paul purposed to go to Jerusalem and Rome. "And when these things were fulfilled, Paul purposed in his spirit, having passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, after I have been there, I must also see Rome. And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a time." Erastus was a city treasurer of Corinth (Rom. 16:23; cf. 2 Tim. 4:20) of a high rank. He must have been converted by Paul's preaching in Corinth (cf. Acts 18:8) and became an attendant to Paul.

According to 19:22, after Paul sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia, he stayed in Asia for a time. It was at this time in Ephesus that the Apostle wrote his first Epistle to the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 16:3-10, 19; 4:17; cf. Acts 19:20-23, 8-10, 17; 20:1).

Paul's purpose in 19:21 was to carry out his loving concern for the need of the poor saints in Jerusalem. At this time he was at Ephesus on his third ministry journey, busy with a heavy burden to carry out his ministry in Asia (1 Cor. 16:8-9) and in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Cor. 16:5-7; Acts 20:1-3). Nonetheless, he still had a burden to spare a part of his time for the needy saints in Jerusalem. When he came to Corinth and wrote his Epistle to the saints in Rome, he expressed his purpose in this concern and begged

them to pray for him concerning this purpose (Rom. 15:25-31). Although Paul was an apostle set apart by God for the Gentiles (Acts 22:21; Gal. 2:8), he was still concerned for the Lord's interest among the Jews. His primary concern was for the Body of Christ universally, not merely for his part of the New Testament ministry among the Gentiles.

Besides this, Paul's purpose in going to Jerusalem at this juncture might also have been to fellowship with James and the other apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning the Judaic influence upon the church there. The decision made by the conference of the apostles and elders in chapter fifteen to resolve the problem concerning circumcision should not have been fully satisfactory to Paul according to his teachings in the Epistles to the Galatians and the Romans. This should have troubled him because of his concern for God's New Testament economy to build up the Body of Christ. After Paul arrived at Jerusalem (21:17-18), James' word in 21:20-22 and his proposal to him to participate in the four Jewish believers' Nazarite vow (21:23-24) seem to confirm this view.

In 19:21 we see that it was in his spirit that Paul purposed to go to Jerusalem. Because the Lord the Spirit dwelt in Paul's spirit (2 Tim. 4:22; Rom. 8:10-11), he must have purposed according to the leading of the Lord the Spirit. Paul's human spirit (Zech. 12:1; Job 32:8; Prov. 20:27) was regenerated by the Spirit of God (John 3:6) and indwelt by the Lord the Spirit. Paul's spirit witnessed with the Spirit (Rom. 8:16), and in his spirit he worshipped God and served Him (John 4:24; Rom. 1:9).

Paul's purpose to go to Jerusalem and his desire to see Rome were fulfilled. Paul did go to Jerusalem (21:17), and he did see Rome (28:14, 16). Paul's desire to see Rome was fulfilled by the Lord bringing him to Rome through his appealing to Caesar (23:11; 25:11).

A CRUCIAL TIME FOR PAUL

The time of 19:21 was both a difficult time and an excellent time for Paul. It was a difficult time because the Jews were opposing him and even seeking to kill him. But

it was an excellent time in that the door had been opened for Paul to gain many for the Lord. Concerning this time, Paul says, "I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a door is opened to me, great and operative, and many are opposing" (1 Cor. 16:8-9). These words to the church in Corinth were written in Ephesus, where Paul stayed for three years on the third journey of his ministry. Therefore, the time of 19:21 was crucial; it was both a time of opposition and of great opportunity to carry out a fruitful work for the Lord.

The fact that Paul purposed in his spirit to go to Jerusalem indicates that he was absolutely for the Body of Christ. Because he was for the Body, he was very concerned about Jerusalem. From this we see that Paul certainly was a qualified vessel to bear the testimony of God's New Testament economy. Paul bore this testimony in an up-to-date way.

PAUL'S BURDEN FOR JERUSALEM

At a time when Paul was in a very difficult situation and also had an excellent opportunity to carry out God's New Testament economy, he purposed in his spirit to go to Jerusalem. Although he was very much occupied with his work in Ephesus, his spirit was burdened for Jerusalem. If we read Romans 15:25-31, we shall see that Paul was burdened to bring financial help from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia to the poor saints in Judea. Paul also refers to this in 2 Corinthians 8, where he indicates that the giving of material things is altogether a matter of grace. Therefore, Paul's purpose in going to Jerusalem was apparently to minister to the needy saints. Actually, Paul had a deeper reason for purposing in spirit to go to Jerusalem.

I believe that from the time of Acts 15 Paul did not have peace concerning the situation in Jerusalem. If we study the book of Acts and all of Paul's Epistles, we shall have a clear view of the Lord's move on earth in His New

Testament economy. The Lord's move started from Jerusalem and eventually reached Antioch. The "flow" of the Lord's move went from Jerusalem to Antioch, and turned from Antioch to the Gentile world. However, the source, the "spring," of this flow in Jerusalem had been "poisoned." Since the source was poisoned, the poison would be carried by the flow wherever it went. This was the reason Paul could not be at peace concerning the situation in Jerusalem.

It is likely that Paul had the burden to help Peter and James to improve or adjust the situation in the church at Jerusalem. The situation there was one of mixture--a mixture of God's New Testament economy with the things of the Old Testament dispensation. As we have seen, this mixture is evident in James' fellowship in 15:13-21. As we shall see, the mixture of God's New Testament economy with the old dispensation is very obvious in chapter twenty-one of Acts. This mixture was very offensive to the Lord. Realizing that the problem still existed in Jerusalem, Paul was not at peace about the church there.

We have seen that at the end of his second journey of ministry Paul went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church there (18:22). He made this trip to Jerusalem because he always endeavored to maintain the oneness of the Body and to keep a pleasant feeling between him and the saints in Jerusalem. From this we see that whenever there was an opportunity Paul would go to Jerusalem to visit the church in order to keep a pleasant relationship between him and the church and also to seek to render some help to the situation there. Because Paul was concerned for Jerusalem, he purposed in spirit, in spite of the difficult and promising situation he was in, to go to Jerusalem.

A BROADENED HEART FOR THE LORD'S INTEREST

Acts 19:21 indicates that Paul had a broadened heart for the Lord's interest. As he was encountering attack at Ephesus and carrying on his ministry, he still purposed in his spirit to go to Jerusalem, and from there he was eager to go to Rome. Concerning this, he said, "I must also see Rome." If you consult a map, you will see that Ephesus, in

Asia Minor, was midway between Jerusalem to the east and Rome to the west. While Paul was laboring and facing attack at Ephesus, he had the heart to care for the situation in Jerusalem and also to see Rome. What largeness of heart Paul had!

Not many of us have such a large heart. Rather, often those who are laboring in a certain place will say, "I am very busy here. I do not have the heart to care for any other place. Furthermore, I am facing much opposition. How can I have the burden for other places?"

Paul's attitude was very different. In the midst of his situation he could still purpose in his spirit to go to Jerusalem, and then express the desire to see Rome. As we have indicated, Paul eventually went to Jerusalem, and, in a marvelous and sovereign way, he did see Rome.

According to Galatians 2:8, Paul's part of the New Testament ministry was among the Gentiles. Although his burden was for the ministry among the Gentiles, he was still concerned for the Lord's interest universally. His primary concern was for the whole Body of Christ, not only for his part of the New Testament ministry. Paul realized that it would be very difficult for the Body of Christ to be built up fully as long as the religious mixture in Jerusalem was allowed to remain. Because he had a clear view concerning the Lord's New Testament move, he was troubled by the situation in Jerusalem, especially as it related to God's New Testament economy to build up the Body of Christ.

GOD'S ECONOMY AND THE LORD'S UP-TO-DATE MOVE

In the fourth message of this Life-study of Acts we pointed out the need for a dispensational transfer, a transfer out of the old dispensation into God's New Testament economy. In studying the book of Acts it is important that we see all the crucial matters related to this transfer. If we are clear concerning these matters, then we shall understand today's situation, and we shall know where we need to be and what we need to do. We should not remain where Apollos was in chapter eighteen,

but go further to follow the Apostle Paul, the one whose eyes were opened to see fully God's New Testament economy. Therefore, in studying this book I do not have the heart for other matters. My burden concerns God's New Testament economy. If by the Lord's mercy we can be helped to see the crucial turning points of God's dispensation, I shall be satisfied. My desire is that the light regarding God's New Testament economy will penetrate our being. If this light penetrates us, then we shall see the Lord's up-to-date move in His economy.

I believe that this study of Acts will be helpful to us in the Lord's recovery. We need to see that we are not carrying out an ordinary Christian work. Rather, we are here in the up-to-date move of God's New Testament economy. Therefore, we must have the vision of God's economy. If we have this vision, we shall be directed and carried on by it in the right way. If we have this vision, we shall not be distracted by today's situation, no matter what it may be. If we have this vision, we shall know where we are and where we are going. Having a clear view concerning God's economy in this age, we shall know what our goal is. We believe that our God is still moving, that He is still going on. Therefore, we need to be in His up-to-date move.

We may compare the view of God's economy presented in Acts to a jigsaw puzzle. When the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle are put together, we have a complete scene. In like manner, throughout the book of Acts we have various "pieces" of a complete "puzzle." When we fit these pieces together properly, we shall see a clear and full view of God's economy. When we reach the end of this Life-study we shall have all the necessary pieces, we shall fit them all together, and we shall see the complete "scene" of the New Testament economy of God. I am especially burdened that the young people see the view of God's economy presented in this book.

In order for the Lord Jesus to come back, His bride needs to be prepared. Consider the situation today in relation to the readiness of the bride. To be sure, the bride

is not yet ready. The only way the bride can be prepared is the way of God's New Testament economy. I say this so that we all may know what the Lord is doing here in His recovery. If we know what the Lord is doing, then we shall know where we are and what our goal should be. May we all be helped through this study of the book of Acts to be fully up-to-date in the Lord's move for the carrying out of God's New Testament economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FIFTY-TWO

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(18)

Scripture Reading: Acts 19:23--20:12

In this message we shall consider 19:23--20:12. In 19:23-41 we have an account of the great disturbance in Ephesus. In 20:1-12 we have a description of Paul's journey through Macedonia and Greece to Troas.

A GREAT DISTURBANCE IN EPHESUS

Acts 19:23 says, "Now about that time no little disturbance took place concerning the way." As we have pointed out, in Acts "the way" denotes the Lord's full salvation in God's New Testament economy.

Satan's Fight against the Spreading of God's Kingdom

Verses 24 through 26 continue, "For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, making silver shrines of Artemis, afforded no little business to the craftsmen, whom he also assembled together with the workmen of similar trades and said, Men, you know that from this trade we have our prosperity. And you observe and hear that not only at Ephesus but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and perverted a considerable number, saying that they are not gods that are made by hands." The Demetrius in verse 24 is not the one in 3 John 12. This Demetrius was a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, the Ephesian goddess. In Latin, this was Diana, the Roman goddess. Making these silver shrines

was a dirty and demonic trade, a trade that cooperated with the demons to possess and usurp people for Satan's evil kingdom (Matt. 12:26). Behind the idol worship were demons who instigated the uproar against the apostle to disturb and frustrate the preaching of the gospel. This was Satan's fight against God's spreading of His kingdom on the earth.

In Ephesus Paul's preaching was prevailing and caused people to talk about the idols in that city. The craftsmen were concerned that their business would come into disrepute (v. 27). As a result, there was a great disturbance. Those whom Demetrius had assembled became full of rage and "they kept crying out, saying, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! And the city was filled with confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus of Macedonia, Paul's traveling companions" (vv. 28-29). The Gaius mentioned in verse 29 was not the Gaius of Derbe in 20:4, nor the Gaius of Corinth in 1 Corinthians 1:14 and Romans 16:23, nor the Gaius addressed by John in 3 John 1. The name Gaius was very common at the time.

Causing Trouble through a Prevailing Ministry

In Acts 19:23-41 we see an important principle. This principle is that if we stay in a locality for a longer time we should have a prevailing ministry, a ministry that is able to stir up others. In a sense, when Paul was in Ephesus he was a troublemaker. Before he arrived, the city was peaceful, worshipping the idol of Artemis. But Paul's presence in Ephesus eventually caused a great disturbance. He did not attack Artemis by name. On the contrary, he carried on a prevailing ministry, and that ministry stirred up the entire city, affecting the society. This indicates that if we stay in a particular place, our ministry should be so prevailing that it stirs up the situation there in the right way.

In 19:23-41 we have another pattern--the pattern of causing trouble through a prevailing ministry. If we follow this pattern, we shall cause trouble through the prevailing

preaching of the gospel. Before we come to a certain place, the people may live peacefully and worship idols. But after we stay there for a period of time, the city may be in a turmoil because of our prevailing ministry.

Certain matters relating to the disturbance in Ephesus are almost laughable. We are told that "some cried out one thing and some another; for the assembly was in confusion, and the majority did not know for what cause they had come together" (v. 32). Furthermore, "some of the crowd focused on Alexander, the Jews having pushed him forward; and Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the populace. But when they realized that he was a Jew, one voice arose from all for about two hours, crying out, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (vv. 33-34). Probably Alexander was not a convert of Paul's preaching. Neither was he the Alexander in 1 Timothy 1:20 and 2 Timothy 4:14. Concerning the disturbance, the townclerk said, "For indeed we are in danger of being charged with insurrection concerning today's affairs, there being no cause for it; and with reference to it we shall not be able to give an account concerning this disorderly gathering" (v. 40). From these verses we see how great was the turmoil caused by Paul's prevailing ministry.

When some read the account of the disturbance in Ephesus, they may say, "When I go to a place to work for the Lord, I do not want to see such turmoil." Nevertheless, if your work is truly prevailing, eventually this prevailingness will touch the heart of the power of darkness. In Ephesus the heart of the power of darkness was the temple of the goddess Artemis. The more the Ephesians became believers in the Lord, the less influence this temple had. Apparently, the disturbance was caused by certain craftsmen. Actually, it was stirred up by the demons who were behind the scene.

Our ministry is to propagate the resurrected Christ as God's kingdom. But today every city is the kingdom of the Devil. Hence, the prevailing ministry for the propagation of Christ is a fighting, a battle, for God's kingdom. The whole earth is the kingdom of darkness. If we are very

kind and gentle in carrying out our work, seeking to please everyone, no opposition will be stirred up, no matter how long we stay in a certain place. If our ministry is truly prevailing, there is bound to be opposition.

However, we should not do anything in ourselves to stir up trouble, thinking that this is a proof that our ministry is powerful and prevailing. It is terrible to do such a thing, for that will be used by the power of darkness. Then instead of being part of the propagation of Christ for God's kingdom, we shall in a practical way be a part of the kingdom of darkness.

We all need to realize that a battle is raging between God and Satan. Therefore, we need to be certain that whatever we do is absolutely on the side of the kingdom of God and that nothing is involved with the kingdom of darkness.

Because of the battle raging between God and Satan, we should be prepared for the enemy's attack. If we carry on a prevailing ministry, eventually we shall be attacked. The demonic "arrows" will be aimed at us. However, instead of being dismayed by this, we, like Paul, should be encouraged.

Paul was strong in confronting attack. He did not flee from that demonic uproar in Ephesus. In fact, he even intended to go in to the populace, but the disciples would not allow him (v. 30). "And some of the Asiarchs also, who were his friends, sent to him and entreated him not to venture into the theater himself" (v. 31). These Asiarchs were principal persons of the province of Asia. Here we see that even Paul's friends in the political circle were concerned for his safety. If Paul had ventured into the theater, the Jews who were opposing him may have seized the opportunity to kill him.

Acts 19:35-41 describes how the crowd was quieted. After the townclerk addressed the crowd, he dismissed the assembly (v. 41). This was the sovereignty of the Lord to preserve His apostle from the demonic uproar.

The Lord's Sovereign Preservation of Paul

In his ministry Paul was constantly fighting against

the power of darkness. As we have pointed out, the power of darkness was behind the idol worship in Ephesus. Humanly speaking, there was no reason for the people in Ephesus to behave so foolishly, crying out without knowing what they were doing. Their behavior was provoked by demons. The demons in the idol worshippers instigated them to do something against God's propagating ministry. It was of the Lord's sovereignty that this disturbance took place at the end of Paul's three-year stay in that city. As 20:1 tells us, "after the uproar had ceased, Paul, having sent for the disciples and encouraged them, took leave of them and went off to go into Macedonia."

THROUGH MACEDONIA AND GREECE TO TROAS

In 20:1-3 we can see more clearly the kind of situation Paul was in. Verse 1 says that he took leave of the disciples and went off to go into Macedonia. It was here that Paul wrote his second Epistle to the church in Corinth (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:5-6; 8:1; 9:2, 4). Paul's first Epistle to the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 16:3-10, 19) was written from Ephesus at the time of 19:22. We have also seen that at the time of 18:5 Paul wrote his first Epistle to the Thessalonians. It is likely that his second Epistle to the Thessalonians was written not long afterward. Furthermore, during this period of time Paul may have written the Epistle to the Galatians.

According to Acts 20:2 and 3, after Paul passed through Macedonia, he came into Greece and spent three months there. It was at this time in Corinth that the apostle wrote his Epistle to the saints in Rome (Rom. 15:22-32; cf. Acts 19:21; 1 Cor. 16:3-7).

A Fourfold Burden

In reading chapters eighteen through twenty of Acts we see that Paul had at least a fourfold burden: a burden for the church in Corinth, a burden for the church in Ephesus, an even stronger burden for the situation in Jerusalem, and also a burden for the church in Rome. In a foregoing message we emphasized the fact that Paul's heart was toward Jerusalem. He purposed in his spirit to go to Jerusalem and then to see Rome. Because of his burden

Paul wrote the two Epistles to the Corinthians and the Epistle to the Romans. Although he was heavily burdened with the work in the area of the Mediterranean Sea, he was also very much burdened for the situation of the church in Jerusalem.

Acts 20:3 says, "And having spent three months there, a plot having been made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he resolved to return through Macedonia." Paul originally intended to go to Jerusalem through Syria from Achaia in Greece (19:21; 1 Cor. 16:3-7). Due to the Jews' plot against him, he changed his route northward to Macedonia. From there he returned to Jerusalem. He was aware of and suffering from the plots of the Jews (Acts 20:19). Because of this, he begged the saints in Rome to pray for him concerning his return to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-26, 30-31). This was possibly also the cause of his being bound in his spirit to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22). Eventually, after returning to Jerusalem, he was seized by the Jews (21:27-30), who sought to kill him (21:31; 23:12-15).

Paul was very cautious concerning the Jews who were plotting against him. When he learned of this plot, he wisely changed his route. By this we can see the difficult situation in which Paul found himself. Although he was in such a situation, he still had the burden to care for the Lord's interest universally, not only in Corinth and Macedonia, but also in Jerusalem and Rome. It is very important for us to see Paul's fourfold burden for Corinth, Ephesus, Jerusalem, and Rome.

Breaking Bread in Troas

According to 20:5 and 6, Paul and his companions came to Troas, where they stayed seven days. "And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed with them, about to go forth on the next day, and prolonged his message until midnight" (v. 7). The first day of the week was the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10). Paul stayed in Troas for seven days, but it was only

on the first day of the week that they gathered together to break bread in remembrance of the Lord. This indicates that at that time the apostle and the church considered the first day of the week a day to meet together for the Lord.

The New Testament does not say explicitly that there was a church in Troas. But by reading this short portion of the Word, we can easily realize that there was a good church there. Although Paul was very busy, he stayed with the saints in Troas for seven days, and on the Lord's day he took the opportunity to minister to them until late at night. From this we see that Paul was truly burdened for the Lord's Body.

While meeting with the saints in Troas on the Lord's day, Paul prolonged his message until midnight. Then, after the situation involving the young man who fell down from a windowsill, they broke bread (vv. 8-11a). Following that, Paul "conversed for a considerable time until day-break, and so he went away" (v. 11b). This indicates that Paul was fully burdened for God's New Testament economy.

Paul's Concern about the Situation in Jerusalem

We need to see the picture of the Apostle Paul presented in these chapters of Acts and also in such Epistles as Galatians, Romans, and 1 and 2 Corinthians. As we study these parts of the New Testament, we can see that in Paul the Lord had obtained an excellent vessel. Paul was a man fully constituted of God's New Testament economy. Because he was constituted in this way, he was burdened concerning the church in Jerusalem.

Actually, the church in Jerusalem and the churches in Judea were not assigned to Paul for him to be burdened concerning them. In Galatians 2:8 Paul says clearly that the Lord assigned Peter to be an apostle to the circumcision, including the churches in the Jewish land, and He assigned Paul to be the apostle to the uncircumcision, that is, to the Gentiles. Therefore, it seems that it would have been sufficient for Paul to bear the burden of all the Gentile churches from Antioch to Asia and from Macedonia to Rome.

Apparently there was no need for Paul to be burdened about Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he had seen the situation there. As one who had seen the situation and who was faithful, Paul could not be at peace concerning Jerusalem. Paul was concerned that the "poison" from the source, the "fountain," in Jerusalem would contaminate the entire Body of Christ.

Even in ancient times there was a great deal of traffic in the area around the Mediterranean Sea. The Roman government had built many roads. In particular, there was traffic to Jerusalem from many different cities, especially at the time of the feasts. Because of this traffic, the religious mixture in Jerusalem could easily spread to the Gentile world.

As we have seen, Peter and James should have solved the problem in Jerusalem. However, they were somewhat weak and fearful and did not take care of the matter. As a result, eventually Paul became burdened to take care of the situation there.

In chapter fifteen of Acts Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem purposely to deal with the problem regarding circumcision. The problem was solved, but the solution was not absolute. Because of the compromising solution, the problem was not uprooted. Rather, the root was allowed to remain. Therefore, Paul was not at peace concerning the situation in Jerusalem.

James was compromising, Peter was weak, and a pitiful situation continued to exist in Jerusalem. Because of this, Paul, a faithful servant of the Lord, was burdened with a very weighty concern. Paul did not have the peace to go on in his ministry in the Gentile world because the poison from the source at Jerusalem was flowing out toward Asia, Europe, and even Rome. This was the reason Paul did not have the peace, assurance, and comfort to proceed further to carry out God's New Testament economy in the Gentile world. His heart was for Jerusalem, and he purposed in spirit to go there to clear up the source of the mixture.

Paul went up to Jerusalem in chapter fifteen and again in chapter eighteen, at the end of his second ministry

journey (v. 22). After he completed his second journey of ministry, Paul arrived at Caesarea. According to the route of travel, he should have gone directly back to Antioch. However, he purposely went to Jerusalem in order to do something gradually to clear away the poison that was there. Now Paul purposed in his spirit to go up to Jerusalem once again.

As we consider the picture portrayed in Acts, we see that while Paul was laboring to care for the Lord's move in the area around the Mediterranean Sea, he was still burdened concerning Jerusalem, because it was the source of the poison that was spreading into the Gentile world. Therefore having no peace to continue his work in Europe and Asia, he endeavored in his faithfulness to go up to Jerusalem in order to deal with the source of the poison of religious mixture that was flowing out from Jerusalem to the Gentile world.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FIFTY-THREE

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(19)

Scripture Reading: Acts 20:13-38

In this message we shall begin to consider 20:13-38. In this portion of Acts Paul goes to Miletus and meets there with the elders of the church in Ephesus.

Verse 16 says, "For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying that if possible he might be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost." Probably Paul wanted to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in order to meet many people from different countries who came to Jerusalem on this day (cf. 2:1, 5).

DECLARING ALL THE COUNSEL OF GOD

From Miletus Paul "sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church" (v. 17). When they came to him, he said, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you all the time, serving the Lord as a slave with all humility and tears and trials which came upon me by the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and to teach you publicly and from house to house" (vv. 18-20). In verse 20 Paul says that he did not shrink from declaring to the saints in Ephesus anything that was profitable, and in verse 27 he says that he did not shrink from declaring to them all the counsel of God. These verses refer to Paul's three years of teaching in Ephesus and indicate the extent of his teaching.

According to verse 20, Paul taught the saints in Ephesus both publicly and from house to house. This indicates that at Paul's time there were home meetings. Not only did Paul teach publicly in a larger meeting place; he also taught from house to house. This indicates that the churches had small meetings in the homes as well as large meetings in a public place.

TESTIFYING REPENTANCE AND FAITH

In 20:21 Paul continues, "Solemnly testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance unto God and faith in our Lord Jesus." Once again, the word "testifying" is used. Testifying requires experiences of seeing, participating, and enjoying. It is different from mere teaching. Paul's use of this word here indicates that he himself had experienced repentance unto God and faith in the Lord Jesus. Therefore, he could testify concerning what he had experienced. He did not merely preach and teach; he testified of what he had passed through in his experience of repentance and faith.

GOING BOUND IN SPIRIT TO JERUSALEM

In verse 22 Paul goes on to say, "And now, behold, I am going bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing what I will meet with there." We have seen that Paul originally intended to go to Jerusalem through Syria from Achaia in Greece (19:21; 1 Cor. 16:3-7). Due to the Jews' plot against him, he changed his route northward to Macedonia, and from there he returned to Jerusalem. Paul was aware of and suffering from the plots of the Jews (v. 19). This was possibly the cause of his being bound in spirit to go to Jerusalem. The spirit in verse 22 refers to Paul's regenerated spirit, in which he served God. In his spirit, a spirit joined to the Lord the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), Paul sensed beforehand that something would happen to him in Jerusalem, and the Holy Spirit testified this to him (v. 23).

Paul knew that trouble was waiting for him. He realized this in his spirit. The Jews throughout the area around the Mediterranean Sea were plotting to seize him.

Not only those in Jerusalem but also those in Asia and in Macedonia and Achaia were determined to apprehend him. It may have been that they all were working together and had a joint plot. Eventually, in his last visit to Jerusalem, Paul was caught by some Jews who had come to Jerusalem from Asia Minor.

Aware of the plot of the Jews, Paul, in a very real sense, had nowhere to go. If he went to Asia Minor, the Jews were there. If he went to Macedonia and Achaia, the Jews were there. If he went back to Judea, the Jews were there all the more. How, then, could he not be bound? Where was he to go? We need to understand Paul's situation.

It was not by doing something wrong that Paul stirred up the opposition of the Jews. Rather, their opposition was stirred up by his being faithful to God's New Testament economy; it was provoked by his obedience to the heavenly vision. Simply because Paul was faithful to the vision he had received from the Lord concerning God's New Testament economy, there was opposition to him wherever he went.

Neither James nor Peter faced the kind of opposition Paul did. James was compromising, and Peter was somewhat weak. Actually, since Peter's ministry began before Paul's, he should have stirred up the opposition of the Jews. However, that was not the case with Peter. No doubt, Peter suffered. But his suffering came from the outsiders, whereas Paul's suffering came from insiders as well as outsiders.

If we read carefully Galatians 2, we shall see that even James and Peter were both a cause of suffering to Paul. In writing the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul was frank. He told them that he had even rebuked Peter to his face. Peter would not have needed that rebuke if he had been faithful. If Peter had been faithful, he would have shared a great deal of Paul's sufferings.

In saying this about Peter I am not belittling him. It was very difficult to stand against the heavy Judaic atmosphere in Jerusalem. As we shall see, when Paul went to Jerusalem for the last time, even he was subdued by the atmosphere

there. Although he had written the books of Galatians and Romans, he still agreed to take part with those who had made a vow and agreed to go to the temple to be purified.

The atmosphere in Jerusalem was so heavy and strong that no one could withstand it. Both Peter and James were defeated by it. Peter was defeated by not doing anything about the situation, and James was defeated by compromising with the situation. As we shall see, in Acts 21 James said strongly to Paul that in Jerusalem there were many thousands among the Jews who believed and who were all zealous for the law (21:20). This indicates that those believers were strongly under the Judaic influence, mixing God's New Testament economy with the Old Testament dispensation. If we consider this matter, we shall realize that Paul was in a very difficult situation.

BONDS AND AFFLICTIONS AWAITING HIM

Let us consider 20:22 again along with verse 23: "And now, behold, I am going bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing what I will meet with there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in city after city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me." Paul did not know what he would meet with in Jerusalem, but he knew one thing, that the Holy Spirit solemnly testified to him that bonds and afflictions awaited him. The Holy Spirit's testifying was only a prophecy, a foretelling, not a charge. Hence, he should not have taken this as a command but as a warning. Although Paul did not know exactly what was awaiting in Jerusalem, he knew, through the warning of the Holy Spirit, that bonds and afflictions awaited him.

In verse 24 Paul continues, "But I consider my life of no account as if it were precious to myself, in order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus to solemnly testify the gospel of the grace of God." Paul's word here is related to the Lord's New Testament move in propagating the resurrected Christ through the gospel.

In 20:24 the Greek word rendered "life" also means

soul. Paul's word in this verse implies that he sensed that he would be martyred.

THE SCOPE OF PAUL'S TEACHING

Verse 25 continues, "And now, behold, I know that you all, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will see my face no more." This verse indicates that in Ephesus Paul proclaimed the kingdom of God. We have seen that the kingdom of God is the main subject of the apostles' preaching in Acts (1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 28:23, 31). This is not a material kingdom visible to human sight, but a kingdom of the divine life.

In 20:25 Paul tells the elders of the church in Ephesus that they will see his face no more. This indicates that Paul realized beforehand that he would be martyred.

Acts 20:26 and 27 say, "Wherefore I testify to you on this day, that I am clean from the blood of all men; for I did not shrink from declaring to you all the counsel of God." Literally, the Greek word translated "on this day" means "on today's day," a very forceful expression. Paul's word in verse 27 about not shrinking from declaring all the counsel of God indicates that he carried on a great work in Ephesus. Here we have an indication of the scope of Paul's teaching to the dear saints in Ephesus.

THE HOLY SPIRIT PLACING OVERSEERS AMONG THE FLOCK

Paul's word in 20:28 is very important: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood." As in 1 Peter 5:2, the Greek word for "flock" literally means "little flock." This flock is little in number (Luke 12:32) compared with the world. It is a little herb for the supply of life, not a big tree for birds to lodge in (Matt. 13:31-32 and notes), not a huge religion like Christendom.

In 20:28 Paul tells the elders of the church in Ephesus that the Holy Spirit had placed them among the flock as overseers. It was the apostles who appointed the elders in

every church (14:23). But here Paul, the leading one, who did the appointing says that the Holy Spirit did it. This indicates that the Holy Spirit was one with the apostles in their appointing the elders and that the apostles had done it according to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

From Paul's word concerning the Holy Spirit placing overseers among the flock we see that the existence of the churches is altogether due to the Holy Spirit, not due to the apostles. Although the apostles had appointed the elders, here Paul says that this was the work of the Holy Spirit. This reveals that a church comes into existence only through the work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the work of the apostles concerning the churches should be absolutely the work of the Holy Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit establishes the elders, it is the Holy Spirit who establishes the churches.

The overseers in verse 28 are the elders in verse 17. This proves that overseers and elders are synonymous terms denoting the same persons. To make an overseer a bishop of a district to rule over the elders of various localities in that district is grossly erroneous. This is what Ignatius taught. His erroneous teaching gave the ground to rank and brought in hierarchy.

The Greek word for "overseer" is *episkopos*, from *epi*, meaning over, and *skopos*, meaning seer; hence, overseer (bishop, from Latin *episcopus*). An overseer (1 Tim. 3:2) in a local church is an elder. The two titles refer to the same person: elder, denoting a person of maturity; overseer, denoting the function of an elder. It was Ignatius in the second century who taught that an overseer, a bishop, is higher than an elder. From this erroneous teaching came the hierarchy of bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and the pope. This teaching is also the source of the Episcopal system of ecclesiastical government. Both the hierarchy and the system are abominable in the sight of God.

SHEPHERDING THE FLOCK

In Acts 20:28 Paul speaks of the elders shepherding the flock. The main responsibility of the elders as

overseers is not to rule over the flock but to shepherd the flock, to take all-inclusive tender care of the flock, the church of God. The elders are not placed in the church by the Holy Spirit as rulers but as shepherds. Shepherding the flock of God requires suffering for the Body of Christ as Christ did (Col. 1:24). This kind of shepherding with suffering will be rewarded with the unfading crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4).

According to 1 Peter 5:1-3, the elders are not to lord it over the flock; that is, they are not to exercise lordship over the ruled (Matt. 20:25). Among the believers, besides Christ there should be no other lord; all should be servants, even slaves (Matt. 20:26-27; 23:10-11). The elders in the church can take only the leadership (not the lordship), which all the believers should honor and follow (1 Thes. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17).

THE VALUE OF THE CHURCH AS A TREASURE TO GOD

In Acts 20:28 Paul says that the church of God has been obtained "through His own blood." This indicates the precious love of God for the church and the preciousness, the exceeding worth of the church in the eyes of God. Here the apostle does not touch the divine life and nature of the church as in Ephesians 5:23-32, but the value of the church as a treasure to God, a treasure which He acquired with His own precious blood. Paul expected that the elders as overseers would also treasure the church as God did.

Both the Holy Spirit and God's own blood are divine provisions for the church He treasures. The Holy Spirit denotes God's Person, and His own blood, God's work. God's redemptive work acquired the church; now God's Person, the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), cares for the church through the overseers.

God's own blood is the blood of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:7). This also implies that the Lord Jesus is God. In the following message we shall consider in more detail the meaning of God's obtaining the church through His own blood.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FIFTY-FOUR

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(20)

Scripture Reading: Acts 20:13-38

THE CHURCH PURCHASED WITH GOD'S OWN BLOOD

In 20:28 Paul charges the elders of the church in Ephesus "to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood." The Greek word translated "obtained" also means acquired or purchased. Whenever we purchase something, we acquire it, or obtain it. God acquired, obtained, the church by purchasing it. In order to purchase anything, we need to pay the price for that thing. What was the price God paid to purchase the church? According to Paul's word in 20:28, God obtained the church by paying the price of "His own blood."

The phrase "His own blood" in verse 28 is very unusual. It is quite bothering. Can God have blood? God is God; He is not a man or a creature. How, then, can God, the Creator, have blood?

Some may try to explain this by saying that the blood in 20:28 is the blood of Jesus. But how can Jesus' blood be God's blood? The Lord Jesus is God, but 20:28 does not speak of Jesus; this verse speaks of God. As we consider this, we realize that it is very difficult to explain theologically.

More than two centuries ago, Charles Wesley wrote a hymn that speaks of God dying for us. In this hymn

Wesley says:

Amazing love! how can it be
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

In this hymn Wesley goes on to say, "Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!" Here Wesley declares that God died for us. When I was translating this hymn into Chinese years ago, I was troubled by this. I was not sure whether to be so bold as to translate it literally to indicate that God died for us. Do you have the boldness to say that God died for you? Charles Wesley saw the vision concerning this and declared in his hymn that God died for us.

THE GOD-MAN

The God who died for us is not the God before incarnation. Prior to incarnation, God certainly did not have blood, and He could not have died for us. It was after the incarnation, in which God was mingled with humanity, that He died for us. Through incarnation, our God, the Creator, the eternal One, Jehovah, became mingled with man. As a result, He was no longer only God--He became a God-man. As the God-man, He surely had blood and was able to die for us.

When the God-man died on the cross, He died not only as man but also as God. The One who died on the cross was the One who had been conceived of God and born with God. Because He was a God-man, the very element of God was in Him. The divine element was mingled with His humanity.

In the conception of the Lord Jesus, the God-man, the divine essence out of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18-20; Luke 1:35) was generated in Mary's womb. Such a conception of the Holy Spirit in the human virgin, accomplished with both the divine and human essences, constituted a mingling of the divine nature with the human nature and produced the God-man, One who is both the complete God and a perfect man, possessing the divine nature and the human nature distinctively, without a third nature being produced. This is the most wonderful and excellent Person of Jesus.

The conception and birth of the Lord Jesus was God's incarnation (John 1:14), constituted of the divine essence added to the human essence, hence, producing the God-man of two natures--divinity and humanity. Through this, God joined Himself to humanity that He might be manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16) and might be the Savior (Luke 2:11) who died and shed His blood for us.

THE BLOOD OF JESUS, THE SON OF GOD

The blood that has redeemed fallen human beings is the blood of Jesus, the Son of God. As human beings, we need genuine human blood for our redemption. Because He was a man, the Lord Jesus could fulfill this requirement. As a man, He shed human blood to redeem fallen human beings. The Lord is also the Son of God, even God Himself. Therefore, with His blood there is the element of eternity, and this element ensures the eternal efficacy of His blood. Therefore, as a man He had genuine human blood, and as God He has the element that gives to His blood eternal efficacy.

First John 1:7 says that "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." The name "Jesus" denotes the Lord's humanity, which was needed for the shedding of the redeeming blood, and the title "His Son" denotes the Lord's divinity, which is needed for the eternal efficacy of the redeeming blood. Thus, "the blood of Jesus His Son" indicates that this blood is the proper blood of a genuine man for redeeming God's fallen creatures with the divine surety for its eternal efficacy, an efficacy which is all-prevailing in space and everlasting in time.

The blood the Lord shed on the cross was the blood of Jesus, the Son of God. It was not only the blood of Jesus; it was also the blood of the Son of God. For this reason, the redemption accomplished by the God-man, by the One mingled with God, is eternal.

If the redemption accomplished on the cross was accomplished merely by a man, that redemption could not be eternally effective. Although it might be effective for the redemption of one person, it would not be effective for

the redemption of millions of believers. Since a man is limited, a particular man cannot die for millions of others. However, although man is limited, God is not limited. Likewise, although man is temporal, God is eternal. Therefore, in Christ's redemption there is the eternal and unlimited element of God. This is the reason that in Hebrews 9:12 this redemption is called an eternal redemption.

We need to see that the blood shed by the Lord Jesus on the cross is eternal blood. It is the blood not merely of a man but of a man mingled with the divine element. Hence, this blood, the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, is eternal. In Acts 20:28 Paul had the boldness to speak of this blood as being God's own blood.

THE GOD REVEALED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Some of today's Christians have a concept of God that is very similar to the Jewish concept. The Jewish concept of God is that God is God and that there is no human element in Him. But according to the Bible, the very God in the Old Testament has become the God revealed in the New Testament. In the Old Testament God was merely God, without any human element. But in the New Testament we see the God-man. Through incarnation the God in the Old Testament put on human nature and became the God-man. As such, He became God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16).

God became the God-man by being conceived in the womb of a human virgin and then being born of that virgin. In this way the human element was added to His divine element. However, this does not mean that as the God-man the Savior has two persons. No, the Lord Jesus, the Savior, has one person with two natures--the divine nature and the human nature. Although this is very difficult to understand, it is nevertheless a fact revealed in the Bible.

Now we can see that our God is the God revealed in the New Testament and not merely the God as He is

revealed in the Old Testament. The Jews, however, have God only as He is seen in the Old Testament. What is the difference between the Jewish God and our God? The difference is that the Jewish God is merely God without a human element, whereas, according to the New Testament, our God is no longer merely God--He is a God-man. Our God has two natures, the divine nature and the human nature. This means that our God, the God-man, is both the complete God and a perfect man. However, He is not two persons; rather, the God-man is one person.

Although we have always believed and taught that the God-man, Jesus Christ, is one person with the divine nature and the human nature and that He is both the complete God and a perfect man, certain opposers have falsely accused us of teaching that Christ was neither fully God nor fully man. They accuse us of saying that the two natures, the divine nature and the human nature, are mingled in Christ to produce a third nature. This accusation is utterly false and baseless, and we repudiate it.

Those who have made this false accusation against us do so by twisting our word in the booklet *The Four Major Steps of Christ*. In that booklet we say clearly and emphatically that our Savior is both the real God and the true man. Through incarnation neither the divine nature nor the human nature is lost. On the contrary, although the divine and human natures are mingled to form the God-man, both the divine nature and the human nature remain, and a third nature is by no means produced. Although this truth was clearly defined and presented, it was twisted in an evil way in an attempt to accuse us of heresy concerning the Person of Christ. According to the Scriptures, we definitely believe that our Savior, who shed His blood for our redemption, died on the cross as the God-man.

FORSAKEN BY GOD ECONOMICALLY

Since we have pointed out that the Lord Jesus died on the cross as the God-man, some may wonder about Mark

15:34: "At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, My God, why did You forsake Me?" This was the Lord's cry during the time He was bearing our sins (1 Pet. 2:24), being made sin for us (2 Cor 5:21), and taking the place of sinners (1 Pet. 3:18). This means that God judged Him as our Substitute for our sins. In the sight of God, Christ became a great sinner. Because Christ was our Substitute and was made sin in the sight of God, God judged Him and even forsook Him.

According to Matthew 1 and Luke 1, the Lord Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit. Later, for His ministry, He was anointed with the Holy Spirit, who descended upon Him (Luke 3:22). We need to realize that before the anointing Spirit descended upon the Lord Jesus economically, He already had, essentially, the begetting Spirit as the divine essence within Him as one of the two essences of His being. Now we need to see that the begetting Spirit as the divine essence never left Him essentially. Even when He was on the cross crying out, "My God, My God, why did You forsake Me?" He still had the begetting Spirit as the divine essence. Then who left Him? It was the anointing Spirit through whom He presented Himself to God (Heb. 9:14) who left Him economically. After God accepted Christ as the all-inclusive offering, the anointing Spirit left Him. But although the anointing Spirit left Him economically, He still had the begetting Spirit essentially.

When the Lord Jesus, the God-man, died on the cross under God's judgment, He had God within Him essentially as His divine being. Nevertheless, He was forsaken by the righteous and judging God economically. He was conceived and born of the Holy Spirit essentially and therefore the Holy Spirit was one of the essences of His being. As the Lord Jesus grew up and lived on earth, He had the Holy Spirit within Him essentially. Later, when He was baptized, He already had the Holy Spirit as an essential part of His being. However, at the time of His baptism the Holy Spirit descended upon Him economically. This means

that the Lord Jesus had the Holy Spirit as one of the essences of His being essentially and also that the Holy Spirit descended upon Him economically. This does not mean, of course, that there are two Holy Spirits. It means that the one Holy Spirit has two aspects--the essential and the economical. The essential aspect was for the being, the existence, of the Lord Jesus, and the economical aspect was for His work, His ministry.

We need to be impressed with the fact that when the Lord Jesus was on the cross dying for our sins, God was in Him essentially. Therefore, the One who died for our sins was the God-man. But at a certain point the righteous God, while judging this God-man, left Him economically. God's forsaking of Christ was an economical matter related to the carrying out of God's judgment.

Because the Lord Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and was born of God and with God, He had the Holy Spirit as the intrinsic essence of His divine being. Therefore, it was not possible for God to leave, to forsake, Him essentially. Nevertheless, He was forsaken by God economically when the Spirit, who had descended upon Him as the economical power for the carrying out of His ministry, left Him. But the essence of God remained in His being. Therefore, He died on the cross as the God-man, and the blood He shed there for our redemption was the blood not only of the man Jesus, but also the blood of the God-man. Therefore, this blood, through which God obtained the church, is God's own blood.

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF THE CHURCH

Let us read Acts 20:28 again: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood." Here, in His charge to the elders of the church in Ephesus, Paul speaks both of the Holy Spirit and of God's own blood in order to indicate his feeling concerning the preciousness of the church. According to Paul's understanding, the church is

altogether precious. The church is under the care of the Holy Spirit, and the church has been bought by God with His own blood. Hence, the church is a treasure in the sight of God. Paul treasured the church even as God does.

In 20:28 Paul charged the elders to treasure the church as God does and he did. The fact that God purchased the church with His own blood indicates the preciousness of the church in His sight. Having paid such a price for the church, the church surely is dear to Him. Moreover, the church is under the care of the Holy Spirit. According to Paul's word in verse 28, the elders should consider the church very precious, regarding it as a treasure in the sight of God. The elders, in shepherding the church, should have the same feeling about the church that God has.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FIFTY-FIVE

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(21)

Scripture Reading: Acts 20:13-38

In this message we shall continue to consider Paul's charge to the elders in Ephesus recorded in 20:13-38.

WOLVES AND PERVERTED ONES

Verse 29 says, "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." Here Paul indicates that wolves will come in from the outside to damage the flock, the church of God. In verse 29, Paul did not care for his own life, but he was very much concerned for the future of the church, which was a treasure to him as well as to God.

In verse 30 Paul goes on to say, "And from among you yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after themselves." The perverted ones among the believers in the church are always used by the Devil, who hates the church, to draw the sheep away to form another "flock."

During our many years in the church life, we have experienced both the wolves and the perverted ones. The wolves come from outside the church, and the perverted ones rise up from inside the church.

When perverted ones rise up in the church, we may think that this indicates that we have not been careful in our work and that we have brought inside seed that has produced perverted ones. Many of us would think this way whenever we see perverted ones rising up. However, we

may not have anything to do with the rising up of such ones. Consider Paul's work in Ephesus. The church in Ephesus was raised up, established, and carried on by Paul's ministry over a period of three years. To be sure, Paul did his work very carefully. Nevertheless, even Paul anticipated that certain ones would rise up to speak perverted things in order to draw away saints after themselves to form another "flock."

One of the Lord's parables in Matthew 13 speaks of the sowing of tares among the wheat (vv. 24-30, 36-43). I have studied this parable for years, trying to understand where the tares come from. Some might say that seeds producing tares are blown in by the wind. Although I do not know where the tares come from, I know that wherever the "wheat" is, there the "tares" will be also. This indicates that where the real believers are, there false believers will also be. This is unavoidable. It was unavoidable in Paul's work, and it will be unavoidable in our work today.

After working in Ephesus for three years, Paul warned the elders of the church there that wolves would come in among them and that certain ones would rise up to speak perverted things. We have seen this take place both in the Far East and the West. We should not expect that there will be wheat without tares. It is possible that in any local church certain perverted ones may rise up. When some hear this, they may say, "Oh, please don't predict such a thing. Among the brothers and sisters in our locality there will never be any perverted ones." Nevertheless, we need to receive Paul's word. Although he did not know who the perverted ones would be, he predicted their rising up.

According to Paul's word in verse 30, the purpose of the perverted ones is to draw away the disciples after themselves. Their intention is to draw away the saints to form another "flock." We have observed this over the years. We have seen that the intention of the perverted ones is to set apart a group of believers to become their following. Therefore, we should take heed to Paul's word concerning wolves entering in from without and perverted ones rising up from within.

THE WORD OF GOD'S GRACE

In verses 31 and 32 Paul continues, "Wherefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears. And now I commit you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who have been sanctified." Here Paul commits the believers to God and to the word of His grace. Grace is the Triune God received and enjoyed by the believers. I believe that during the three years Paul was in Ephesus, he daily spoke the word of God's grace to the saints.

We can testify that, by the Lord's mercy, the word of God's grace can be found in the Life-study Messages. Recently a young brother charged the young people in the Lord's recovery to become constituted of all the riches of the Life-studies. I agree with this brother's word. If the young people are constituted in this way, in the recovery there will be a great dispensational transfer. I would encourage the young people to take the time over the next several years to become constituted of all the Life-study Messages. If the young people are saturated with these messages in the coming years, saturated with the word concerning God's New Testament economy, many will be useful in serving the Lord full time. They will be able to go to other cities and countries and convey to others God's New Testament economy. This will cause the situation among today's Christians to be transformed. In this way the riches in the Life-studies will become known to the entire Christian community. However, the main thing is that among us many living vessels are raised up and constituted of God's New Testament economy.

We should not think that only the young people need to be constituted of the Life-study Messages. Even those who are much older still have the time to be constituted of these messages and then have years to serve the Lord by carrying out God's New Testament economy throughout the earth.

Building Up the Saints

In 20:32 we see the function of the word of God's grace.

First, this word is able to build up the saints. To build up the saints requires the growth in the divine life, and the growth in the divine life needs the nourishment of the divine element and the edification and equipment with the divine knowledge. All these can be afforded only by the word of God's abundant grace, which is the Triune God Himself who went through all the processes of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension and who has been given to the saints for their enjoyment.

Giving Us an Inheritance

Second, the word of God's grace functions to give us "the inheritance among all those who have been sanctified." The divine inheritance is the Triune God Himself with all that He has, all He has done, and all He will do for His redeemed people. This Triune God is embodied in the all-inclusive Christ (Col. 2:9), who is the portion allotted to the saints as their inheritance (Col. 1:12). The Holy Spirit, who has been given to the saints, is the foretaste, the pledge, and the guarantee of this divine inheritance (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14), which we are sharing and enjoying today in God's New Testament jubilee as the foretaste and will share and enjoy in full in the coming age and for eternity (1 Pet. 1:4).

Our eternal inheritance is related to the divine life which we received through regeneration and which we are experiencing and enjoying through our entire Christian life. "This inheritance is the full possession of that which was promised to Abraham and all believers (Gen. 12:3; see Gal. 3:6ff), an inheritance, as much higher than that which fell to the children of Israel in the possession of Canaan, as the sonship of the regenerate, who have already received the promise of the Spirit through faith as a pledge of their inheritance, is higher than the sonship of Israel: compare Gal. 3:18-29; 1 Cor. 6:9; Eph. 5:5; Heb. 9:15" (Wiesinger, quoted by Alford).

An inheritance is a proper and legal possession. It is not gained by our energy, ability, or deeds. On the contrary, it is granted to us by another in a way that is legitimate. We do not work for an inheritance; we receive it.

On the day we were regenerated, we were given the right to share an inheritance. This inheritance includes all the blessings related to eternal life. Daily we need to take possession of this inheritance and enjoy it. This inheritance is legal, proper, and legitimate, for Christ died to purchase it for us, paying the price of His precious blood. Daily we may participate in and enjoy the inheritance that is ours today and for eternity.

According to Paul's word in Acts 20:32, the inheritance is among those who have been sanctified. To participate in God's inheritance requires us to be sanctified, and to be sanctified requires the word of God's grace. In John 17:17 the Lord Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." To be sanctified (Eph. 5:26; 1 Thes. 5:23) is to be separated from the world and its occupation unto God and His purpose, not only positionally (Matt. 23:17, 19), but also dispositionally (Rom. 6:19, 22). God's living word works in the believers to separate them from anything worldly. This is to be sanctified in God's word as the truth, the reality.

WORKING TO SUPPORT HIMSELF AND TO HELP HIS CO-WORKERS

In 20:33 and 34 Paul went on to say, "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my needs and to those who are with me." Paul worked with his hands at making tents (18:3) in order to support both himself and those who were with him. He worked in order to help his young co-workers. This indicates that Paul's way was not that of today's clergy who make a profession out of preaching.

Like Paul, we all should bear the New Testament economy wherever we may be. If the situation allows, we may spend our full time in the work of the ministry. Otherwise, we should do something to support ourselves and also to help others.

In 20:35 Paul said, "I have showed you all things, that toiling in this way we ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus which He Himself

said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The Greek words rendered "the weak" may also be translated "the infirm," referring to those who are weak physically (1 Cor. 11:30); hence, the poor ones.

In verse 35 Paul asked the elders to remember the word of the Lord Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." This word is not recorded in the Gospels; it must have been received by oral communication.

If we carefully read Paul's word to the elders of the church in Ephesus, we shall see that Paul did not consider preaching a profession. Rather, Paul had a genuine burden to carry out God's New Testament economy.

BURDENED FOR THE CARRYING OUT OF GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

The situation on earth today needs a strong testimony, and a strong testimony requires much labor. Thus there is the great need for many to serve the Lord with their full time. But in order to labor for the Lord, you need to be fully constituted of the Word.

I would like to point out once again that the Lord's recovery is not an ordinary Christian work. On the contrary, the recovery is the Lord's up-to-date move for the carrying out of His New Testament economy, which has not been fully carried out in the past. As those who have heard His word concerning His New Testament economy, we should say to Him, "Lord, we are here for Your move on earth. We do not want to merely gain the knowledge of Bible teachings. We are willing to take up the burden to be constituted of all the New Testament teachings so that, like Paul, we may be vessels to carry out Your economy. We are even willing to labor full time." If the situation requires that we work at a job to support ourselves and others, we should do so. Otherwise, we should be willing to devote all our time to the Lord's ministry.

Concerning God's New Testament economy, the need on earth today is very great. The need is much greater now than in the past centuries when missionaries went forth to preach the gospel and teach the Bible, to a large extent in a superficial way. A superficial preaching of the gospel and

teaching of the Bible will never carry out God's New Testament economy. Such preaching and teaching cannot afford God a way to carry out His eternal plan.

Because the Lord has enlightened us concerning His economy and has even burdened us and commissioned us to carry it out we all need to consider this seriously. We should not say to ourselves, "I have been visiting different denominations and groups, but none of them can satisfy me. Now I feel that the churches in the Lord's recovery are quite good, and I am satisfied simply to enjoy the church life here." This attitude is altogether not adequate. All the saints in the recovery need to be built up in the burden of the New Testament economy.

When some saints hear about the need to be burdened for the carrying out of God's New Testament economy, they may feel that they are not talented or gifted and therefore cannot do very much. However, if the saints are serious with the Lord and become saturated with the riches of God's economy, especially as conveyed in the Life-study Messages, they will be able to care for a number of others among their relatives, neighbors, friends, colleagues, and schoolmates. At least, we all are able to take care of ten other people, not preaching a shallow, superficial gospel or presenting a common teaching, but ministering the deeper truths of the New Testament economy. If we are saturated with God's economy, whenever we speak concerning it, the truth will flow out. Furthermore, the people will be able to understand what we are saying. If all the saints in the Lord's recovery take care of ministering the truths of God's New Testament economy to ten others, there will be an excellent outcome for the Lord's interest. Others will be constituted of the truth through us, and they in turn will pass this truth on to others. This will result in a marvelous multiplication.

We need to realize that in every nation people are seeking the truth. They may be evil and worldly, but they still desire the truth. They want to know the real meaning of human life. Therefore, we all need to take up the burden to spread the truth concerning God's New Testament economy. In carrying out this burden, we should not follow

the trend of today's Christianity. Instead, we should follow the pattern of the Apostle Paul presented in Acts. For the sake of the Lord's propagation, let us all become saturated with God's economy and then help others to be saturated with it.

I encourage the young people to set aside two years after graduating from college to be full time for the Lord. I suggest that these full time young people spend half a day to make a thorough study of the New Testament with the help of the Recovery Version, the footnotes, and the Life-study Messages. In this way, whether or not they continue to serve full time after the two years, they will be fully saturated with and established in the truth of God's New Testament economy. In addition to their study in the morning, these full time ones may use the remainder of the time to preach the gospel and contact people. I encourage the young people to consider this matter seriously.

We in the Lord's recovery are not here to be common members of a church doing an ordinary Christian work. Like Paul, our work should revolutionize the situation on earth. Paul is an excellent pattern for us today. He not only carried out the burden of God's New Testament economy; he also labored with his hands making tents in order to support himself and help others. If we also are faithful to work for the Lord's purpose, He will take care of our living. Then we shall be able to support many full time workers not only in this country but in many others countries. For example, if ten saints are faithful in rendering financial support to one full time worker, out of a thousand saints one hundred will be able to go full time. This is especially true in the United States where, according to the Lord's sovereignty, the economy is very strong.

Those who are burdened to go forth to labor full time in carrying out God's New Testament economy should not go out empty-handed. Rather, they must go out with the full knowledge of the truth, at least the full knowledge of the New Testament. We thank the Lord for opening up the New Testament to us. I believe that in the years to come

the saints will see more riches in the Word. May all the saints in the Lord's recovery be saturated with the riches of God's economy and then dig deeper into the Word to find more riches.

As we go forth bearing the burden of God's economy, we should not care about the opposition. Often those who are building a highway encounter opposition. Nevertheless, they proceed to clear away the obstacles and fill in the gaps so that a highway can be built. Let us go forth with such a spirit to carry out God's New Testament economy, presenting the teachings concerning God's economy to the needy ones. Many, when they hear of this, will be convinced and receive it. Others may oppose. However, instead of arguing, simply present the truth to them. Although they may reject the truth again and again, eventually the Lord will gain them through our faithfulness.

Let us all be filled with the riches of God's New Testament economy and then carry out the burden for God's economy positively and aggressively. We all can become aggressive if we are filled and saturated. I hope that in the coming years there will be a great increase for the Lord's propagation. May there be a real stirring up throughout the earth!

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FIFTY-SIX

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(22)

Scripture Reading: Acts 21:1-26

After Paul's solemn and precious fellowship with the elders of the church in Ephesus (20:13-35), "he knelt down with them all and prayed" (20:36). Eventually, they escorted Paul to the ship. Acts 21:1 says, "Now it came about that when we parted from them and set sail, we took a straight course and came to Cos, and on the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara." The Greek word translated "parted" may also be rendered "tore ourselves."

At Patara Paul and his company found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board, and set sail (v. 2). They sailed to Syria and came down to Tyre. "And having sought out the disciples, we remained there seven days; and they told Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem" (v. 4). In 20:23 the Holy Spirit made known to Paul that bonds and afflictions awaited him in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit's testifying concerning this was only a prophecy, a foretelling, not a charge. Therefore, Paul should have taken it not as a command but as a warning. Now in 21:4 the Spirit took a further step to tell him, through some members of the Body, not to go to Jerusalem. In practicing the Body life, Paul should have taken this word and obeyed it as a word from the Head.

TO PTOLEMAIS AND CAESAREA

Acts 21:7 and 8 go on to say, "And when we finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and having

greeted the brothers, we remained one day with them. And on the next day we went out and came to Caesarea; and entering into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we remained with him." Wherever Paul went he visited the brothers and stayed with them (vv. 4-7). He was actually practicing the Body life of the church, living according to what he taught concerning the Body of Christ.

Acts 21:10 and 11 say, "And while we remained there many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And he came to us and took Paul's girdle; and having bound his own feet and hands, he said, Thus says the Holy Spirit, In this way shall the Jews in Jerusalem bind the man whose girdle this is and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." Here the Holy Spirit told Paul again, not directly but through a member of the Body, what would befall him in Jerusalem. This was again a warning in the nature of a prophecy, not a charge. It was again the Head speaking through the Body, which Paul should have listened to in the practice of the Body life.

Verse 12 continues, "And when we heard these things, both we and those in that place entreated him not to go up to Jerusalem." The "we" includes Luke the writer. Here the Body, through many members, expressed its feeling, entreating Paul not to go to Jerusalem. But due to his strong will in being ready even to sacrifice his life for the Lord, he would not be persuaded. Concerning this, verse 13 says, "Then Paul answered, What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Since Paul would not be persuaded, the members of the Body were forced to leave this matter to the will of the Lord. Verse 14 says, "And when he would not be persuaded, we were silent, having said, The will of the Lord be done."

TO JERUSALEM, ENDING THE THIRD JOURNEY

Acts 21:15 and 16 say, "And after these days, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. And some of the disciples

from Caesarea also went with us, bringing us to a certain Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing, with whom we were to lodge." In verse 16 we see that they were to lodge with Mnason in Jerusalem.

Verse 17 continues, "And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers welcomed us gladly." This coming to Jerusalem was the end of Paul's third ministry journey which began in 18:23.

THE INFLUENCE OF JUDAISM

A Mixture of God's New Testament Economy with the Old Testament Dispensation

According to 21:17, when Paul and his company came to Jerusalem, the brothers gladly welcomed them. Verse 18 says, "And on the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present." The word "us" in this verse indicates that Luke was present.

In 21:18 we see that Paul went in to James. James was the central figure relating to the problem in Jerusalem, for he was a leader among the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. When Paul and his co-workers went in to see James, all the elders were present. This indicates that James was the leading one among the elders.

After Paul greeted the elders, "he related one by one the things which God did among the Gentiles through his ministry" (v. 19). Paul wisely did not teach them, but instead presented the things God had done through his ministry. When they heard this, they glorified God (v. 20).

Although the elders in Jerusalem glorified God for what He had done among the Gentiles through Paul's ministry, they nevertheless went on to say to him, "You observe, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed, and all are zealous for the law." The Greek word rendered "thousands" also means myriads, ten thousands. These myriads of the Jews who believed were all zealous for the law.

The word in 21:20 about thousands of believing Jews being zealous for the law indicates how the Jewish believers in Jerusalem still kept the law of Moses, still

remained in the Old Testament dispensation, and still were strongly under the Judaic influence, mixing God's New Testament economy with the out-of-date economy of the Old Testament.

James addressed his Epistle to "the twelve tribes in the dispersion" (James 1:1), indicating that it was written to Christian Jews. However, to call these believers in Christ "the twelve tribes," as God's chosen people in His Old Testament economy, may indicate the lack of a clear view concerning the distinction between Christians and Jews, between God's New Testament economy and the Old Testament dispensation. It may also indicate that James did not realize that God in the New Testament had delivered and separated the Jewish believers in Christ from the Jewish nation, which was then considered by God as a "crooked generation" (Acts 2:40). In His New Testament economy God no longer regards the Jewish believers as Jews for Judaism but as Christians for the church. Therefore, the Jewish believers, as the church of God, should be as distinct and separate from the Jews as from the Gentiles (1 Cor. 10:32). Nevertheless, James, as a pillar of the church (Gal. 2:9), in his Epistle to the Christian brothers, still called them "the twelve tribes." This was contrary to God's New Testament economy.

In his Epistle James also uses the word "synagogue" (James 2:2). The use of this word by James may indicate that the Jewish believers considered their assembly and assembling place as one of the synagogues among the Jews. James' use of this word in his Epistle may indicate that the Jewish Christians regarded themselves as still a part of the Jewish nation, as the chosen people of God according to the Old Testament, and that they lacked a clear vision concerning the distinction between God's chosen people of the Old Testament and the believers in Christ of the New Testament.

James 2:8-11 indicates that the Jewish believers at James' time were still practicing the keeping of the Old Testament law. These verses correspond to the word in Acts 21:20 spoken to Paul by James and the elders in

Jerusalem concerning the zeal of the thousands among the Jews who believed for the law. James, the elders in Jerusalem, and many thousands of Jewish believers still remained in a mixture of the Christian faith and the Mosaic law. They even advised Paul to practice such a semi-Judaic mixture (21:20-26). They were not aware that the dispensation of law was altogether over and that the dispensation of grace should be fully honored, and that any disregard of the distinction between these two dispensations would be contrary to God's economical plan for the building up of the church as the expression of Christ.

In chapter twenty-one of Acts we see that James and the elders in Jerusalem had formed a mixture of God's New Testament economy with the Old Testament dispensation. Actually James and the elders were even promoting this mixture. Of course, they did not neglect faith in Christ, but they were still zealous for the Old Testament. As a result, there was a religious mixture in Jerusalem. We all need to have a clear understanding of this.

Paul Accused of Apostasy

Referring to the thousands of Jews who believed and were zealous for the law, James went on to say to Paul, "And they have been instructed concerning you that you are teaching all the Jews throughout the nations apostasy from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs" (v. 21). To leave the law of Moses, not to circumcise, and not to walk according to the customs of dead letters are really according to God's New Testament economy. But these were considered by the unbelieving Jews and even by the Jewish believers in Christ to be apostasy from God's Old Testament dispensation. It certainly is not apostasy to put aside the Old Testament economy. Rather, that is part of the carrying out of the truth. Nevertheless, James and the other elders used the situation among the thousands of believing Jews in Jerusalem in order to persuade Paul.

Those believing Jews who had been instructed concerning Paul were correct as to the facts, but they were

mistaken in accusing Paul of apostasy. In the Epistle to the Galatians Paul clearly says that the law has been put aside, and that he is dead to the law: "I through law have died to law that I might live to God" (Gal. 2:19). This means that Paul no longer had anything to do with the law. For him to have died to the law means that the obligation under the law, the relationship to the law, was terminated. Hence, before Paul came to Jerusalem the last time in Acts 21, he had clearly written to the Galatians that he was dead to the law and had nothing to do with it.

The Jews were right regarding the facts, but they twisted the facts by accusing Paul of teaching apostasy. Apostasy is a matter of heresy. Paul's departure from the law was neither apostasy nor heresy; it was the practice of the truth of God's New Testament economy. However, the opposers took the facts and twisted them. Our opposers do the same thing today.

According to 21:21, Paul taught apostasy from Moses, telling the Jews not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. I believe that Paul did teach that it was no longer necessary to practice circumcision. Yet, as we have pointed out, he had Timothy circumcised (16:1-3). The criticism of his opposers, therefore, was not fair.

The Jews also claimed that Paul taught the people not to walk according to the customs. In this matter they were accurate. Nevertheless, the report that went to Jerusalem concerning Paul's ministry was only partially true. The situation is the same with us today.

The Requirement That Paul Be Purified with Those Who Had a Vow on Themselves

In 21:22 and 23a James and the elders said to Paul, "What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Therefore do what we tell you." Literally, the Greek word translated "what" mean "this that." In verse 23 James and the elders did not propose something to Paul; rather, they required it of him, telling him to do what they said to him.

James and the elders went on to say, "Four men are with us who have a vow on themselves; take these and be purified with them, and pay their expenses that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things of which they have been instructed concerning you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law" (vv. 23b-24). The vow mentioned in verse 23 was the Nazarite vow (Num. 6:2-5). For Paul to be purified with the Nazarites was to become a Nazarite with them, joining them in their vow. The word "purely" is used in the Septuagint in Numbers 6:3, in describing the Nazarite's duties. To take the Nazarite vow is a purification before God.

In addition to telling Paul to be purified with the four who had a vow on themselves, they told him to pay their expenses so that they might shave their heads. Paying their expenses refers to the cost of the offerings which a Nazarite had to pay for the completion of his purification (Num. 6:13-17). This was very expensive for the poor Nazarites. It was a custom among the Jews, and was considered a proof of great piety, that a rich person would pay the expenses of the offerings for the poor.

The shaving of the head was to be done at the completion of the Nazarite vow (Num. 6:18). This shaving differed from the shearing in Acts 18:18, which was for a private vow. We have emphasized the fact that the vow in 18:18 was a private vow in any place by the Jews for thanksgiving, with the shearing of hair. It differed from the Nazarite vow, which had to be carried out in Jerusalem with the shaving of the head. In Acts 18 Paul had a private vow, and it seems that God tolerated it, probably because it, being a private vow accomplished in a place other than Jerusalem, would not have had much effect on the believers.

Acts 21:26 says, "Then Paul took the men on the following day, and having been purified with them entered into the temple, giving notice of the completion of the days of the purification, until the offering was offered for each one of them." Here we see that Paul participated in their

Nazarite vow. In order to do this, Paul had to enter into the temple and remain there with the Nazarites until the completion of the seven days of the vow. Then the priests would offer the offerings for each one of them, including him. Paul surely was clear that such a practice was of the out-of-date dispensation, which, according to the principle of his teaching in the New Testament ministry, should be repudiated in God's New Testament economy. Yet he went through with it, probably because of his Jewish background, which was also manifested in his earlier private vow in 18:18, and because he was practicing his word in 1 Corinthians 9:20. However, his toleration jeopardized God's New Testament economy, which God would not tolerate. As we shall see, just at the time when their vow was to be concluded, God allowed an uproar to rise up (v. 27).

God's Dealing with the Mixture in Jerusalem

The mixture of Judaic practices with God's New Testament economy was not only erroneous in God's dispensation, but also abominable in the eyes of God. This gross mixture was terminated by Him a mere ten years or so later with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the center of Judaism, through Titus and his Roman army. This rescued the church and absolutely separated it from the devastation of Judaism.

God might have tolerated the private vow Paul had in 18:18, but He would not allow Paul, His chosen vessel not only for the completion of His New Testament revelation (Col. 1:25) but also for the carrying out of His New Testament economy (Eph. 3:2, 7-8), to participate in the Nazarite vow, a serious Judaic practice. Paul might have intended in going to Jerusalem to clear up the Judaic influence on the church there, but God knew that it was incurable. Hence, in His sovereignty He allowed Paul to be arrested by the Jews and imprisoned by the Romans so that he might write his last eight Epistles, which completed the divine revelation (Col. 1:25) and gave the church a clearer and deeper view concerning God's New Testament economy (Eph. 3:3-4). Thus, God left the

Judaic--influenced church in Jerusalem to remain as it was until the devastating mixture was terminated with the destruction of Jerusalem. For Paul to write his last eight Epistles to complete God's New Testament revelation was far more important and necessary than for him to accomplish some outward works for the church.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FIFTY-SEVEN

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(23)

Scripture Reading: Acts 21:18-26

In this message we shall continue to consider Paul's situation in 21:18-26.

PURIFIED WITH THE NAZARITES

We have seen that, on the one hand, James and all the elders glorified God when they heard about the things God had done among the Gentiles through Paul's ministry (vv. 18-20a). On the other hand, they pointed out to Paul that in Jerusalem thousands of Jews believed and were zealous for the law (v. 20). Furthermore, these believing Jews had been instructed concerning Paul that he taught "apostasy from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs" (v. 21). James and the elders went on to make the following requirement of Paul: "Four men are with us who have a vow on themselves; take these and be purified with them, and pay their expenses that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things of which they have been instructed concerning you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law" (vv. 23-24). As we have seen, the vow mentioned here is the Nazarite vow (Num. 6:2-5). To be purified with the Nazarites was to become a Nazarite with them, joining them in their vow.

According to verse 24, Paul was told to be purified with the four men who had a vow on themselves and to pay their expenses. The first thing a Nazarite had to do was to

purify himself in the presence of God. According to the custom at the time, the rich would often pay the expenses of the offerings needed for a Nazarite to complete his purification. Sometimes the poor Nazarites could not afford to pay for all the offerings. Thus, they needed someone to help them with the expenses. Those who helped the Nazarites in this way joined themselves to them.

Here in Acts 21, for Paul to be purified with the Nazarites and to pay their expenses was for him to be joined to them so that the four would then become five. In the words of James and the elders in Jerusalem, if Paul were to be purified with the Nazarites and pay their expenses, all the believing Jews would know that Paul himself also walked orderly, keeping the law. But was Paul keeping the law? He certainly was not keeping the law. Nevertheless, James and the elders told Paul to join himself to the four Nazarites so that the Jewish believers would see that he kept the law. This was a serious, terrible, and mistaken requirement made by James and the elders.

In 21:25 James and the elders said to Paul, "But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should keep themselves from idol sacrifices and blood and anything strangled and fornication." Their word here has the same old tone as that in chapter fifteen.

Acts 21:26 says, "Then Paul took the men on the following day, and having been purified with them entered into the temple, giving notice of the completion of the days of the purification, until the offering was offered for each one of them." The completion spoken of here is the completion of the Nazarite vow (Num. 6:13).

I would call your attention to the word "having been purified." Here we see that Paul had already been purified with the four Nazarites. He then took them into the temple and waited with them for the offering to be offered for each one. This time of waiting is indicated by the word "until." Having been purified along with the four, Paul waited in the temple with them for the priest to come at

the end of the completion on the seventh day to offer sacrifices for them all, including Paul.

PAUL'S COMPROMISE AND RELEASE

It is very difficult to believe that Paul would be purified, enter into the temple, and wait for the offerings to be offered by the priest. He did this after writing the Epistles to the Galatians and the Romans, books that were written not long before he came to Jerusalem. Although it is difficult to believe that Paul carried out the word of James and the elders, it is a fact that he joined himself to the Nazarites and went with them into the temple.

As we shall see in a later message, there was an uproar against Paul (21:27--23:15), and he was seized by the Jews in Jerusalem (21:27-30). Concerning this, 21:27 and 28 say, "Now when the seven days were about to be concluded, the Jews from Asia saw him in the temple and threw all the crowd into confusion; and they laid their hands on him, crying out, Men, Israelites, help! This is the man who is teaching all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place; and besides, he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has profaned this holy place." This uproar took place "when the seven days were about to be concluded," that is, on the seventh day. Humanly speaking, Paul's intention in going into the temple was to avoid trouble. Actually, his going into the temple with the four Nazarites caused a great deal of trouble for him.

Suppose Paul had decided not to go to the temple but simply to stay with the brothers in the house of Mnason, with whom Paul and his companions were to lodge in Jerusalem. Let us further suppose that Paul had said to the brothers, "I do not care for the temple, because God is finished with it. Brothers, did the Lord Jesus not tell us that God has forsaken the temple? I am practicing the Lord's word concerning us. The priesthood and all the sacrifices are also over. Therefore, I cannot go back to the temple to have any share in the offerings and the priesthood. Brothers, I would like to stay here to have fellowship with you." Would not the situation have been very different if Paul had decided not to

go to the temple and instead had spent his time having fellowship with the brothers? To be sure, the situation would have been very different.

In chapter twenty-one of Acts Paul was compromising. He was the writer of the Epistles to the Galatians and the Romans, yet not long after these Epistles were written, he took the step described in this chapter. For Paul to take such a step was a great compromise on his part.

According to 21:26 and 27, Paul was in the temple waiting for the completion of the days of the purification. He was to be in the temple until the priest came to offer the offerings for him and the four others. How could Paul bear to stay in the temple for that period of time? Do you think he was happy? Do you think he was joyfully praising the Lord? Paul could praise the Lord when he was in prison in Philippi (16:23-25). But do you think he could praise the Lord there in the temple in Jerusalem? Apparently, the temple was a much better place for Paul than a prison. However, that prison in Philippi actually became a holy place, even the heavens, for Paul, whereas the temple in Jerusalem was a prison for him. In a very real sense, Paul was imprisoned there in the temple, unable to be released. Paul had become "trapped" in that situation.

Although Paul was imprisoned in the temple, the Lord had a way to release him from this prison. The Lord used the Jews to accomplish this release. In particular, the Lord used the uproar caused by the Jews to take Paul out of the temple. On the one hand, Paul was then in greater difficulty. On the other hand, he was released not only from the temple but also from the God-condemned mixture of the New Testament grace with the Old Testament law in Jerusalem. In His sovereignty the Lord protected His faithful servant from that terrible mixture.

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

We have pointed out that Paul went to Jerusalem the last time not only to carry out his loving concern for the need of the poor saints there, but also to have fellowship with James and the other apostles and elders in Jerusalem

concerning the Judaic influence upon the church there. The decision made by the conference of the apostles and elders in Acts 15 to solve the problem concerning circumcision was not fully satisfactory to him. Therefore, in going to Jerusalem, Paul might have intended to clear up the Judaic influence on the church there. However, God had His own way to deal with the situation. In His sovereignty He allowed Paul to be arrested by the Jews and imprisoned by the Romans. He then allowed the terrible mixture of the grace with the law in Jerusalem to remain until the city was destroyed by Titus with his Roman army in A.D. 70. That mixture was terminated approximately ten years after the events recorded in Acts 21.

In the Gospel of Matthew the Lord Jesus prophesied the coming destruction of Jerusalem. For example, in the parable in Matthew 21:33-46 concerning the transfer of the kingdom of God, the Lord portrayed the leaders of the Israelites as evil husbandmen (vv. 33-35, 38-41), indicating that God would "miserably destroy those evil men, and will lease the vineyard to other husbandmen, who will render the fruits to him in their seasons." This word concerning destruction was fulfilled when Titus destroyed Jerusalem. The Lord also predicted the destruction of Jerusalem in the parable in Matthew 22:1-14. In Matthew 22:7 He says, "And the king was angry; and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city." These "troops" were the Roman soldiers under Titus who destroyed Jerusalem.

In Matthew 23:37-39 we see the Lord's forsaking of Jerusalem with its temple. Concerning the coming destruction of the temple, the Lord said to His disciples, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, A stone shall by no means be left upon a stone which shall not be thrown down" (Matt. 24:2). This also was fulfilled when Titus destroyed Jerusalem. According to the description given by Josephus, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple was thorough and absolute. Thousands of Jews were killed, perhaps including many of the Jewish believers. In His anger the Lord not only

destroyed

a

rebellious nation of Israel; He also terminated Judaism and the mixture of Judaism with Christianity. When Jerusalem was destroyed, the source of the "poison" that was flowing out of it was also terminated. Therefore, the Lord had His marvelous way to deal with the situation in Jerusalem.

THE LORD SOVEREIGNLY DELIVERING PAUL AND TRANSFERRING HIM

The Lord knew what was in Paul's heart. He also knew that Paul was faithful but was not able to help the situation. Instead of helping it, Paul was trapped in it by compromising with it. However, the Lord used the uproar described in 21:27--23:15 to rescue Paul. The Jews seized him and were seeking to kill him (21:30-31). But a commander of the Roman cohort intervened, laid hold of him, ordered him to be bound with chains, and inquired concerning the situation (21:31-33). It was not the commander's intention to protect Paul. He was simply fulfilling his duty to maintain order in the city. He could not allow such an uproar to continue. Therefore, he intervened, and through his intervention Paul was rescued. Actually, the commander's intervention was Paul's protection from the plot of the Jews.

Through the intervention of the Roman commander, Paul was given the opportunity to defend himself before the rioting Jews (21:40--22:21). Following that, he was bound by the Romans (22:22-29) and defended himself before the Sanhedrin (22:30--23:10). Because of the plot of the Jews (23:12-15), Paul was transferred to the Roman governor in Caesarea (23:16--24:27), where he remained in custody for quite a period of time. Apart from God's sovereignty in using the Roman commander to protect Paul, he would have been killed. God sovereignly delivered Paul out of that threatening situation.

In His sovereignty the Lord caused Paul to have a dispensational transfer. Paul was in favor of such a transfer. He came to Jerusalem with the positive intention and strong purpose to help the believers there to

experience this dispensational transfer. However, instead of helping them, he himself was eventually trapped in a situation of mixture and compromise.

Paul must have been unhappy when he was in the temple with the four Nazarites, for he did not have a way out of the situation. Paul must have regretted joining those who had the Nazarite vow. He might have regretted going to the temple instead of staying in the house of Mnason with his co-workers, keeping himself away from the attention of the Jews. Paul, however, joined himself to the Nazarites and went with them into the temple, where he was seen by Jews from Asia and seized by them. Their intention was to kill him. Who except the Lord could help the situation? The Lord was sovereign and helped Paul to have a complete transfer out of the Judaic mixture in Jerusalem.

As a result of what happened in Jerusalem, Paul was taken to Caesarea and was probably kept there for two years. We may infer that those two years were a profitable and an excellent time for Paul. What do you think Paul did during those years in Caesarea? What did he do while he was being kept from both his work and from the trouble caused by the plotting Jews? He may have been preparing to write the crucial books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews. While Paul was in custody in Caesarea, he might have considered putting into writing those materials that would complete his ministry. Thus far, Paul had written only six of his fourteen Epistles: Romans, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Although these books are basic, they are not as crucial as Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Hebrews. Before 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon were written, these four crucial books were written after Paul's two-year period of custody in Caesarea. Just as Paul's time in Arabia had much to do with the early part of his ministry, so the two years in Caesarea had a great deal to do with Paul's upcoming writings in the completion of his ministry.

We need to be impressed with the Lord's sovereignty in

completing Paul's transfer from the old dispensation to the new. Praise the Lord that such a transaction took place! In His sovereignty and wisdom, the Lord carried out such a complete transfer with Paul, and this transfer is fully recorded in the holy Word. Having this record in our hands, we can now see a full pattern concerning the complete transfer from the Old Testament economy to God's New Testament economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FIFTY-EIGHT

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(24)

Scripture Reading: Acts 21:18-39

A SUMMARY OF THE REVELATION IN THE BIBLE

The Bible reveals that God had an eternal plan and that this plan eventually became His economy. God's plan is to have a group of human beings who are regenerated with the divine life become His sons and the members of Christ so that the Triune God in Christ may have a Body through which to express Himself.

God's plan is accomplished through Christ's incarnation, human living, and all-inclusive death to terminate everything of the old creation so that He may germinate His chosen people in resurrection. In His resurrection Christ became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) so that He may propagate Himself as the processed Triune God to produce the Body. After His resurrection Christ ascended to the heavens, and there He was made the Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). In His resurrection the Lord had already breathed Himself as the Spirit into His chosen people essentially (John 20:22). Then in His ascension He poured out Himself as the all-inclusive consummated Spirit upon them economically. Therefore, everything has been fulfilled and accomplished: incarnation, human living, the all-inclusive death, the life-giving and propagating resurrection, the breathing of the life-giving Spirit essentially, the ascension, and the pouring out of the consummated Spirit economically. Because all this has been accomplished, the church has been produced.

Before Christ came to pass through the processes for accomplishing God's plan, the points related to it were put into the Old Testament in the way of promises, prophecies, types, figures, and shadows. Then, in the fullness of time, the Triune God in the Son became a man (Gal. 4:4). In His humanity He passed through the processes of human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension to accomplish everything for the fulfillment of God's plan. Having become the all-inclusive Spirit, He now enters into God's chosen people to apply to them all that the Triune God in the Son has accomplished. Through such an application, God's people become living witnesses of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ (Acts 1:8).

As those who have the all-inclusive Spirit within us, what should we do? We should simply be living witnesses containing, bearing, and conveying the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ so that He may be propagated throughout the earth for the fulfillment of the divine economy. This is a brief summary of the entire revelation in the New Testament.

THE SITUATION OF MIXTURE IN JERUSALEM

Since Christ has come and passed through the processes of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, breathing the Spirit into God's chosen people essentially and pouring the Spirit upon them economically, many of the promises, prophecies, types, figures, and shadows in the Old Testament related to this are now out-of-date. God's people should not hold on to these out-of-date things. However, degraded Judaism as a religion continues to hold on to those things which have become out-of-date.

Between those in degraded Judaism and the Christian believers was the situation of mixture in Jerusalem. In Jerusalem was the first group of vessels chosen by God to contain Christ. This group included the apostles, among whom Peter was the leading one and James was the most influential one. According to Acts 21, with these apostles there were thousands of Jews who believed in Christ (v.

20). Although they had become believers in Christ, they were still strongly under the influence of their Judaic background. Because of this influence, it was impossible for them to abandon their background and to give up the atmosphere that prevailed in Jerusalem.

The Jewish believers in Jerusalem became those who insisted on having both faith in Christ and also the out-of-date things of the Old Testament. They wanted to put these two matters together. I would say that, according to my study of the New Testament, James was the leader in this trend. It seems that he took the lead to say, "There is no need for us to fight. We may keep our faith in Christ and at the same time also keep the Old Testament laws, customs, and practices. We may still practice circumcision."

In not wanting to fight or offend others, James may have had a very good intention. He may have had a good heart in wanting to blend the Old Testament dispensation with faith in Christ. We also need to realize that James had a broadened heart. This is indicated by the fact that he did not propose that the Gentile believers be circumcised. Consider the solution he proposed to the problems concerning circumcision during the course of the fellowship recorded in Acts 15: "I judge that we do not harass those from the Gentiles who turn to God. But that we write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and fornication and what is strangled and blood. For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who proclaim him in the synagogues, being read every Sabbath" (vv. 19-21). James made it clear that it was not necessary for the Gentiles to be circumcised or to keep the law. He only required that they abstain from idol worship, fornication, things strangled, and blood.

James, however, continued to think that it would be better for the Jewish believers to practice the things of the Old Testament and to keep the law. James seemed to say, "The Gentiles do not need to keep the law or to be circumcised. But we Jews should practice circumcision and keep the law. We need to practice the kind of life exactly like that practiced by our forefathers in the Old

Testament. Of course, we now have faith in Christ. Therefore, let us keep both the Old Testament things and our faith in Christ." This, I believe, was James' concept.

A CLEAR VISION OF THE BODY

If James' concept had been widely accepted in Asia Minor and Europe, how could there have been one Body for Christ in a practical way? Would there be two kinds of churches--a Judaic church for the Jewish believers and a Gentile church for the Gentile believers? Such a thing is utterly impossible.

Concerning the Body Paul had seen a clear vision. He spoke of the one Body in Romans 12:5, and in 1 Corinthians 12:13 he said, "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit." Furthermore, in Galatians 3:27 and 28 Paul said, "For as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There cannot be Jew nor Greek, there cannot be slave nor free man, there cannot be male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Although Paul had seen a clear vision, in his first six Epistles--Romans, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians--this vision was not yet presented in a full way. No doubt Paul was waiting for a time to put into writing the vision he had seen.

THE LORD'S SOVEREIGN RESCUE OF PAUL

When Paul saw the situation of mixture in Jerusalem, he must have been heavily burdened by it. Perhaps when James made his presentation to him in chapter twenty-one concerning the thousands of Jews who believed and who were zealous for the law and concerning Paul's joining with those who had the Nazarite vow, he was hesitating what to do. Perhaps he said to himself, "Humanly speaking, I should simply do what James says. After I pass through this critical time, I may have another opportunity to adjust or clarify the situation in Jerusalem." This may have been Paul's thought as he complied with James' proposal (21:23-26).

The Lord, however, did not allow Paul to complete the days of the purification. Paul, a chosen vessel, was the unique one used by the Lord to carry out God's New Testament economy. How could the Lord allow such a one to complete the days of purification, which involved the temple, the priesthood, and the offering of animal sacrifices with the shedding of blood? All these things were terminated by God's New Testament economy. The Lord could not tolerate this. Hence, almost at the last minute, at the time when Paul's vow was about to be completed, the Lord came in, and there was a great disturbance. That was the Lord's exercise of His sovereignty concerning Paul to rescue him from that dilemma.

In Acts 21 Paul was in danger of being killed, and he certainly must have been afraid of this. If the Roman commander had not intervened when he did, Paul certainly would have been put to death. But the Lord's sovereign hand controlled everything to rescue Paul from that situation and to preserve his life. Later, after Paul defended himself before the rioting Jews (21:40--22:21), was bound by the Romans (22:22-29), and defended himself before the Sanhedrin (22:30--23:10), he was encouraged by the Lord. According to 23:11, "the Lord stood by him and said, Take courage, for as you have solemnly testified concerning Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." This was a great encouragement to Paul and assured him that he would not be killed by the Jews. We all need to have a clear view of Paul's situation here at this point in Acts.

OUR NEED TO SEE GOD'S ECONOMY AND TO HAVE A DISPENSATIONAL TRANSFER

At this point we need to go on to consider today's situation. As a whole, Christianity is not a testimony of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. There is a great deal of mixture in Christianity, not just of the one element of Judaism, but also of many other elements. The mixture has gone to such an extent that among the millions of Christians very few know what God's New Testament economy is. For the most part,

fundamental Christians know the redemption of Christ in a rather superficial way. In addition, they teach people to be ethical and moral in order to glorify God. Who among your Christian friends knows God's New Testament economy to propagate the resurrected Christ and to impart this Christ into the believers so that they may be living members to form Christ's Body in this age in order to express the Triune God? Where can you find believers who know this?

Because the majority of today's Christians have not seen the vision concerning God's New Testament economy in the Word. I am burdened in this Life-study of Acts to emphasize God's economy. It is not my burden to touch the many small points in this book. For example, someone has asked me why in Acts 18:18 and 26 Priscilla is mentioned before Aquila but in 1 Corinthians 16:19 Aquila is mentioned first and Priscilla last. I simply do not have the heart to cover these minor things. In my heart is the concern for the matter of a dispensational transfer. As we study the book of Acts, we should learn to say, "Lord, we need a great transfer, a dispensational transfer. We need to be transferred from degraded Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism into God's New Testament economy. We need a transfer from all religious things into the pure revelation of God's economy."

We need to see that God's intention is to propagate the resurrected Christ by imparting Him into us so that we may become His living members saturated with Him and constituted of Him in order that Christ may have a Body on earth for His expression. Then He will bring His kingdom in, and following that there will be the ultimate consummation of God's New Testament economy. Our need is to see this and to have a dispensational transfer so that we may be in it in a practical way.

In these messages it is not my burden merely to teach the Bible. Rather, I am burdened to present what the Lord, in His mercy, has shown us from the Word concerning the New Testament economy of God. If we see this vision, we shall not care about opposition or attack. Those who oppose the Lord's recovery do not have the

view, the vision, concerning God's New Testament economy. We cannot deny that we have seen this vision, and our testimony concerning it is becoming stronger and stronger. In our reading of Acts may we devote our full attention to and concentrate our entire being on the vision of God's New Testament economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE FIFTY-NINE

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(26)

Scripture Reading: Acts 21:18-39; Matt. 17:1-8; Heb. 1:1-3; 2:14; 3:1; 8:6; 9:15; Eph. 1:17-23; 2:14-16; 3:8, 17-21; 4:4-6, 24; 5:18; 6:11; Phil. 3:4-14; Col. 1:12, 15, 18; 2:2, 9, 16-17; 3:4, 10-11; Rev. 2:7, 17; 3:5, 20

Before we go on in this Life-study to another section of the book of Acts, I would like to give a further word concerning the need for a dispensational transfer, the transfer out of the Old Testament economy into God's New Testament economy.

THE DISAPPEARING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT ECONOMY

Concerning the matter of a dispensational transfer, let us consider the case of Peter. On the mount of transfiguration Peter took the lead to propose to the Lord that he build three tabernacles, one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for the Lord Jesus (Matt. 17:4). "While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I delight; hear Him!" (v. 5). When the disciples heard this, they fell on their face. When they lifted up their eyes, "they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone" (v. 8). Moses and Elijah had disappeared, and only Jesus remained. Peter had proposed to keep Moses and Elijah, that is, the law and the prophets, with Christ, but God took Moses and Elijah away, leaving "no one except Jesus Himself alone." No one

except Jesus Himself alone should remain in the New Testament. He is today's Moses, imparting the law of life into His believers, and also today's Elijah, speaking for God and speaking forth God within His believers. This is God's New Testament economy.

In Matthew 17:1-8 we have a clear revelation of the fact that with the coming of Jesus both Moses and Elijah were over. Moses and Elijah represent the entire Old Testament, with Moses representing the law and Elijah representing the prophets. According to Jewish custom, the Old Testament was regarded as having two main parts--the Law and the Prophets. Even the Psalms were considered part of the Law. Therefore, the fact that Moses and Elijah were over indicates that the entire Old Testament, consisting of the Law and the Prophets, was over.

Peter had the experience of seeing the vision on the mount of transfiguration, and later, in his second Epistle, he referred to what happened on that mountain (2 Pet. 1:16-18). Why, then, did Peter say nothing about this vision when James was insisting on keeping the Old Testament economy along with the New Testament economy? I find this difficult to understand. In Acts 21 did Peter not have any remembrance of the vision he had seen in Matthew 17 and about which he later wrote in 2 Peter 1?

Peter certainly was knowledgeable concerning the disappearing of the Old Testament economy. On the mount of transfiguration he must have been impressed with this. He heard the voice out of the cloud declare, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I delight; hear Him!" (Matt. 17:5). He had also seen Moses and Elijah together with Jesus, and then he saw that Moses and Elijah had disappeared and that Jesus remained alone. Why, having heard this word and having seen this vision, was Peter silent in Acts 21? Why did he not rise up and say, "Brother James, let me tell you what I heard and saw on the mount of transfiguration. Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, are over. We should no longer hold on to the Old Testament economy. To do that is contrary to God's move in His New Testament economy." However, Peter kept silent and did not speak this

way to James in Acts 21. Likewise, there is no indication that John, who was with Peter on the mount of transfiguration, said anything to James concerning it at that juncture. Neither Peter nor John stood up to testify regarding the vision they had seen and the charge they had received on the mount of transfiguration.

THREE EMPHATIC CHARGES

In Matthew 28:19-20a the resurrected Christ said to His disciples, "Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you." "Nations" refers to the Gentiles. The disciples were charged to disciple the Gentiles by baptizing them into the Triune God. The Lord's charge to the disciples in Matthew 28:19 is very emphatic.

According to Mark 16:15, the Lord, after His resurrection and before His ascension, charged the eleven, saying, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all the creation." In this verse "creation" mainly denotes different peoples, although it includes more than this. As in Matthew 28:19, here the Lord commands the disciples to preach the gospel to all peoples, to all nations.

After His resurrection and before His ascension, the Lord Jesus spoke yet another word to the disciples to indicate that the gospel should be preached to all nations. In Luke 24:47 He told them that "repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." If we consider these three charges at the end of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we shall see how strong, definite, emphatic, and absolute they are.

THE SITUATION OF MIXTURE IN JERUSALEM

Regarding the situation of mixture in Jerusalem, Peter and John were silent. There is no record that they did anything to diminish this mixture. Rather, according to Luke's account in Acts, only Paul bore the burden of this matter. It seems that Peter and John were not concerned

about it. If they had been concerned, they should have spoken strongly to James and said, "James, before you were saved, we heard the word and saw the vision about the passing away of the Old Testament economy."

According to the record of the New Testament, the James in Acts 21 was a brother of the Lord Jesus in the flesh. Along with the other brothers of the Lord, James was saved right after His resurrection, if not a little before that time. Therefore, it is possible that James was present when one or more of the charges recorded at the end of Matthew, Mark, and Luke was given. He must have known that the Lord had commanded the disciples to preach the gospel to all the nations.

Why did the disciples, including James, seemingly disregard the Lord's word about preaching the gospel to all the nations and pay so much attention to the Old Testament? Both the revelation given to the disciples and the Lord's charge were clear, definite, emphatic, and absolute. All the disciples, therefore, should have been clear concerning God's economy. But in the midst of the situation in Jerusalem, none of them cared for the Lord's charge. Instead, they were in favor of a mixture of the Old Testament dispensation with God's New Testament economy.

Acts 21:19 says that Paul, after greeting James and all the elders "related one by one the things which God did among the Gentiles through his ministry." When they heard this, they glorified God (v. 20). Then James took the lead to say to Paul, "You observe, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed, and all are zealous for the law" (v. 20). It was a shame to James that he spoke such a word. If I had been Peter listening to this word, I would have had a deep sense of shame.

In the early chapters of Acts Peter was bold. He and John were strong when they faced the opposition of the Sanhedrin. However, in chapters fifteen through twenty-one Peter seems to have lost his boldness. According to Paul's word in Galatians 2, Peter even practiced hypocrisy

concerning this mixture. How pitiful was the situation in Jerusalem in Acts 21! We all need to be impressed with the picture of this situation. However, we should not blame Peter, for, in principle, we are in the same kind of situation today.

It is correct to say that from the time of Acts 15 Paul was troubled deeply in his spirit about the situation in Jerusalem. Because of his heavy burden concerning this, during the course of his third journey of ministry, he was not able to forget Jerusalem. In 19:21 he purposed in his spirit to go to Jerusalem. His purpose was not only to carry out a loving concern for the need of the poor saints in Jerusalem, but also to have fellowship with James and the others concerning the mixture there. Apparently, Paul purposed to go to Jerusalem in order to bring financial help from the Gentile believers to those in Judea. Actually, in Paul's spirit and heart was the concern for the dreadful situation in Jerusalem, which was the source of the Lord's move on earth. According to Paul's understanding, that source had been polluted. Therefore, he did not have peace to proceed further with the Lord's move. He knew that no matter how much work he accomplished in the Gentile world, the polluted stream from Jerusalem would flow there. Realizing this, Paul purposed in his spirit to return to the source with the intention of trying to clear up the situation, to get rid of the pollution. It was also his desire to go on from there to Rome and even to Spain for the furtherance of the gospel to carry out God's New Testament economy.

THE LORD'S INTOLERANCE, SOVEREIGNTY, AND SYMPATHY

It seems that when Paul went to Jerusalem the last time, he did not have the opportunity to help matters there. Rather, the door was firmly closed, and he was pressed by James and the elders into a very difficult situation. Having no way out, he acted on the proposal to go to the temple in order to be purified with the four who had a Nazarite vow. But, as we have seen, the Lord did not tolerate this.

In 21:23 and 24 James said to Paul, "Four men are with us who have a vow on themselves; take these and be purified with them, and pay their expenses that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things of which they have been instructed concerning you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law." We have seen that the vow in verse 23 was the Nazarite vow (Num. 6:2-6) and that to be purified with the Nazarites was to become a Nazarite with them and to join with them in their vow.

Acts 21:26 goes on to say, "Then Paul took the men on the following day, and having been purified with them entered into the temple, giving notice of the completion of the days of the purification, until the offering was offered for each one of them." This was an extremely serious matter. A Nazarite vow was not something ordinary; rather, it was special, particular, and extraordinary. Furthermore, the offerings related to the Nazarite vow were particular. It is difficult to believe, therefore, that the Apostle Paul would go back to the temple, participate in the Nazarite vow, and wait for the priests to offer sacrifices for him and the others.

According to what Paul had written in the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians, he should not have returned to the temple, and he certainly should not have participated in this vow. It is no surprise, then, that the Lord did not tolerate this situation. Paul may have been trying to keep the peace, but the Lord allowed a great uproar to take place against Paul.

It was a very serious matter for an apostle such as Paul, after writing the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians, to join himself with those who had the Nazarite vow and go with them to the temple to be purified and then to remain in the temple until the priest came to offer the sacrifices. The Lord tolerated Paul's private vow in 18:18, but He did not tolerate Paul's joining himself to those with the Nazarite vow in chapter twenty-one.

Actually, Paul should not even have made the vow in chapter eighteen. In Galatians 2:20 he had declared that

he had been crucified with Christ. There Paul seemed to be saying, "I, the Jewish Paul, have been crucified with Christ. Now it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." However, in having a vow in the Jewish way, Paul was living not as a Christian but as a Jew, for he was following a Jewish practice, not a Christian one.

All the believers in Jerusalem were Jews. It was in Antioch that the believers were first called Christians (11:26). Had Paul forgotten the term "Christian" when, in Acts 18, he was carrying out a Jewish practice? Should a Christian have a vow for thanksgiving in a Jewish way? If not, then why did Paul continue to practice something Jewish? Although the Lord tolerated that practice, He had no toleration for what was taking place in Acts 21, when Paul was awaiting the time for the priests to offer the sacrifices at the completion of the days of purification.

From 21:27 onward we see the Lord's sovereignty in a particular way. We also see His sympathy. On the one hand, Paul was faithful. He was even willing to risk his life for the Lord's name (20:24; 21:13). He was ready "to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (21:13). On the other hand, Paul was still human and was not able to help himself in Acts 21. The Lord did not have anyone better or more faithful than Paul. Therefore, He intervened first to rescue Paul from the mixture in Jerusalem and then from the Jews who were plotting to kill him. Eventually, he was placed in Roman custody, separated from troubles and disturbances. In this way the Lord gave Paul a tranquil time for the writing of his last Epistles. In particular, Paul was given the opportunity to write the four crucial Epistles of Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. Let us now briefly consider these four Epistles, which should be grouped together.

FOUR CRUCIAL EPISTLES

Hebrews

In Hebrews we see that Christ is far superior to everything in Judaism. In Judaism there is God. According to Hebrews 1, Christ is the very God. Furthermore, in Hebrews 2 we see that Christ is also man. The God in

Judaism is merely God, but the God in the New Testament is both God and man, the God-man. As such a God-man, Christ is superior to the angels, another important item of Judaism. Furthermore, the book of Hebrews reveals that Christ is superior to Moses, Joshua, and Aaron, the priest.

According to the book of Hebrews, the new covenant enacted by Christ is superior to the old covenant enacted by Moses (8:6-13), and Christ's unique sacrifice is superior to the old sacrifices (10:9-10, 12, 14). God now cares only for Christ's unique sacrifice, which has terminated and replaced all the Old Testament sacrifices.

In the book of Hebrews Paul presents a clear picture showing us that the Old Testament things are over. What remains now in God's New Testament economy is Jesus Christ, the all-inclusive One. Having seen such a view, Paul could not tolerate a mixture of such an all-inclusive Christ with the inferior things of the out-of-date, Old Testament economy.

Ephesians

In the book of Ephesians Paul indicates that all the believers, both Jews and Gentiles, need a spirit of wisdom and revelation to see God's calling, which issues in the church, Christ's Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (1:17-23). In Ephesians 2 Paul goes on to point out that all the ordinances in the Old Testament law have been abolished through Christ's death on the cross so that in Christ the Jews and the Gentiles might be created into one new man (vv. 14-16). In chapter three we see that the riches of Christ need to become the constituent of the church life, and that we need Christ to make His home in our hearts so that we may be filled unto all the fullness of the Triune God to become His full expression (vv. 8, 17-19). In chapter four Paul speaks of the one Body, the one Spirit, the one Lord, and the one God (vv. 4-6). The Body is constituted of and mingled with the Triune God to become the new man (v. 24). Following this, in chapter five Paul indicates that the new man should be filled in the spirit with the Triune God in order to have a life that is the expression of the Triune God in Christ (v. 18). Finally, in

Ephesians 6 we see that we must fight a spiritual battle for the kingdom of God (v. 11). This is a brief summary of the revelation in Ephesians.

Philippians

In Philippians 3:7 Paul says, "What things were gains to me, these I have counted loss on account of Christ." Paul was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee as to the law (3:5). However, he counted all Jewish things, all the things of the Old Testament, as dung in order that he might gain Christ (3:8). Paul knew that in God's New Testament economy Christ must be everything. Therefore, Paul pursued Christ so that he might live a life of being found in Christ (3:9-14).

Colossians

According to the revelation in the book of Colossians, Christ is the reality of every positive thing. Christ is the portion God has given to the saints (1:12), the image of God (v. 15), the Firstborn of all creation (v. 15), the Firstborn from among the dead (v. 18), the mystery of God (2:2), the embodiment of the Godhead (2:9), our feast, new moon, and Sabbath (2:16-17), and our life (Col. 3:4). In Colossians we see that Christ must be everything to us. Colossians also says clearly that in the new man, composed of all the believers, there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, but Christ is all and in all.

If we consider together Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, we shall see that to such an enlightened one as Paul, in God's New Testament economy there is nothing but Christ. However, what Paul saw in Jerusalem during his last visit there was a mixture. Something of Christ was mixed with the things of the Old Testament economy.

COMING BACK TO CHRIST AS OUR TREE OF LIFE, MANNA, AND FEAST

Through Paul's completing ministry (Col. 1:25) the all-

inclusive Christ is revealed in a full way. In the fourteen Epistles of Paul, especially in Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, Christ is unveiled as everything to the church and to the saints. But by the time the book of Revelation was written this view of the all-inclusive Christ had been all but lost. This loss is indicated by the seven epistles in Revelation 2 and 3. Christ, the Head of the Body, came in to call the overcomers to overcome the degraded situation. The overcomers in Revelation do not simply overcome sin, the world, and the Mesh; they especially overcome the degraded situation in which the clear view of the all-inclusive Christ has been lost.

In Revelation 2:7 the Lord Jesus says, "To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." In 2:17 He goes on to say, "To him who overcomes, to him I will give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows but he who receives it." Furthermore, in 3:20 the Lord says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me." These verses speak of the tree of life, the hidden manna, and feasting with the Lord. Here the Lord seems to be saying, "You need to enjoy Me and forget outward practices and forms. Come back directly to Me as your tree of life, manna, and feast. Turn from all the mixtures and the things replacing Me in the degraded churches and come back to Me as your everything."

The problem in today's degraded situation is that many things are replacing the all-inclusive Christ. We need to turn from all replacements and come back directly to the all-inclusive Christ as our tree of life, our hidden manna, our feast, and our everything. We need to come back to this One in the way of enjoyment, not merely in the way of doctrine. We need to return to Him not only in the way of knowing Him objectively, but in the way of enjoying Him as the tree of life, the hidden manna, and the feast.

To overcome the degraded situation among today's Christians and to come back directly to the enjoyable

Christ as our tree of life, hidden manna, and feast is to have a real transfer. This is a transfer out of old degraded religion into an up-to-date recovery, a recovery of the enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ. Today this Christ is not only the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45)--He is the sevenfold, intensified Spirit (Rev. 5:6).

We need to have an overall view to see today's degraded situation and also to see that the Lord's intention is to bring us back to Himself so that we may be fully recovered to the enjoyment of Him. Every day we should know only one thing--to enjoy Christ as the tree of life, the hidden manna, and the feast. We need to enjoy Christ as our everything, even as our white garments (Rev. 3:5) and the white stone (2:17) to make us building materials for God's eternal habitation. Our need today is to experience a transfer from degraded religion to the reality of the all-inclusive Christ in the way of enjoyment.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SIXTY

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(26)

Scripture Reading: Acts 21:27--22:29

Acts 21:27--26:32 is a lengthy section that records the ultimate persecution by the Jews. In 21:27--23:15 we have an account of an uproar against Paul. In this message we shall see that Paul was seized by the Jews in Jerusalem (21:27-30), that the Roman commander intervened (21:31-39), and that Paul was given the opportunity to defend himself before the rioting Jews (21:40--22:21). After making his defense, Paul was bound by the Romans (22:22-29).

SEIZED BY THE JEWS IN JERUSALEM

Acts 21:27 and 28 say, "Now when the seven days were about to be concluded, the Jews from Asia saw him in the temple and threw all the crowd into confusion; and they laid their hands on him, crying out, Men, Israelites, help! This is the man who is teaching all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place; and besides, he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has profaned this holy place." Yes, God's New Testament teaching according to His New Testament economy is really against the Jews who oppose God's New Testament economy (Matt. 21:41, 43-45; 22:7; 23:32-36; Acts 7:51; 13:40-41), against the law of dead letters (Rom. 3:20, 28; 6:14; 7:4, 6; Gal. 2:19, 21; 5:4), and against the holy place, the temple (Matt. 23:38; 24:2; Acts 7:48). Because Paul's ministry was to carry out God's New Testament economy, it could not please the Jews who were possessed and

usurped by Satan, the enemy of God, with their deformed traditional religion, to oppose and ravage God's New Testament move. Rather, it offended them and it stirred up their jealousy and hatred to the uttermost, so that they made a plot (20:3) to do away with him (21:31, 36).

In 21:28 "this place" and "this holy place" refer to the temple. Verses 29 and 30 continue, "For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, whom they supposed Paul had brought into the temple. And the whole city was aroused, and the people ran together; and laying hold of Paul, they dragged him outside the temple; and immediately the doors were shut." Literally, the Greek words translated "the people ran together" mean "a running together of the people occurred."

THE INTERVENTION OF THE ROMAN COMMANDER

Acts 21:31-33 say, "And as they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. And he took soldiers and centurions at once and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they ceased beating Paul. Then the commander drew near and laid hold of him and ordered him to be bound with two chains, and he inquired who he might be and what he had done." This commander was a chiliarch in command of a thousand troops, or a cohort. A cohort was one of the ten divisions of an ancient Roman legion. In His sovereignty, the Lord used the intervention of this Roman commander to rescue Paul from the Jews, who were seeking to kill him.

DEFENDING HIMSELF BEFORE THE RIOTING JEWS

Paul's Need to Make a Defense

Paul asked permission of the Roman commander to speak to the people (v. 39). When the commander had given him permission, Paul addressed the people in the Hebrew dialect. This dialect was Aramaic, the language then spoken in Palestine.

In 22:1 Paul said, "Men, brothers, and fathers, hear my defense which I now make to you." Paul faced his

opponents in a way different from Christ. Christ was a lamb brought to the slaughter, and as a sheep dumb before its shearer for the accomplishment of His redemption, He did not open His mouth when judged by men (Isa. 53:7; Matt. 26:62-63; 27:12, 14). But Paul, a faithful and bold apostle sent by the Lord, needed to make a defense and to exercise his wisdom to save his life from his persecutors so that he might fulfill the course of his ministry. Although he was willing and ready to sacrifice his life for the Lord (20:24; 21:13), he still endeavored to live longer that he might carry out the Lord's ministry as much as possible.

Persecuting This Way

In 22:3 and 4 Paul went on to say, "I am a man who is a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, having been trained according to the strictness of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as you all are today. And I persecuted this way unto death, binding and delivering to prisons both men and women." As we have seen, "this way" denotes the way of the Lord's full salvation in God's New Testament economy.

In verse 5 Paul continued by saying that the high priest and all the council of the elders could testify for him. The Greek word for "council" here is *presbuterion*, presbytery, eldership (of the Sanhedrin), hence the Sanhedrin, the highest court of the Jews composed of the chief priests, elders, lawyers, and scribes.

Paul's Experience on the Road to Damascus

In 22:6 and 7 Paul says, "Now it came about that as I was journeying and drawing near to Damascus, about midday, suddenly a great light shone out of heaven around me, and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Literally, the Greek word for "great" in verse 6 means considerable. As we have pointed out, the "Me" in verse 7 was a corporate Me, including Jesus the Lord and all His believers, all the members of His Body. From that time he began to see that the Lord Jesus and His believers are one great person, a wonderful "Me."

Verse 8 continues, "And I answered, Who are You, Lord? And He said to me, I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting." Even without knowing the Lord Jesus, Paul called Him Lord. Then the Lord indicated that Paul, by persecuting His followers, who were united to Him through their faith in Him, was actually persecuting Him.

In verse 9 Paul says, "And those who were with me beheld the light, but did not hear the voice of the One who was speaking to me." To say that they did not hear the voice means that they did not hear in the sense of understanding, as in Mark 4:33 and 1 Corinthians 14:2. They heard the voice (Acts 9:7), but they did not understand it, just as they beheld the light, but beheld no one.

According to verse 10, Paul went on to say, "What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, Rise up and go into Damascus, and there it will be told you concerning all things which have been appointed for you to do." Here we see that the Lord would not directly tell Paul right after his conversion what He wanted him to do, for the reason that He needed a member of His Body to initiate him into the identification with His Body.

Acts 22:11 says, "And as I could not see because of the glory of that light, I was led by the hand of those who were with me and came into Damascus." This was the Lord's dealing with Paul who, prior to his conversion, considered himself knowledgeable concerning man and God.

Initiated into the Identification with the Body of Christ

Verses 12 and 13 continue, "And a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well attested by all the Jews dwelling there, came to me, and standing by said to me, Saul, brother, receive your sight! And in that very hour I looked up at him." We know from 9:11-17 that the Lord sent Ananias, one member of His Body, to Paul so that he might be initiated into the identification with His Body. This must have impressed him with the importance of the Body of

Christ and helped him realize that a believer needs the members of the Body of Christ.

According to 22:14-16 Ananias said to Paul, "The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear the voice of His mouth; for you will be a witness to Him unto all men of the things which you have seen and heard. And now, why do you delay? Rise up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." "His" is significant here. It points particularly to the name of the One whom Paul hated and persecuted (v. 8).

The Greek word translated "calling on" is *epikaleo*. This word is composed of *epi*, upon, and *kaleo*, call by name; that is, to call out audibly, even loudly, as Stephen did in 7:59-60.

Calling on the Lord's name in 22:16 was a means for Paul to wash away his sins in arresting so many of the believers who called on the Lord's name. All the believers knew that he considered calling on the Lord's name a sign of those he should arrest (9:14, 21). Now he had turned unto the Lord. In order to wash away his sins in persecuting and arresting the Lord's callers, not only before God but also before all the believers, Ananias charged him to do the same calling, which he had condemned, at his baptism, a public confession of the Lord whom he had persecuted.

Sent to the Gentiles

In 22:17 and 18 Paul goes on to say, "And it came about that when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I came into a trance, and I saw Him saying to me, Hurry, and go quickly out of Jerusalem, because they will not accept your testimony concerning Me." The Greek word rendered "trance" is *ekstasis*, and may be translated "ecstasy." This Greek word means being put out of its place; hence, it refers to a state in which a man passes out of himself and from which he comes to himself (12:11), as in a dream, but without sleep. It differs from a vision, in which definite objects are visible.

In 22:19 and 20 Paul said to the Lord, "Lord, they

know that I was imprisoning and beating in every synagogue those who believe on You, and when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I myself also was standing by and consenting and keeping the garments of those who did away with him." Nevertheless, the Lord said to him, "Go, for I will send you to Gentiles afar off" (v. 21). We are told the people "listened to him up to this word" (v. 22). But hearing the word "Gentiles," they began to shout, "Away with such a man from the earth, for it is not fitting for him to live!" (v. 22). Actually, the word "Gentiles" uttered by Paul in verse 21 is related to the matter of the dispensational transfer. As soon as he spoke this word, it seems that a whirlwind came to stir up the people. They were provoked by this word and were not willing to listen any longer.

In Acts 22 Paul was somewhat cautious in presenting his experience on the way to Damascus. Yet he could not avoid relating a particular aspect of the truth--the Lord's word to go to the Gentiles afar off. Since the Lord had told him this, how could he not testify of it to the people? They, however, did not have the ears to hear such a word. The principle is the same among many Christians today. Just as the Jews in Acts 22 did not want to hear anything about the Gentiles, so these Christians do not want to hear us speak concerning the denominations, the church, the church ground, and Christ being the life-giving Spirit. From experience we know that if we talk to certain believers about these matters, they will be offended.

BOUND BY THE ROMANS

Acts 22:23 and 24 say, "And as they were crying out and throwing off their garments and throwing dust in the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by scourging in order that he might ascertain for what cause they were shouting against him so." But as they stretched out Paul with the thongs, he said to a centurion standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?" (v. 25). Here we see Paul's wisdom. He

utilized his Roman citizenship to save himself from suffering persecution.

In these chapters in Acts we see that the Lord's sovereign hand surely was with Paul. In His sovereignty, wisdom, and goodness the Lord rescued Paul and protected him. In chapter twenty-one Paul was forced into a very difficult situation, and he had no way to be released from it. The Lord, however, raised up the environment through which Paul was rescued from that situation. However, Paul was then in danger of being killed. But the Lord intervened through the Roman commander to protect Paul from the Jews who wanted to kill him.

As we shall see, after Paul was placed in Roman custody, "the Jews formed a plot and put themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. Now there were more than forty who formed this conspiracy" (23:12-13). However, the son of Paul's sister heard of the ambush and reported it to Paul (23:16). Paul then called one of the centurions and told him to bring the young man to the commander. When the commander heard of the plot, he said to two of the centurions, "Prepare two hundred soldiers that they may go as far as Caesarea, and seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen by the third hour of the night, and mounts to stand by to put Paul on that they may bring him safely to Felix the governor" (23:23-24). We may be surprised that so many soldiers, horsemen, and spearmen were involved in transferring Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea. The commander may have ordered this because of the large number of Jews involved in the uproar against Paul. The point we are making concerning this is that here we see the Lord's sovereign protection of Paul.

In Caesarea Paul was kept in custody for two years. During these years he was safely guarded, protected from the plotting Jews. This became a golden time for Paul to consider his future. In particular, it was a time for him to consider the matters he would later put into writing in such books as Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. Sovereignly the Lord prepared an environment to safeguard Paul and to prepare him to carry out his

writing ministry to complete his ministry and to complete the New Testament revelation.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SIXTY-ONE

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(27)

Scripture Reading: Acts 22:1-21

PAUL'S BAPTISM

In 22:1-21 Paul defends himself before the rioting Jews. In this message we shall focus our attention on Ananias' word to Paul in verse 16: "And now, why do you delay? Rise up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name."

In the case of Paul, like that of the Ethiopian eunuch, water baptism is emphasized. We need to pay attention both to water baptism and Spirit baptism. Water baptism signifies the believers' identification with Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12), and Spirit baptism signifies the reality of the believers' union with Christ in life essentially and in power economically. Water baptism is the believers' affirmation of the Spirit's reality. Both are needed, and neither can replace the other. All believers in Christ should properly have both.

According to the Lord's word in Mark 16:16, in order to be saved, a person must believe and be baptized. To believe is to receive the Lord (John 1:12) not only for forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43), but also for regeneration (1 Pet. 1:21, 23), so that those who believe may become the children of God (John 1:12-13) and the members of Christ (Eph. 5:30) in an organic union with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19). To be baptized is to affirm this by being buried to terminate the old creation through Christ's death and by being raised up to be a new creation of God through Christ's resurrection.

Such a baptism is much more advanced than the baptism of repentance by John (Mark 1:4; Acts 19:3-5).

To believe and to be baptized are two parts of one complete step for receiving the full salvation of God. To be baptized without believing is merely an empty ritual; to believe without being baptized is to be saved only inwardly without an outward affirmation of the inward salvation. These two should go together.

TRANSFERRED OUT OF ADAM INTO CHRIST

Baptism is actually a great transfer. For this reason, the New Testament ministry began with baptism. We have emphasized the fact that baptism involves first termination and then germination. Through termination and germination a real transfer takes place. It is not surprising, then, that the New Testament begins with baptism to indicate that the things of the Old Testament should be terminated in order to have a new beginning. However, among many Christians today, baptism is simply a ritual whereby people enter into another kind of religion.

When we were baptized, we were transferred out of Adam into Christ. Many Christians have never been taught this adequately. Others know that in baptism they were transferred out of Adam into Christ, but for them this is only a doctrinal matter. It is not something practical in their Christian life. In our living as Christians we should be out of Adam and in Christ. No longer should we live in the sphere of Adam; instead, our living should absolutely be in the sphere of Christ.

CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

In 22:16 Ananias told Paul to be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord. In this verse "calling on His name" modifies both "be baptized" and "wash." Here Ananias seems to be saying, "Paul, rise up and be baptized. As you are being baptized, you must call on the name of the Lord. Calling on His name is the condition of your being baptized."

It would be a good practice for us when baptizing new

believers to charge them to call on the name of the Lord Jesus. This means that while they are being baptized, they are calling on the name of the Lord. Just as we breathe and eat at the same time, so a person may be baptized and call on the Lord at the same time. The transfer that takes place through baptism is strengthened by one's calling on the Lord's name. Therefore, let us charge those who are being baptized by us to call on the name of the Lord Jesus and thereby have a stronger transfer out of Adam into Christ.

A Condition for Baptism and for the Washing Away of Sins

In 22:16 Ananias told Paul to rise up, be baptized, and wash away his sins. We have seen that "calling on His name" modifies both "be baptized" and "wash." Calling is a condition both of being baptized and of washing away sins. Calling on the Lord's name was a means for Paul to wash away his sins.

According to Ananias' understanding, what were Paul's sins that needed to be washed away? No doubt, the most serious sins, according to Ananias, were the sins of persecuting and arresting those who called on the name of Jesus. Paul's going out to arrest those who called on the Lord's name was his major sin. In this matter he was condemned not only by God but also by the believers, both in Jerusalem and elsewhere. All the believers condemned Paul as a persecutor. Paul regarded the calling on the name of the Lord as a sign of the believers. Therefore, wherever Paul went, he sought out those who called on the Lord's name.

In 22:16 Ananias seemed to be saying, "Paul, in the eyes of the believers your most serious sin was persecuting and arresting those who called on the Lord. Now that you have repented and have had a turn, you need to wash away your sins. In particular, you need to wash away the sin of persecuting the saints. In order to wash away your sins, you need to call on the name of the Lord. If you call, 'O Lord Jesus,' a number of times, the saints will forgive you. Your calling will be the condition for the washing

away of your sins. Paul, you cannot be a silent believer, a believer who does not audibly call on the Lord's name. If you are silent, the believers will not recognize you as one of them, and they will not forgive you. Therefore, you must now practice the very thing that you condemned--calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. Once you took this as a sign of those to be persecuted and arrested by you. Now it should be a sign that you have believed in the Lord Jesus and have been saved. Paul, rise up, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name. When you do this, you will be forgiven by all those who love the Lord Jesus."

The Initial Step of Paul's Transfer

Paul's calling on the name of the Lord Jesus was the initial step of his transfer. He was transferred from condemning this calling to practicing it. Some may say that calling on the Lord's name was a part of Paul's conversion. Yes, but that was not only part of his conversion; it was also the beginning of his transfer from one realm into another.

It is difficult to understand why the Jews opposed the matter of calling on the Lord's name. To the Jews the important matters were keeping the law and practicing circumcision and following the customs. Nevertheless, before his transfer, Paul particularly opposed the calling on the Lord's name.

The principle is the same today among those who oppose the practice of calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. Some condemn us for calling on the name of the Lord. Actually, they have no reason to oppose this practice. Nevertheless, some falsely say that it is mere shouting. But what is wrong with believers in the Lord calling on His name? This practice is strongly revealed in the Scriptures. It is better to call on the Lord's name than to be silent, dead, and without any genuine contact with the Lord.

Some who oppose calling on the name of the Lord Jesus say, "Christianity has been on earth for nineteen hundred years, but we have never heard this teaching that believers should call on the Lord's name." To this we

may reply, "Perhaps you have never heard this kind of teaching, but certainly you have heard believers call on the Lord's name. In fact, it is likely that in the years you have been a Christian you have had at least some experience of calling on the name of Jesus yourself."

There have been many cases of those who called on the Lord's name without receiving any teaching concerning this practice. One particular person strongly opposed our calling on the Lord's name. One day as he was riding his bicycle, he was hit by a car, and the bicycle was thrown into the air. While he was falling to the ground, he spontaneously called, "O Lord Jesus!"

I also know of a certain Christian husband who never prayed. One day his wife was involved in an accident. Do you know what he did? He called on the name of the Lord.

Do you know of any genuine Christian who can say that he has never called on the name of the Lord Jesus? Certainly every real believer in Christ has called upon His name at some time. That brother who was hit by a car while riding a bicycle spent some days in the hospital, and day by day he called, "O Lord Jesus." No one taught him to call; he called automatically. Many of us can testify that when we call on the Lord Jesus, we truly contact Him.

Have you ever had the experience of falling asleep when you were trying to pray? This happened to me a number of times as I was praying silently, especially late at night. From experience we know that silent prayer often puts us to sleep. Furthermore, with that kind of prayer there may be little enjoyment of the Lord, if any. However, when we call on the name of the Lord, we enjoy Him. We may call quietly in order not to disturb others, but we still enjoy the Lord by calling on His name.

A Necessity in Our Christian Life

I am concerned about those who are troubled by our emphasis on calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. It is not correct to say that we stress this too much. Actually, calling on the Lord is a necessity in our Christian life. If you practice calling on the Lord's name, you will be in the initial stage of the dispensational transfer. I assure you

that the more you call on the name of the Lord Jesus, the more you will be brought out of the old things into the new.

Some believers have been Christians for many years. As the years have gone by, their Christian life has become quite old. Because of this oldness, they need to experience a transfer in a practical way. The most prevailing way to have such a transfer is to call, "O Lord Jesus!" I encourage you to practice this. If you call on the Lord's name day by day, you will be able to testify many things concerning your experience of the Lord.

Calling on the name of the Lord is a great help to Christian husbands. Married brothers often have difficulty in loving their wives. If a married brother will call on the name of the Lord Jesus, he will experience a genuine change in relation to his wife and truly love her.

Likewise, a married sister can be helped by calling on the Lord's name to submit to her husband. If such a sister does not contact the Lord by calling on Him, she may say to herself, "It is not fair that I must submit to my husband. Why should I submit to him? God is not fair to ordain that he be the head instead of me." God's word, however, cannot be changed. Neither can this married sister ignore the requirement that she should submit to her husband. How, then, can she be helped? The best way for her to receive help in the matter of submitting to her husband is to call on the Lord's name. If she calls on Him day by day, she will be able to submit to her husband.

When we call on the Lord's name, we experience a real transfer. We are brought into another realm; we are brought into the kingdom of God, which is actually the propagated Christ Himself. If we realize this, we shall understand why the matter of calling on the name of the Lord is emphasized so much in the Bible.

Whenever we call on the Lord, He has both the opportunity and ground to spread Himself within us. This is not a mere doctrine; it is something very practical for our Christian experience. Today our Lord is the all-inclusive Spirit. As the Spirit, He is omnipresent, and He

is now working within us, waiting for the opportunity to spread in us. When we call on His name, we give Him the way to increase in us.

To Participate in the Lord's Riches

An important verse related to calling on the Lord is Romans 10:12: "There is no difference between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord of all is rich to all who call upon Him." For years, I knew only the following verse in Romans 10: "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (v. 13). I had been told that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, but I had never heard that the Lord is rich to all who call on His name. He is rich not only in initial salvation--He is rich in all divine and spiritual things. If we would participate in the Lord's riches, we need to call on Him. Day and night, we should call on the name of the Lord. Although we may call quietly so as not to disturb others, we can still softly call, "O Lord Jesus."

To Be Brought into Our Spirit

Once we call on the Lord's name, we cannot remain in our natural thoughts and reasonings. From experience we know that when we call on the name of the Lord we are brought into the depths of our being, that is, we are brought into our spirit. We cannot call on the name of the Lord and at the same time stay in the natural mind. Those who reason concerning the calling may say, "Is it right to call on the name of the Lord? Is this practice scriptural? If it is scriptural, why has it not been taught by others during the last nineteen centuries?" If such a person will call on the Lord, he will be saved from his natural thoughts and reasonings. When we refuse to call we remain in the natural mind. But when we call on the Lord, we are brought into the spirit. Oh, how we need to call on the Lord so that we may enjoy Him!

To Experience the Lord's Nearness

Calling on the Lord is a reality, for when we call on Him we touch Him. In a verse related to this calling Paul

says: "The word is near you, in your mouth" (Rom. 10:8). In a very practical sense, the word here is equal to the Lord. Thus, for the word to be near means that the Lord is near. Whenever we call on the name of the Lord, we experience His nearness, His intimate presence.

How do we know that the Lord is near us? We know this by calling on the Lord. You cannot convince someone that the Lord is near him by arguing or debating with him. The more we argue, the farther away the Lord may seem to be. But if instead of arguing we call on His name a few times, we shall sense that He is near. If we continue calling on Him, we shall realize that He is not only near but even within us. The more we call on the Lord, the more He becomes our enjoyment. Through calling on Him He also becomes our peace, rest, comfort, and solution in all kinds of situations. This is not a mere doctrine or superficial teaching; this is a truth for our experience.

REMAINING IN THE TRANSFER BY BEING FAITHFUL TO OUR VISION

With Paul, we all should learn to call on the name of the Lord Jesus in order to have a complete transfer. Then, also with Paul, we should be faithful to our vision. As we shall see, Paul was able to testify, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (26:19). Paul's faithfulness is seen in his not avoiding the use of the word "Gentiles" in 22:21. May we all learn to be faithful to the vision we have seen concerning the church, the ground of the church, and Christ as the life-giving Spirit.

We should learn of Paul to present the truth in a very good way. However, this does not mean that we shall always be able to avoid opposition and attack. No matter what our presentation of the truth may be, certain ones will still oppose. Nevertheless, we must be faithful. If at any time we are not faithful to the Lord's vision, then we are no longer in the dispensational transfer. The way to keep ourselves in this transfer is to be faithful. First, we make the transfer by calling on the name of the Lord. Then we remain in this transfer by being faithful to our vision.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SIXTY-TWO

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(28)

Scripture Reading: Acts 22:30--23:35

DEFENDING HIMSELF BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

We have seen that in 21:31-39 the Roman commander intervened to rescue Paul from the Jews who were seeking to kill him. Paul was then given the opportunity to defend himself before the rioting Jews (21:40--22:21). The Jews listened to him up to a point, but eventually began to make a disturbance. Paul was then bound by the Romans (22:22-29). In his wisdom, Paul utilized his Roman citizenship to save himself from suffering persecution (vv. 25-29). The Roman commander then gave Paul the opportunity to defend himself before the Sanhedrin (22:30--23:10). Acts 22:30 says, "And on the next day, intending to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to come together; and having brought Paul down, he had him stand before them." Let us now consider Paul's defense given before the Sanhedrin.

Conducting Himself in All Good Conscience

Acts 23:1 says, "And Paul, looking intently at the Sanhedrin, said, Men, brothers, I have conducted myself in all good conscience before God until this day." Following man's fall and his being sent out of the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:23), God wanted man, in His dispensation, to be responsible to his own conscience. But man failed to live

and walk according to his conscience and fell further into wickedness (Gen. 6:5). After the judgment of the flood, God ordained man to be under human government (Gen. 9:6). Man failed also in this. Then, before fulfilling His promise to Abraham concerning the blessing of the nations in Christ (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8), God put man under the test of the law (Rom. 3:20; 5:20). Man failed utterly in this test. All these failures indicate that man has fallen from God to his conscience, from his conscience to human government, and from human government to lawlessness. Therefore, man has fallen to the uttermost.

To conduct oneself "in all good conscience before God," as Paul did, was a great return to God from man's fall. Paul spoke this word to vindicate himself before those who accused him of being a lawless and even reckless person. He referred, in his defense, to his conscience again in 24:16. This showed his high standard of morality in contrast to the hypocrisy of the Jewish religionists and the crookedness of the Roman (Gentile) politicians.

In his defense before the Sanhedrin in the presence of representatives of the Roman government, Paul could say that there was nothing wrong in his personal conduct. He did all things according to his conscience, behaving in the highest standard of morality.

Paul's Boldness and Wisdom

Acts 23:2 and 3 continue, "And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! And you sit, judging me according to the law, and contrary to the law you order me to be struck?" Here we see Paul's straightforwardness and boldness in dealing with his persecutors. Those standing by said to him, "Do you revile the high priest of God?" (v. 4). Paul replied, "I did not know, brothers, that he is the high priest; for it is written, You shall not speak evilly of a ruler of your people" (v. 5).

Acts 23:6 says, "And Paul, knowing that one part was Sadducees, but the other Pharisees, cried out in the

Sanhedrin, Men, brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" The Pharisees were the strictest religious sect of the Jews (26:5), formed about 200 B.C. They were proud of their superior sanctity of life, devotion to God, and knowledge of the Scriptures. Actually, they were degraded into pretentious conduct and hypocrisy (Matt. 23:2-33). The Sadducees were another sect among Judaism. They did not believe in the resurrection, nor in angels, nor in spirits. While the Pharisees were supposed to be orthodox, the Sadducees were ancient modernists.

When Paul declared that he was a Pharisee and that he was being judged concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead, "a dissension arose between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge both. And there was a great outcry; and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party rose up and fought it out, saying, We find nothing evil in this man; and if a spirit has spoken to him, or an angel... " (vv. 7-9). Paul wisely used this situation to his benefit, knowing that the Pharisees would take sides with him and then fight with the Sadducees.

When Paul realized that it was helpful to him to take his stand as a Roman citizen, he did so, and this frightened the Roman officials. Here he cried out that he was a Pharisee, knowing that this would cause a fight between the Pharisees and Sadducees. Once again Paul exercised his wisdom to avoid suffering persecution. As we have seen, Paul faced his opponents in a different way than Christ did. When Christ was judged by men for the accomplishment of redemption, He did not open His mouth (Isa. 53:7; Matt. 26:62-63; 27:12, 14). But Paul, as a faithful and bold apostle sent by the Lord, exercised his wisdom to save his life from his persecutors so that he might fulfill the course of his ministry. For the sake of carrying out this ministry, he endeavored to live as long as possible.

Acts 23:10 goes on to say, "And when much dissension arose, the commander, fearing that Paul might be torn to

pieces by them, ordered the soldiers to go down and take him by force from their midst and bring him into the barracks." This was the sovereignty of the Lord to rescue Paul from the hand of the Jews.

ENCOURAGED BY THE LORD

Acts 23:11 says, "But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, Take courage, for as you have solemnly testified concerning Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." The Lord was living all the time in Paul essentially (Gal. 2:20). Now, to strengthen and encourage him, the Lord stood by him economically. This showed the Lord's faithfulness and good care for His servant.

The Lord's word in 23:11 about Paul solemnly testifying concerning Him in Jerusalem indicates that the Lord admitted that the apostle had borne a solemn testimony concerning Him in Jerusalem. Testimony differs from mere teaching. To testify requires experiences of seeing, participation, and enjoyment.

What the ascended Christ wanted to use to carry out His heavenly ministry for the propagating of Himself so that the kingdom of God might be established for the building up of the churches for His fullness was not a group of preachers trained by man's teaching to do a preaching work, but a body of His witnesses, martyrs, who bore a living testimony of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. Witnesses bear a living testimony of the resurrected and ascended Christ in life. They differ from preachers who merely preach doctrines in letters. In His incarnation, Christ carried out His ministry on earth, as recorded in the Gospels, by Himself to sow Himself as the seed of the kingdom of God only in the Jewish land. In His ascension He carries out His ministry in the heavens, as recorded in Acts, through witnesses in His resurrection life and with His ascension power and authority to spread Himself as the development of the kingdom of God from Jerusalem unto the remotest part of the earth, as the consummation of His ministry in the New Testament. All the apostles and disciples in Acts were such witnesses of Christ.

As we shall see, in 26:16 Paul testified that the Lord had appointed him a minister and a witness. A minister is for the ministry; a witness is for the testimony. Ministry is mainly related to work, to what the minister does; testimony is related to the person, to what the witness is.

Satan could instigate the Jewish religionists and utilize the Gentile politicians to bind the apostles and their evangelical ministry, but he could not bind Christ's living witnesses and their living testimonies. The more the Jewish religionists and Gentile politicians bound the apostles and their evangelical ministry, the stronger and brighter these martyrs, these witnesses, of Christ and their living testimonies became. The Lord in 23:11, in His appearing to the apostle, indicated that He would not presently rescue him from his bonds, but that He would leave him in bonds and bring him to Rome so that he might testify concerning Him as he had done in Jerusalem. The Lord encouraged Paul to do this.

In 23:11 the Lord told Paul that he would testify of Him in Rome. This would fulfill Paul's desire, expressed in 19:21, to see Rome. Later, both the Lord's promise and Paul's desire were fulfilled.

Paul was strengthened and encouraged by the Lord's word in verse 11. This word gave Paul the assurance that the Lord would bring him safely from Jerusalem to Rome. Assured by this clear word from the mouth of the Lord, Paul knew that he would go to Rome and there bear the testimony of the Lord Jesus.

THE PLOT OF THE JEWS

Acts 23:12-15 describes the plot of the Jews against Paul. Verses 12 and 13 say, "And when it became day, the Jews formed a plot and put themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. Now there were more than forty who formed this conspiracy." The plot in verses 12 through 15

manifested the falsehood and satanic hatred (John 8:44; Matt. 23:34) in the hypocritical religionists of Judaism.

In these verses we see how furious the Jews were in hating Paul. The forty who formed the conspiracy may have been young men. They came to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have bound ourselves with a curse to taste nothing until we kill Paul. Now therefore, you inform the commander with the Sanhedrin in order that he may bring him down to you, as though you were intending to determine more accurately the things concerning him; and we, before he draws near, are ready to do away with him" (vv. 14-15). Literally, the Greek words translated, "We have bound ourselves with a curse," mean "We have cursed ourselves with a curse." This is a very strong expression. It seems that the forty conspirators were saying that if they could not kill Paul, then they themselves would not live any longer. It is likely that those who plotted against Paul intended to kill him within twenty-four hours. Their plan was to ambush him as he was brought to the chief priests and elders for further investigation.

SECRETLY TRANSFERRED TO FELIX, THE ROMAN GOVERNOR IN CAESAREA

In 23:16--24:27 we see that Paul was transferred to Felix, the Roman governor in Caesarea. According to 23:16-25, this transfer was carried out secretly. Acts 23:16-18 say, "But the son of Paul's sister heard of the ambush, and he came and entered into the barracks and reported it to Paul. And Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, Bring this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him. So he took him and brought him to the commander and said, The prisoner Paul called me to him and asked me to bring this young man to you, who has something to tell you." What is recorded here also shows the sovereignty of the Lord to rescue Paul's life.

When the Roman commander heard of the plot against Paul, he exercised his authority and wisdom to send Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea, where the governor of the province of Judea was. Concerning this, verses 23 and 24

say, "And he called to him a certain two of the centurions and said, Prepare two hundred soldiers that they may go as far as Caesarea, and seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen by the third hour of the night, and mounts to stand by to put Paul on that they may bring him safely to Felix the governor." These spearmen may have been slingers, lightly armed soldiers. The third hour of the night was nine o'clock. Felix, to whom Paul was to be brought safely, was the Roman governor of the province of Judea.

The Roman commander exercised his authority to such an extent that he used two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to transfer Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea. Those who plotted against Paul never imagined that the Roman commander would take such an action. They expected to kill Paul the next day. But during the night, the Roman commander sent Paul out of Jerusalem in the midst of a procession of four hundred seventy soldiers. Here again we see the Lord's sovereignty.

Acts 23:31 says, "So the soldiers, according to what was directed them, took up Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris." Antipatris was a place about forty Roman miles away from Jerusalem and about twenty-six from Caesarea.

Acts 23:33-35 relates what happened once Paul was brought into Caesarea: "And when they had entered into Caesarea and handed over the letter to the governor, they presented also Paul to him. And when he had read it, he asked from what province he was; and learning that he was from Cilicia, he said, I will hear you fully when your accusers also arrive; and he ordered that he be guarded in Herod's praetorium." The praetorium, built by Herod the Great, was the palace of the former kings. It became the official residence of the governor of the Roman province of Judea. Paul was guarded here leniently, not as in the common prison. In the following message we shall see what happened to Paul under Felix, the Roman governor, in Caesarea.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SIXTY-THREE

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(29)

Scripture Reading: Acts 24:1-27

In this message we come to 24:1-27. In this section of Acts Paul is accused by the Jews' advocate (vv. 1-9), he defends himself before Felix (vv. 10-21), and he is kept in the custody of the unjust and corrupt Roman politician (vv. 22-27).

ACCUSED BY THE JEWS' ADVOCATE

Acts 24:1 says, "And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a certain orator, Tertullus; and they informed the governor against Paul." The orator Tertullus, was an advocate, a lawyer, who knew Roman legal procedure.

Verses 2 through 4 continue, "And when he was called, Tertullus began to accuse him saying, Since we have obtained much peace through you, and through your forethought reforms are being carried out for this nation, both in every way and everywhere we welcome it, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. But that I may not detain you further, I entreat you to hear us briefly in your forbearance." Tertullus' word here displayed his baseness; he was altogether without any ethical standard.

In 24:5 Tertullus said concerning Paul, "For we have found this man a pest and an agitator of insurrections among all the Jews throughout the inhabited earth, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." Here we have a threefold accusation. First, Tertullus accused Paul of

being a pest. A pest is full of evil "germs." Paul, however, was full of positive germs--the germs of the resurrected Christ for the propagation of Christ by imparting Him to others. We all should be such "pests."

Second, Tertullus gave to Paul the title of "agitator." He accused Paul of being an agitator of insurrections among the Jews throughout the inhabited earth.

Third, Tertullus claimed that Paul was a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. The word "sect" here is somewhat equal to today's word "cult." Tertullus' word indicates that the Jews regarded the believers in the Lord Jesus as Nazarenes. In chapter thirteen of Acts the believers were first called Christians in Antioch. Christians are Christ-men, those who live Christ. Here the Jews' attorney gives the believers another nickname--Nazarenes. The use of this nickname indicates that the believers were considered followers of the Nazarene, Jesus.

DEFENDING HIMSELF BEFORE FELIX

In 24:10 Paul begins to make his defense before Felix: "And when the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul answered, Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense as to the things concerning myself." We have seen that, in contrast to the way the Lord Jesus faced His opponents, it was necessary for Paul to make a defense and to exercise his wisdom in order to save his life from his persecutors so that he might fulfill the course of his ministry.

Serving God and Behaving according to the Scriptures

In verses 11 through 14 Paul goes on to say, "As you can realize, it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem. And neither in the temple did they find me disputing with anyone nor stirring up a crowd, neither in the synagogues nor throughout the city. Neither are they able to prove to you the things concerning which they now accuse me. But I confess this to you, that according to the way which they call a sect, so

I serve the God of our fathers, believing all that is written throughout the Law and in the Prophets." Here we see that what the opposing Jews called a sect Paul called the way. As we have pointed out, the way, mentioned several times in Acts (9:2; 18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 22:4), denotes the Lord's full salvation in God's New Testament economy.

In verse 14 Paul testified that according to the way the opposers called a sect he served the God of their fathers. Literally, the Greek word rendered "serve" means "serve as a priest." Paul's way of serving God was the way of the New Testament economy. Therefore, his way of serving was different from that of the other Jews.

In verse 14 Paul also says that he believed all that is written throughout the Law and in the Prophets. Here Paul is saying that he acted according to the Old Testament, which was composed of the Law and the Prophets. Therefore, Paul vindicated himself as a person who behaved according to the Scriptures.

A Resurrection of the Righteous and the Unrighteous

In 24:15 Paul speaks of the resurrection: "Having hope toward God, which these themselves also look for, that there is about to be a resurrection both of the righteous and the unrighteous." The resurrection of the righteous will occur before the millennium at the Lord's coming back (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thes. 4:16). It will be the resurrection of life (John 5:28-29a; Dan. 12:2). The resurrection of life is the resurrection of the saved believers before the millennium. The dead believers will be resurrected to enjoy eternal life at the coming back of the Lord Jesus. Hence, it is called the resurrection of life. It is also the resurrection of reward (Luke 14:14), when God will reward the saints (Rev. 11:18) at the Lord's return (1 Cor. 4:5).

The resurrection of the righteous, which is the resurrection of life, also includes the first, or the best, resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6). Revelation 20:5 and 6 speak of the first, or the best, resurrection. The first resurrection is the best one. It is not only the resurrection of life, but also

the resurrection of reward, the ex-resurrection, that is, the extraordinary resurrection for which the Apostle Paul sought (Phil. 3:11), the resurrection of kingship as a reward to the overcomers so that they may reign as co-kings with Christ in the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:4,6). Not only the resurrected overcomers, such as the man-child in Revelation 12:5 and the later martyrs in Revelation 15:2, but also the raptured living ones, such as the firstfruit in Revelation 14:1-5, will have "part in the first resurrection" (Rev. 20:6).

In Philippians 3:11 Paul refers to the first, or best, resurrection as the out-resurrection: "If by any means I may attain to the out-resurrection from among the dead." This is the outstanding resurrection, the extra-resurrection, which will be a prize to the overcoming saints. All believers who are dead in Christ will participate in the resurrection from among the dead at the Lord's coming back (1 Thes. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52). But the overcoming saints will enjoy an extra, outstanding portion of that resurrection. This is called in Hebrews 11:35 the "better resurrection."

To arrive at the out-resurrection means that our entire being has been gradually and continually resurrected. God first resurrected our deadened spirit (John 5:25; Eph. 2:5-6). Then from our spirit He proceeds to resurrect our soul (Rom. 8:6) and our mortal body (Rom. 8:11), until our entire being--spirit, soul, and body--is fully resurrected out of our old being by and with His life. This is a process in life through which we must pass and a race for us to run until we arrive at the out-resurrection as the prize. Hence, the out-resurrection should be the goal and destination of our Christian life. We can reach this goal only by being conformed to the death of Christ (Phil. 3:10), by living a crucified life. In the death of Christ we are processed in resurrection from the old creation to the new.

We have pointed out that in Acts 24:15 Paul says that there will be a resurrection both of the righteous and the unrighteous. The resurrection of the unrighteous will occur after the millennium (Rev. 20:5). It will be the

resurrection of judgment (John 5:29) and of shame and everlasting contempt (Dan. 12:2b). This resurrection of judgment will be the resurrection of the perished unbelievers after the millennium (Rev. 20:5, 12). All the dead unbelievers will be resurrected after the thousand years to be judged at the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15). Hence, it is called the resurrection of judgment. In Revelation 20:12 the word "standing" indicates the dead have been resurrected. This is the resurrection of judgment for eternal perdition upon the unrighteous after the millennium. This is the resurrection concerning which the Apostle Paul warned unrighteous Felix in Acts 24:25.

All the unsaved will be in the resurrection of judgment. Because they will be condemned to eternal perdition, their resurrection will be of shame and everlasting contempt. Paul, in his wisdom, mentioned this resurrection as a warning to Felix. Paul's word implies that Felix should prepare himself to face the coming resurrection of judgment. As we shall see, later on Paul spoke directly to Felix concerning the coming judgment.

Paul's Exercise to Have a Conscience without Offense

In 24:16 Paul said to Felix, "In this I also exercise myself, to have always a conscience without offense toward God and men." Paul uttered a similar word when he defended himself before the Sanhedrin: "I have conducted myself in all good conscience before God until this day" (23:1). We have seen that for Paul to conduct himself in all good conscience before God was a great return to God from man's fall. Paul spoke such a word to vindicate himself before those who accused him of being a lawless and even a reckless person. Paul's testimony in 23:1 and 24:16 concerning his conscience showed his high standard of morality in contrast to the hypocrisy of the Jewish religionists and the crookedness of the Roman politicians. As we continue on in Acts 24, we shall see more concerning the corruption of Roman politics.

KEPT IN THE CUSTODY OF THE UNJUST AND CORRUPT ROMAN POLITICIAN

Acts 24:22 and 23 say, "But Felix, knowing more accurately the things concerning the way, adjourned the case, saying, When Lysias the commander comes down, I will determine your affairs. And he directed the centurion to keep him in custody, and yet that he should have some liberty, and that no one should prevent his own people from attending to him." Literally, the Greek word rendered "the case" in verse 22 means "them." The Greek word for "liberty" in verse 23 also means relief, ease.

According to verse 24, "After some days, Felix arrived with Drusilla his wife, who was a Jewess, and he sent for Paul and heard him concerning his faith in Christ Jesus." Drusilla was a daughter of King Herod Agrippa. She was persuaded by Felix, who became enamored of her, to forsake her husband and marry him. This showed the intemperance and corruption of Felix, a Roman politician. He was an immoral person without self-control.

Verse 24 says that Felix heard Paul concerning his faith in Christ Jesus. Literally, the Greek word translated "his" means "the."

Reasoning concerning Righteousness, Self-control, and the Coming Judgment

Acts 24:25 says, "And as he was reasoning concerning righteousness, and self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix became afraid and answered, Go for the present, and when I have an opportunity, I will call for you." Literally, the Greek word rendered "was reasoning" means to say thoroughly, discuss (in argument or exhortation), dispute; the same as in 17:2 and 18:4, 19.

Realizing Felix's unrighteousness (vv. 26-27) and intemperance, the apostle reasoned with him of righteousness and self-control, the control of passions and desires, especially here regarding the controlling of sexual desires. The coming judgment is related to the resurrection of the unrighteous, which the apostle preached in verse 15.

The apostle also reasoned with Felix of the coming judgment as a warning. Through this Felix became afraid.

Felix certainly was an unrighteous politician. As verse 26 indicates, he hoped to receive money from Paul. He expected a bribe, the giving of money unrighteously. Based upon this fact, Paul reasoned with him concerning righteousness.

We have seen that Felix also lacked self-control. Because of Felix's intemperate lust, Paul, in order to show Felix's sinfulness, also reasoned with him concerning self-control.

Eventually, in his reasoning with Felix, Paul came to the matter of the future judgment for perdition. In their preaching to the Gentiles, both Peter in 10:42 and Paul here and in 17:31 stressed the coming judgment of God. The resurrected Christ at His coming back will be the Judge of the living before the millennium on His throne of glory (Matt. 25:31-46). This is related to His second coming (2 Tim. 4:1). He will also be the Judge of the dead after the millennium on the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15).

Paul's word to Felix was a strong warning. Felix became afraid, but he was not moved. Sending Paul away, he said, "Go for the present, and when I have an opportunity, I will call for you" (v. 25).

Felix did send for Paul a number of times. Concerning this, 24:26 says, "At the same time also he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; wherefore also he sent for him more frequently and conversed with him." This indicates the Roman politician's corruption. His intention in sending for Paul was not to hear the gospel; rather, his purpose was to get money.

Two Years in Caesarea

Verse 27 concludes, "And when two years were completed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and wanting to gain favor with the Jews, Felix left Paul bound." Porcius Festus was the successor of Felix as the governor of Judea. Felix's leaving Paul bound again shows the corruption of Roman politics.

Luke does not disclose what the apostle did during these two years in Caesarea. Paul may have used the time to be with the Lord for His move on earth. If so, this may have influenced the Epistles he wrote during the time of his appeal in Rome--Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians--which are the most mysterious, most profound, and the richest in the divine revelation.

A PICTURE OF HYPOCRISY AND CORRUPTION

In these chapters of Acts we have a picture of hypocrisy in religion and corruption in politics. What hypocrisy there was in Judaism! The Jews pretended to serve God, to please God, and to glorify God, yet they did many evil things. These chapters expose the evil of the Jewish people. They were religious in an evil way, even plotting to kill Paul. Although they were evil, they still pretended to be those who worshipped God and pleased Him. Hence, in Judaism there was hypocrisy.

In Roman politics we see corruption and unrighteousness. Felix knew that Paul had not done anything wrong. Therefore, in justice Felix should have released Paul. However, in order to gain favor with the Jews and with the hope of receiving money from Paul and his friends, he kept Paul in custody for two years. Felix allowed Paul's friends to visit him, but his purpose in doing so was to receive money. As a result, in an unrighteous way Paul was kept in custody for two years. In the following message we shall consider what Paul might have done during those years.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SIXTY-FOUR

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(30)

Scripture Reading: Acts 24:22-27; Gal. 1:17; Col. 1:25; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 2 Tim. 1:14; 2:2, 22

In 24:1-9 Paul was accused by the Jews' advocate, and in 24:10-21 he defended himself before Felix, the Roman governor of Judea. Then in 24:22-27 he was kept in the custody of the unjust and corrupt Roman politician. Acts 24:27 says, "And when two years were completed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and wanting to gain favor with the Jews, Felix left Paul bound." Luke does not disclose what Paul did during these two years. In this message we shall consider what Paul might have done during this period of time.

RECEIVING REVELATION THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Luke does not tell us anything about the two years Paul was kept in custody in Caesarea. Neither does Luke say anything about the time Paul spent in Arabia after his conversion. Concerning this, Paul says, "Neither did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away to Arabia, and again returned to Damascus" (Gal. 1:17). It is difficult to trace where in Arabia Paul went and how long he stayed there after his conversion. However, it must have been a place apart from the Christians, and the time of his stay there must not have been short. His purpose in referring to this was to testify that he did not receive the gospel from man (Gal. 1:12). In

Arabia Paul must have received some revelation concerning the gospel directly from the Lord.

No doubt, the divine revelation Paul received from the Lord in Arabia came through his knowledge of the Old Testament. Paul was an excellent student of the Old Testament. This is indicated by the way he expounded the Old Testament in the books of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. As we read these books, we see that Paul had a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament. Furthermore, he had insight into the Scriptures. An example of this insight is Paul's allegorizing Sarah, Abraham's wife, and Hagar, Abraham's concubine, as two covenants (Gal. 4:22-26). Apart from Paul's allegorizing of these women in Galatians 4, we could read Genesis again and again without seeing that Sarah and Hagar signify two covenants. But Paul, who was very knowledgeable in the truth in the Old Testament, had the insight to see this. Through his knowledge of the Old Testament the divine light came to him. Therefore, as indicated by his writings, Paul could understand the types in the Old Testament concerning Christ's Person and work. Paul's knowledge of the Scriptures was one reason for his receiving so much divine revelation.

RECEIVING REVELATION DIRECTLY FROM THE LORD

Although Paul received a great deal of revelation from the Lord through his knowledge of the Old Testament, certain aspects of the revelation he received from the Lord are not based on the Old Testament. We may take as an example what Paul says concerning the different kinds of law in Romans 7 and 8. In Romans 8:2 he says, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed me from the law of sin and of death." Here Paul speaks of two laws—the law of sin and death and the law of the Spirit of life. In Romans 7, in addition to the law of God (v. 22), Paul speaks of "the law of my mind" (v. 23), which is the law of doing good. In Romans 7:23 he also mentions "the law of sin which is in my members." Therefore, in these two chapters Paul speaks of four laws: the written law of God,

the law of doing good, the law of sin and death, and the law of the Spirit of life. In contrast to the law of God, the law of doing good, the law of sin and death, and the law of the Spirit of life are not written laws. Rather, they are fixed principles of life.

Every kind of life has its own law. The law of doing good is the law of the human life. The law of sin and death is the law of the sinful, satanic life. The law of the Spirit of life is the law of the divine life. These three laws are based on the fixed principles of these kinds of life. The human life has its own law, the satanic life has a sinful law, and the divine life, which is the highest life, surely has a divine law.

What was the source of the revelation Paul saw concerning these three laws? I have investigated this matter in the attempt to learn the source, but I have not been able to find it. Probably Paul received the revelation concerning these three laws directly from the Lord. Moreover, his knowledge of these laws was based on his experience. Paul experienced the law of the mind, the law of doing good. Paul also experienced the law of sin and death. Concerning this, he could say, "I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and making me a captive in the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:23). Earlier in Romans 7 Paul said, "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but to do the good is not. For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil I do not will, this I practice. But if what I do not will, this I do, it is no longer I that do it but sin that dwells in me. I find then the law that, at my willing to do the good, the evil is present with me" (vv. 18-21). Therefore, from his experience Paul learned that there is such a law as the law of sin and death. To be sure, from his Christian experience Paul discovered that there is a higher law within him--the law of the divine life. Paul certainly received the revelation concerning the law of doing good, the law of sin and death, and the law of the Spirit of life.

Because Paul received so much revelation from the

Lord, when he came forth to preach, he could minister to others the riches of these revelations. He was able to write such letters as 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Romans, Galatians, and 1 and 2 Corinthians. As we read Paul's writings, we see that each one of them is full of divine revelation. The point we are emphasizing here is that Paul must have received a great deal of revelation from the Lord during the time he was in Arabia.

PAUL IN CAESAREA

According to Acts 24:27, the Lord set aside a two-year period in which Paul was kept in custody in Caesarea. In these years Paul must have thought about what had taken place in Acts 15 and 21.

In Acts 21 we see the weakness of Paul in facing the religious mixture in Jerusalem. Although Peter and John were with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration, they were silent concerning God's New Testament economy in Acts 21. As we have seen, James spoke on behalf of the believing Jews who were still zealous for the law (21:20). Did James not have any light concerning God's New Testament economy? It seems that he was very dull in his understanding of this. Although Peter and John had been enlightened regarding God's New Testament economy, they did not do anything about the situation of the mixture of the New Testament grace with the Old Testament law in Jerusalem. It seems that Paul was the only one burdened about that situation.

As we consider the scene portrayed in these chapters of Acts, we see that the central figure was actually the Lord Himself. He played the major role in these chapters as the One who was sovereign over everything. Eventually, the Lord delivered Paul from the difficult situation in Jerusalem, preserving his life from the plotting Jews, and placed him in custody under the Roman government in Caesarea. Although Paul was in custody, he was not actually in prison. Felix "directed the centurion to keep him in custody, and yet that he should have some liberty, and that no one should prevent his own people from

attending to him" (24:23). As 24:26 indicates, Felix's purpose in allowing Paul's friends to visit him was to gain money for himself. Although Felix's purpose was to get money, the Lord had His own purpose in keeping Paul in custody in Caesarea. There in Caesarea Paul did not have anything to do, and he was safely kept from trouble.

PREPARED TO WRITE MORE EPISTLES

What do you think Paul did during those two years of custody in Caesarea? Do you think that, after having passed through so much turmoil, Paul did nothing except read the Scriptures? Paul surely must have recalled his experiences in chapters fifteen and twenty-one. He must have thought about the things through which he had passed. He might have compared his recent experiences with the revelation he had received in the past, especially with the revelation he had received in Arabia. I believe that Paul reviewed the entire situation from Acts 15 onward in the light of the revelation that had been given to him. As he reviewed matters in this way, the light may have become clearer and clearer. This, of course, is our inference based upon the study of the New Testament.

As Paul considered the situation in Acts 21, he may have felt unhappy with James and also with Peter and John. He may have regretted what had happened. Then Paul may have realized that it was necessary for him to write more Epistles. The content of Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians may have been deep within him during the years in Caesarea.

I have spent time studying what Paul did for two years in Caesarea. I believe that during this time Paul reviewed his experience from Acts 15 and 21, comparing it with the revelation he had received from the Lord and with the situation he had observed in Jerusalem with James, Peter, and John. I believe that the more Paul reviewed his experience, the more burdened he became to put out further writings. Paul may have realized that he would not soon be released from the custody of the Roman government. He may have anticipated a lengthy stay in

Caesarea. I believe that during the two years he was there, he was prepared by the Lord to write the eight Epistles of Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

Books like Hebrews and Ephesians could not have been written without adequate preparation. The writing of such Epistles requires a great deal of preparation. Before Paul could write Hebrews and Ephesians, he first had to enter into the depths of God's revelation. Before writing these Epistles, he needed a time of thorough consideration. Paul was given this time, a time of preparation, during the two years he was kept in custody in Caesarea. Later, when he was transferred from Caesarea to Rome, he had the opportunity to put out the books of Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. Of course, he was also able to write 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. It would be very helpful to review especially Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians against the background of Acts 15 through 24. If we do this, we shall visualize these four Epistles in a new way with more light.

BURDENED CONCERNING GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

Paul was heavily burdened concerning God's New Testament economy. Although he was not able to continue to work this out personally, he was given the opportunity to write the divine revelation. In Colossians 1:25 he says, "I became a minister according to the stewardship of God, which was given to me for you, to complete the word of God." Here we see that Paul's writing of the book of Colossians was for the completing of God's New Testament economy. Without the books of Colossians, Philippians, Ephesians, and Hebrews, we would not have a clear view of God's New Testament economy.

Actually, the Greek word for "economy" (*oikonomia*) is a word used particularly by Paul, especially in the book of Ephesians. Although Paul uses this word in 1 Corinthians 9:17, he does not use it there for the specific purpose of unveiling God's New Testament economy. But he does use

the word *oikonomia* for this purpose in Ephesians. Ephesians, we know, is a book on the church. But if we have only this understanding of Ephesians, our comprehension of this book will be too superficial. We need to see that Ephesians is a book on God's economy.

We have emphasized the fact that regarding the situation in Acts we can see the Lord's sovereignty. Neither Judaism nor Roman politics could defeat the sovereign Lord. On the contrary, everything served His purpose. Even Peter's fearfulness (Gal. 2:12) and the plots of the Jews served the Lord's purpose. Apparently, these things frustrated His move. Actually, they served His purpose in revealing and then carrying out God's New Testament economy.

Today we are burdened for the carrying out of God's New Testament economy. This is the reason I have often pointed out that in the Lord's recovery we are not doing an ordinary Christian work. On the contrary, by the Lord's mercy and grace, we are here to carry out God's New Testament economy.

SEEING THE VISION OF GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

After studying all the books of the Bible for many years, we began to see the overall revelation in the Scriptures concerning God's New Testament economy. Through the Word, the Lord showed us that in this economy the Triune God became a man in the Son. This means that the accomplishment of God's New Testament economy began with the incarnation. Through Christ's human living, death, resurrection, and ascension, everything necessary for the accomplishment of God's economy was done. After breathing the Spirit into the disciples essentially (John 20:22), the Lord, in His ascension, poured out the Spirit upon His Body economically (Acts 2:17). That outpouring of the Spirit was the completion of the accomplishment of God's New Testament economy. Now the Triune God as the processed all-inclusive Spirit is both within His chosen people and upon them, and with them He is carrying out

the New Testament economy. The Lord is propagating Himself by imparting Himself to His believers to make them living members of His universal Body to be His corporate vessel for His expression. Today this corporate vessel is expressed in various localities as local churches, and all these churches are lampstands shining in this dark age. Eventually, all the shining local churches will consummate in the New Jerusalem, which will be the ultimate consummation of God's move in His New Testament economy.

The crucial focus of God's New Testament economy is the all-inclusive Christ as our life, our person, and our everything. The divine economy is not focused on any law, regulation, teaching, philosophy, or practice. God's economy is focused on one all-inclusive, wonderful Person. This Person is the embodiment of the processed Triune God, and He is realized as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, who is within us and upon us. This Spirit is working in us so that we may be brought back directly to Christ to enjoy Him as everything. I hope that we shall all have a clear view concerning this.

If we see the vision of the divine economy, we shall praise the Lord for the two years He kept Paul in custody in Caesarea. Those years were a time of preparation for Paul, a chosen vessel, to put forth the completing revelation which he received of the Lord. After the preparation in Caesarea, Paul was transferred to Rome. Then he wrote the excellent completing Epistles of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews. If we would be constituted of Paul's ministry, we need to study these four books.

In addition to writing these four Epistles, Paul also wrote 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. In 1 Timothy 1:3 and 4 Paul said to Timothy, "Even as I urged you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach differently, nor to occupy themselves with myths and unending genealogies, which give occasion for questionings rather than God's dispensation which is in faith." Here Paul charged us not to teach differently, but to teach God's

economy. According to the Epistle of 1 Timothy, God's economy is focused on God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). According to 1 Timothy 3:15, the church of the living God, the house of God, is the pillar and base of the truth, and this truth is actually the reality of the New Testament economy.

In 2 Timothy 1:14 we have this charge: "Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us." Then in 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul went on to say, "The things which you have heard from me through many witnesses, these commit to faithful men, who will be competent to teach others also." Here Paul charged Timothy to pass on to others what he had received so that they might in turn teach others.

Furthermore, Paul told Timothy to "pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22). Here we see that calling on the name of the Lord has a definite place in the carrying out of the New Testament economy of God. For the carrying out of God's New Testament economy, we need to call on the name of the Lord continually. Not only should we ourselves call individually; we should also call on Him with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

We thank the Lord for the last eight Epistles written by Paul. If we did not have these books, I do not know where we would be today with respect to God's New Testament economy. We also thank the Lord for the picture portrayed for us in Acts. After considering the remaining chapters of this book, we shall have an even clearer view of the carrying out of God's New Testament economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SIXTY-FIVE

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(31)

Scripture Reading: Acts 25:1-27

In the last four chapters of Acts, chapters twenty-five through twenty-eight, Paul defends himself twice. First, he defends himself before Festus (25:6-8), and then before Agrippa (26:1-29). Following his defense before Agrippa, Paul makes his fourth journey (27:1--28:31). In these chapters we have a picture of people in three kinds of situations. We have a picture of the Jewish religionists, the Roman politicians, and those in the church.

THE JEWISH RELIGIONISTS

Let us first consider the portrait of the Jewish religionists. Judaism was formed according to God's word. Therefore, the Jewish religion was according to the Scriptures. The Jewish religionists had the holy Bible, the holy land, the holy city, the holy temple, the holy priesthood, and all the other holy things. Nevertheless, what these religious people did as recorded in the book of Acts was absolutely not of God but of Satan.

Acts 25:1-3 says, "Festus therefore, having come into the province, after three days went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. And the chief priests and leading men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they kept entreating him, asking for a favor against him, so that he might summon him to Jerusalem, setting an ambush to do away with him on the way." Here we see that the Jews wanted to set up an ambush in order to kill Paul. Furthermore,

the Jewish religionists lied and exercised hypocrisy. With them there was nothing holy or righteous. With them there was nothing that could be counted as being for God. In this religion we cannot see anything spiritual or divine. On the contrary, what was practiced among the Jewish religionists in the case of Paul was not only fleshly and sinful but even devilish and hellish. The source of what they did was the Devil.

THE ROMAN POLITICIANS

In Acts we also have a portrait of the Roman politicians. In particular, we have an account concerning the commander, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. The higher the Roman politicians were, the more corrupt they were. Felix was more corrupt than the commander, Festus was more corrupt than Felix, and Agrippa was more corrupt than Festus. According to the record in the holy Word, in the Roman political circle there was much corruption. As we have pointed out, along with the Hebrew religion and Greek culture, Roman politics was one of the three elements that composed western culture. But according to Acts, Roman politics was corrupt.

Acts 24:24 speaks of Felix and Drusilla his wife. Drusilla was a daughter of King Herod Agrippa. Felix became enamored of her and persuaded her to forsake her husband and marry him. This shows the intemperance and corruption of Felix, a Roman politician. Felix's corruption is also seen in his sending for Paul frequently in the hope that money would be given him by Paul (24:26).

Acts 25:13 speaks of Agrippa and Bernice. Bernice was a sister of Drusilla, the wife of Felix. She was also a sister of Agrippa, with whom she lived incestuously. This may be the reason that in 25:13 Bernice is not identified as being Agrippa's wife. Roman politics certainly was dark and corrupt, full of sexual immorality and the love of money. The record in Acts exposes the corruption of the Roman politicians.

THE DISAPPOINTING SITUATION CONCERNING THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM

In 1 Corinthians 10:32 Paul speaks of the Jews, the

Greeks, and the church of God. This indicates that in New Testament times people were of three classes: the Jews--God's chosen people; the Greeks--unbelieving Gentiles; and the church--a composition of the believers in Christ. We have seen that, according to the picture portrayed in Acts, the Jewish religionists were hypocritical and even devilish and that the Roman politicians were dark and corrupt. What, then, was the situation concerning the church? When Paul was in custody for two years in Caesarea, he must have been disappointed with the church in Jerusalem. What he saw in the church there was weakness and compromise.

Paul, as a vessel chosen by God, was enlightened to the uttermost concerning the universe. In 2 Corinthians, an Epistle written not long before his last trip to Jerusalem, Paul testifies that he was caught away to the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2) and was also caught away into paradise (v. 4), the pleasant section in Hades. Having received an abundance of revelation, Paul was enlightened concerning the secrets of the universe. Of course, he received much revelation in particular concerning God's New Testament economy. Now, in the last chapters of Acts, Paul was in a situation in which he was surrounded by the Jewish religionists, the Roman politicians, and his fellow workers in the church life. He must have found this situation very disappointing.

Weakness, Compromise, and the Lack of Revelation

As one who had an abundance of the divine revelation stored up in his being, Paul faced the situation among the Jews, the Roman politicians, and the church people. Among the Jewish religionists he saw hypocrisy, and among the Roman politicians he saw corruption. Furthermore, in the church life he saw weakness, compromise, and the lack of light and revelation. It seems that no one in the church was bold enough to stand for the revelation they had received and the vision they had seen. In the midst of that situation Peter should have stood boldly for the revelation he had received of the Lord, but he failed to do this.

In chapters two through five of Acts Peter and John were very strong and bold. As a result of their boldness, they were brought before the Sanhedrin in chapter four, and they were placed by the Sanhedrin in public custody in chapter five. There was no sign of weakness or compromise in Peter and John in these early chapters. There is no hint that they were afraid of the Jewish religionists or compromised with them. However, as we read from Acts 15 onward and also read Galatians 2, we see that Peter eventually was exposed in his weakness and even in his hypocrisy.

The Destruction of Jerusalem

Because of the strong attitude and standing taken by Peter, John, and the other believers, the Jews persecuted the saints to such an extent that, with the exception of the apostles, they all left Jerusalem (8:1). But by the time Paul paid his last visit to Jerusalem in Acts 21, James could speak of "how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed, and all are zealous for the law" (v. 20). All these thousands of believers had remained in Jerusalem. If Peter and John had had the strong attitude and standing in chapter twenty-one that they had in chapters two through five, most of these Jewish believers would have been scattered, and that scattering would have become their salvation as far as the religious mixture in Jerusalem was concerned. However, these thousands of believers, who were still zealous for the law, stayed in Jerusalem, and their remaining in Jerusalem put them in great danger. Not too long after Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, perhaps not more than ten years later, Titus came with the Roman army to destroy Jerusalem and to slaughter those who continued to live there. It is possible that many Christians were put to death at that time.

In the parables in Matthew 21:33-46 and 22:1-14 the Lord Jesus expressed God's anger concerning the situation in Jerusalem. The Lord indicated that God, "the lord of the vineyard," would miserably destroy the evil vinedressers. This was fulfilled when Titus, the Roman prince, and his army destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In Matthew 22:7 the

Lord prophesied that God would send "his troops," the Roman troops under Titus, and destroy the city of Jerusalem. The destruction of Jerusalem may have included the church in Jerusalem. Because of James' compromising attitude and Peter's weakness, the church in Jerusalem may have been destroyed along with the city. However, the situation concerning the church would have been different if Peter and John had been as bold in Acts 21 as they were at the beginning. If they had continued to be strong and bold, the saints either would have been scattered, or would have been persecuted unto death by the Jewish religionists.

The Martyrdom of James

According to history, the James of Acts 21 was martyred at the hands of the opposing Jews. The leaders of the Sanhedrin thought that James was very favorable toward Judaism. They called together a congregation and asked James to speak to them, thinking that he would speak positively about Judaism. James, however, was faithful to preach Christ in a strong way. The leaders of the Sanhedrin were offended, and they put James to death. They had received a mistaken impression of James because so many Jewish believers in Jerusalem were zealous for the law. This may have caused the leaders of the Sanhedrin to think that James was for Judaism.

From the record in Acts 21 we see that James even went so far as to push Paul into the "trap" of an extremely difficult situation. As we have pointed out, the Lord did not tolerate that compromising situation in Jerusalem.

PAUL'S LAST JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

It is difficult to believe that Peter and John were silent about the situation in Jerusalem. They should have borne the burden to clear up the matter. It should not have been necessary for Paul to do this. But Peter and James did not do their duty in Jerusalem. Rather, the church there was allowed to remain in a declining condition, and Paul should have been very unhappy about that situation.

Although he was heavily burdened to carry out God's New Testament economy in the Gentile world, he realized that the source in Jerusalem had been contaminated and that the flow of the poison was spreading into the Gentile world. As Paul's Epistles indicate, he had to face the Judaizers everywhere. According to the book of Galatians, the churches in Galatia were troubled by the Judaizers. Therefore, Paul knew that he could not continue his work in the Gentile world until the situation in Jerusalem had been dealt with. Knowing that the main thing that was damaging the church life in the Gentile world was Judaism, Paul was burdened to go back to Jerusalem. This was the reason he purposed in his spirit to go to Jerusalem (19:21). He was burdened to deal with the source of the contamination.

In reading chapters eighteen through twenty-one of Acts, it is difficult for us to decide whether or not Paul was right in going to Jerusalem the last time. Acts 19:21 says, "And when these things were fulfilled, Paul purposed in his spirit, having passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome." In 20:22 and 23 Paul said, "And now, behold, I am going bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing what I will meet with there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in city after city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me." The Holy Spirit's testimony was a prophecy, a foretelling, not a charge. When Paul was in Tyre, the disciples "told Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem" (21:4). Here, having made known to Paul that bonds and afflictions awaited him in Jerusalem, the Spirit took a further step to tell him through some members of the Body not to go to Jerusalem. Furthermore, the prophet Agabus "took Paul's girdle; and having bound his own feet and hands, he said, Thus says the Holy Spirit, In this way shall the Jews in Jerusalem bind the man whose girdle this is and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles" (21:11). Luke goes on to say, "And when we heard these things, both we and those in that place entreated him not to go up to

Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we were silent, having said, The will of the Lord be done" (vv. 12-14). The more we consider all these verses, the more we realize how difficult it is to decide whether Paul was right or wrong in going up to Jerusalem the last time. On the one hand, the Spirit indicated to Paul that bonds and afflictions awaited him in Jerusalem. On the other hand, through members of the Body, the Spirit told Paul not to go to Jerusalem. The Lord was very clear about the situation there.

ENCOURAGED BY THE LORD

By the Lord's sovereignty Paul was rescued from the hand of the rioting Jews into the hand of the Roman commander (21:27-39). After Paul defended himself before the Jews (21:40--22:21), was bound by the Romans (22:22--29), and defended himself before the Sanhedrin (22:30--23:10), he was encouraged by the Lord. Concerning this, 23:11 says, "But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, Take courage, for as you have solemnly testified concerning Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." This was a word of strong assurance to Paul. Surely Paul was afraid. If he had not been afraid, there would have been no need for the Lord to tell him to take courage. Paul certainly had been in a very frightening situation. But sovereignly the Lord rescued him from that situation, and then He came to assure him that he would testify of Him in Rome. In this way Paul's desire to see Rome would be fulfilled.

PAUL'S VISION OF GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

Let us consider again the picture of the situation in which Paul found himself. The church was weak, compromising, and lacking in light. With the church in Jerusalem there was not a genuine testimony. The religious people in Judaism were blind, devilish, and full of hatred, and the Roman politicians were corrupt.

Against such a background we see Paul, a man burdened for and saturated with God's New Testament economy. As Paul considered the situation involving the church, Judaism, and the Roman government, he knew that what was needed most was God's New Testament economy.

What is God's New Testament economy? God's New Testament economy is to propagate the processed Triune God in the Person of the all-inclusive, resurrected Christ. Only the propagation of this resurrected Christ is the answer to the pitiful situation on the earth. What is needed is for us to allow God to carry out His New Testament economy in propagating the resurrected Christ. Paul must have considered this very much during the two years custody in Caesarea. Therefore, when he was brought to Rome, he began to write the last eight of his Epistles: Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, 1 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, and 2 Timothy. These Epistles give us a clear view of the carrying out of God's New Testament economy.

Not long after Paul presented a clear view of God's New Testament economy by completing his writings of the divine revelation, he was martyred. Approximately a quarter of a century later, the book of Revelation was written. In the seven epistles of Revelation 2 and 3 we can see that the churches, which had been established mainly by Paul for the accomplishment of God's New Testament economy by propagating the resurrected Christ, had become degraded. The degradation consisted of the loss of the all-inclusive Christ and the taking in of other things as replacements of Christ. With the exception of the epistle to the church in Philadelphia, we see that in these seven churches various things had crept in to replace Christ.

Almost nineteen centuries have passed since the book of Revelation was written. Throughout these centuries a struggle has been taking place between Satan and God. Satan has been trying in different ways to replace Christ. As a result, many of us, including me, were born into an organized Christianity that had very little of Christ. For example, how much of Christ is there in the celebration of Christmas? In today's Christianity there is a mixture of

truth and falsehood. Very few believers know the truth in a deep and thorough way.

After I was saved, I immediately began to love the Bible and study it. Gradually the light has come through the Word concerning God's New Testament economy. Through the Lord's enlightenment we can see that Paul was burdened for the full revelation of God's New Testament economy. The accomplishment of the divine economy involved Christ's incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension so that He might propagate Himself by imparting Himself into God's chosen people. In this way God's people may become His sons and the members of Christ to be a corporate Body to express Him. This expression is in local churches in this age and will be in the New Jerusalem in eternity.

This is the vision Paul saw, and this is what we need to see today. Paul's vision concerning God's New Testament economy is fully revealed and developed in his last eight Epistles. Therefore, with the help of the Life-study Messages, we need to study these Epistles, especially Ephesians and Hebrews. Studying Paul's Epistles will enrich our experience of the propagating Christ in God's New Testament economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SIXTY-SIX

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(32)

Scripture Reading: Acts 25:1-27

In the foregoing message we considered Paul's situation in relation to that of the Jewish religion, Roman politics, and the church life. Now we shall consider various matters in 25:1-27, where Luke goes further in presenting a picture of Judaism, the Roman government, and the church life.

THE REQUEST OF THE LEADERS OF THE JEWS REJECTED

According to 24:27, "When two years were completed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and wanting to gain favor with the Jews, Felix left Paul bound." Porcius Festus was the successor of Felix as governor of Judea. In 25:1--26:32 we see that Paul was left to Festus, the successor of Felix.

Acts 25:1-3 says, "Festus therefore, having come into the province, after three days went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. And the chief priests and leading men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they kept entreating him, asking for a favor against him, so that he might summon him to Jerusalem, setting an ambush to do away with him on the way." Here we see that the leaders of the Jews begged Festus to bring Paul back to Jerusalem from Caesarea. Two years earlier, the Roman commander had used four hundred seventy soldiers to take Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea. Now these Jewish leaders

entreated Festus to bring Paul back so that they could set an ambush in order to kill him.

Verses 4 and 5 continue, "Festus therefore answered that Paul was kept in custody in Caesarea, and that he himself was about to proceed there shortly. Therefore, he says, let able men from among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong in the man, let them accuse him." The Greek word rendered "wrong" in verse 5 may also be translated "out of place," "amiss."

We have pointed out in foregoing messages that the record of Acts indicates that Roman politics was corrupt. Nevertheless, Roman law was very strong. Although the politicians in the Roman government were corrupt, they still cared for the law. Therefore, when Festus was asked to bring Paul back to Jerusalem, he considered that such an action was not according to Roman law, and he rejected the request of the Jewish leaders.

DEFENDING HIMSELF BEFORE FESTUS

We have pointed out that, in contrast to the Lord Jesus, it was necessary for Paul to make a defense in order to save his life from his persecutors so that he might fulfill the course of his ministry. In 25:6-8 Paul defended himself before Festus. Verses 6 and 7 say, "And having stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea; and on the next day he sat on the judgment seat and ordered Paul to be brought. And when he arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him, which they were not able to prove." Here we see that the Jewish leaders fulfilled Festus' request in verse 5.

Actually, in defending himself before Festus Paul did not say very much. He simply denied doing anything against either Jewish law or Roman law: "While Paul said in his defense, Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I sinned in anything" (v. 8).

WANTING TO APPEAL TO CAESAR

In dealing with Paul, Festus was a fox and proposed that Paul go up to Jerusalem and be judged there before Festus. Regarding this, 25:9 says, "But Festus, wanting to gain favor with the Jews, answered Paul and said, Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and be judged there before me concerning these things?" This proposal exposed the corruption of yet another Roman politician. Here again we see the crookedness of the Roman politicians.

Paul was wise and saw through the subtlety of Festus' proposal. According to verse 10, Paul said strongly, "I am standing before Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. I have done nothing wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know." Paul's word concerning "Caesar's judgment seat" indicated to Festus that he intended to appeal to Caesar.

In verse 11 Paul went on to say, "If therefore I am doing wrong and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if there is nothing in the things of which these accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar." The Greek words translated "hand me over" may also be rendered "grant as a favor," both here and in verse 16. The Caesar to whom Paul appealed was Caesar Nero.

For his defense Paul wanted to appeal to Caesar. Without such an appeal, the Apostle Paul might have been killed by the Jews through Festus' unjust handling of him, and thus his life might not have been preserved for the finishing of the course of his ministry. Paul's appeal to Caesar would fulfill his desire to see Rome for the furtherance of the Lord's testimony (19:21; 23:11). Without this appeal, he would have been killed by the plot of the Jews (23:12-15; 25:1-3, 9), and he would not have been able to write his last eight Epistles.

Before his appeal to Rome, Paul had written only six Epistles: 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans, and 1 and 2 Corinthians. It was during his first imprisonment in Rome that he wrote Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon. It was after his first imprisonment that he

wrote 1 Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews. Then during his second imprisonment he wrote 2 Timothy. Without these last eight Epistles, what a lack the divine revelation would have had and what a loss the church would have suffered! His appeal did render a great profit and benefit to the Lord's interest.

Acts 25:12 says, "Then when Festus had conferred with the council, he answered, To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go." The council here was the council of the Roman province, composed of the councillors or assessors chosen by the governor of the province, with whom the governor usually consulted concerning an appeal like Paul's.

Why was Paul so strong in daring to appeal to Caesar? Paul was strong in this matter because, as a Roman, he knew Roman law. He knew that when he appealed to Roman law, Festus did not have any choice except to honor this appeal. No doubt, the Roman politicians were corrupt, but the Roman government had strong laws which gave Paul a basis to appeal to Caesar.

On two previous occasions Paul stood on the fact of his Roman citizenship. In chapter sixteen Paul said to his captors, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now they are thrusting us out secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out. And the deputies reported these words to the magistrates. And they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans" (vv. 37-38). Later, when Paul was about to be examined by scourging, he said to the centurion standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned? And when the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it, saying, What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman" (22:25-26). Paul knew the value of Roman citizenship. He knew that Roman law protected those who were Roman citizens. The law did not give anyone the right to mistreat a Roman citizen. Now in chapter twenty-five Paul, according to Roman law, appealed to Caesar.

REFERRED TO KING AGRIPPA

In 25:13-27 Paul's case is referred to King Agrippa. Verse 13 says, "Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus." This Agrippa was Herod Agrippa II, who reigned over the region north and east of Galilee. He was the son of Herod in chapter twelve and was a Jew by religion.

Bernice, who came with Agrippa, was the sister of Drusilla, wife of Felix (24:24). She was also a sister of Agrippa, with whom she lived incestuously. This again shows the corruption of the politicians in the circle of Roman politics.

Agrippa's status was quite complicated. He had either a Jewish father or a Jewish mother. His sister Drusilla is called a Jewess in 24:24. Because Agrippa was a Jew in religion, Festus was careful in talking to him concerning Jewish matters. In 25:19 Festus said to Agrippa regarding Paul and the Jews, "They had certain questions against him concerning their own religion and concerning a certain Jesus who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive." Here we see that Festus was cautious in referring to Judaism.

Although Festus referred Paul's case to Agrippa and conferred with him about it, this case actually was not in Agrippa's jurisdiction. Festus ruled Judea from Caesarea as the center, and Agrippa ruled another region. However, they were relatives and knew each other well. Therefore, when Agrippa came to Caesarea to visit Festus, Festus referred Paul's case to him.

As we read 25:13-22 we see that Festus and Agrippa, officials of the Roman government, were "playing" with Paul's case. When Festus told Agrippa that the Jews had questions against Paul "concerning their own religion and concerning a certain Jesus who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (v. 19), Festus was merely playing with words. His manner of speaking exposes the kind of person he was. After Festus told Agrippa that Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor and that Festus had ordered him to be kept in custody until he was sent up to Caesar (v. 21), Agrippa said

to Festus, "I also myself was desiring to hear the man" (v. 22). Then Festus replied that Agrippa would hear Paul the next day. The more we study the conversation between Festus and Agrippa, the more we realize both the Roman politicians were evil.

Acts 25:23 says, "Therefore on the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered into the hall of audience together with the commanders and prominent men of the city, Festus gave order and Paul was brought." Luke's description of the way Agrippa and Bernice came into the hall indicates the kind of people they were. Once again, no title is given to Bernice. We are not told whether or not she was the queen. Luke simply says that they entered into the hall with great pomp.

After Paul had been brought in, Festus said, "King Agrippa, and all men who are present with us, you behold this man concerning whom all the multitude of Jews petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. But I perceived that he had done nothing worthy of death; and when he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to send him, concerning whom I have nothing definite to write to my lord; wherefore I brought him before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that when the examination has taken place, I may have something to write. For it seems unreasonable to me, in sending a prisoner, not also to signify the charges against him" (vv. 24-27). In verse 26 the Greek pronoun rendered "you" is in plural and refers to the commanders and prominent men who were present (v. 23). As we shall see, Agrippa then gave permission to Paul to speak for himself, and he proceeded to defend himself before Agrippa (26:1-29).

A WITNESS OF CHRIST

In chapter twenty-five of Acts we have a picture of the situation in which Paul was. As the one standing in the midst of this situation, Paul was different from the Jewish people in their religion, from the Roman politicians, and also from the church in Jerusalem. This picture reveals

that Paul was one who lived Christ. Paul was a genuine witness to Christ. It is no wonder, then, that the Lord Jesus considered him a witness when He said to Paul, "Take courage, for as you have solemnly testified concerning Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (23:11). According to 26:16, the Lord had appointed Paul a minister and a witness. Actually, in all his defenses Paul did not say very much concerning Christ. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus recognized that Paul was solemnly testifying concerning Him.

Paul could testify of the Lord because he lived Christ. As one who lived Christ and was a living testimony of Him, Paul was absolutely different from the Jewish religionists, the Roman politicians, and those in the church in Jerusalem.

We need to be deeply impressed with the fact that in these chapters of Acts Paul was a genuine witness of Christ. We have seen that these chapters describe three categories of people: the Jewish religionists, the Roman politicians, and those weak and compromising ones in the church in Jerusalem. Now with Paul we have a fourth category. In this category Paul stands alone as a person who lived Christ. Paul not only preached the propagation of the resurrected Christ; he lived this Christ. Paul lived a life that was the propagation of the resurrected Christ. What a glory! What a victory! What a gain for the Lord and what a shame to the enemy that Paul both preached Christ and lived Christ! In the center of the enemy's activity stood Paul, a person who lived Christ. The resurrected Christ had propagated Himself by coming into Paul and making him a living witness of Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SIXTY-SEVEN

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(33)

Scripture Reading: Acts 26:1-32; Eph. 2:14-16; 3:8, 17; Phil. 3:4-8;
Col. 3:10-11; Heb. 10:14, 18; Acts 21:20, 23-24

In 26:1-29 Paul defends himself before Agrippa. Then in 26:30-32 we have Agrippa's judgment. Before coming to 26:1-32, I would like to say a further word concerning Paul's burden in the four Epistles of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews.

FOUR CRUCIAL EPISTLES CONCERNING THE DISPENSATIONAL TRANSFER

In chapters twenty-one through twenty-six of Acts Paul passed through much suffering, testing, and trial. The Epistles of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews are the expression of what was on Paul's heart during the period of time of Acts 21 through 26.

As we have pointed out, Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians during his first imprisonment in Rome. It should have been after this imprisonment that he wrote Hebrews. We should not think that these Epistles were written by accident. On the contrary, they were written after a long period of consideration and preparation. I believe that the two years of being held in custody in Caesarea were a time of preparation for Paul. The more he saw of the situation concerning Jewish religion, Roman politics, and the church and compared this situation with what he had received from the Lord, the more he was burdened to put into writing the revelation he

had seen. Paul did not have the opportunity to speak what was on his heart. No doubt, he intended to find a time in a quiet environment where he could write down the revelation concerning God's New Testament economy. He must have been looking for a chance to put into writing everything he had seen of the Lord concerning the divine economy, and then to send these writings to the churches, where they would be preserved.

We thank the Lord that He gave Paul the time and the place to write Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews and that we have these four Epistles today. In these four books we see a number of crucial points concerning the dispensational transfer that we have been emphasizing in these messages. This dispensational transfer is a great matter.

ABOLISHING THE ORDINANCES

In Ephesians 2:14-16 Paul says, "For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition, the enmity, having abolished in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, making peace, and might reconcile both in one Body to God through the cross, slaying the enmity by it." Here we see that on the cross Christ abolished all the ordinances. No doubt, this abolishing of the ordinances includes the ones concerning circumcision, diet, and the Sabbath.

Although Christ had abolished these ordinances, James in Acts 21 still promoted them. To be sure, the ordinances abolished by Christ on the cross include the Nazarite vow. Do you not believe that when Christ abolished the ordinances He included the ordinances related to vows? If we have the proper understanding of Ephesians 2 and Acts 21, we shall see that what James did in Acts 21 was contrary to what Christ accomplished on the cross. Christ abolished the ordinances, but James held to them and promoted them.

We may say that the matter of abolishing ordinances is a negative aspect of the revelation in Ephesians. On the

positive side, we have Paul's word concerning the unsearchable riches of Christ: "To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach to the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel" (3:8). For the present, however, we would emphasize that in Ephesians Paul clearly says that on the cross Christ has abolished all the Judaic ordinances of the Old Testament.

COUNTING AS REFUSE THE THINGS OF JUDAISM

In Philippians 3 we see that Paul counted as refuse all the things of Judaism. Although Paul was "a Hebrew of Hebrews" and "as to the law, a Pharisee" (v. 5), he could testify, "What things were gains to me, these I have counted loss on account of Christ. But surely I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them refuse that I may gain Christ" (vv. 7-8). Paul realized that in the sight of God and in the New Testament economy all the things of Judaism were refuse. Paul's word in Philippians 3 indicates the kind of vision that was within him. However, although Paul counted the things of Judaism to be refuse, James, to his shame, continued to promote them.

THE NEW MAN

In Colossians 3:10 and 11 Paul speaks of the new man: "And having put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him; where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." Here we see that in the new man there is room only for Christ. In verse 11 "all" refers to all the members who compose the new man. Christ is all the members of the new man and in all the members. He is everything in the new man. What a tremendous revelation this is! According to Paul's word in Colossians 3:10 and 11, not the slightest ground remains for Judaism.

THE UNIQUE OFFERING

The book of Hebrews reveals that Christ is everything. Christ is both God and man, and He is superior to Moses, Joshua, and Aaron. As our High Priest, Christ has replaced all the Old Testament offerings with Himself as the unique offering. Christ is the only offering God cares for, and all the Old Testament offerings were simply types of this unique offering. Now that Christ has come, all the other offerings should be terminated, and in fact they have been replaced and terminated. Concerning this, Hebrews 10:14 says, "By one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified," and verse 18 goes on to say, "Now where forgiveness of these is, there is no longer an offering for sin." Furthermore, the old covenant has been replaced by the new covenant. Therefore, the things of the Old Testament are over.

I would ask you to compare the revelation in Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews with James' word in Acts 21. In 21:20 James said to Paul, "You observe, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed, and all are zealous for the law." Then James went on to ask Paul to pay the expenses of four men who had taken the vow of the Nazarite: "Four men are with us who have a vow on themselves; take these and be purified with them, and pay their expenses that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things of which they have been instructed concerning you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law" (vv. 23-24). What a contrast there is between James' word and Paul's revelation concerning God's New Testament economy! This comparison should enable us to have a clear view of Paul's situation in these chapters of Acts.

THE IMPROPER USE OF EPHESIANS, PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS, AND HEBREWS

What kind of messages on the book of Ephesians did you hear before you came into the Lord's recovery? A favorite verse of those who emphasize evangelism is Ephesians 2:8. This verse tells us that by grace we are

saved through faith. Many messages are also given from Ephesians 5:22-25 about wives submitting to their husbands and husbands loving their wives. Often during a wedding a pastor will quote these verses from Ephesians 5. But have you ever heard a message telling you that on the cross Christ abolished all the ordinances, in particular, that He abolished the differences between the races? Although the ordinances and all racial differences were abolished by Christ on the cross, who preaches this word today? Actually, even in the twentieth century, racial differences are still promoted in order to maintain a separation of the races. From this we see that the book of Ephesians is misused by many believers. They select certain verses from this book without caring for God's New Testament economy. Many have never seen that Ephesians is a book concerned with God's New Testament economy.

On the negative side, Ephesians 2 reveals that the ordinances have been abolished. On the positive side, in Ephesians 3 we see that Paul preached the unsearchable riches of Christ so that Christ may make His home in our hearts (vv. 8, 17). Have you ever heard a message on this matter before you came into the church life? Many of those who attended Bible schools and seminaries can testify that they were never taught that Christ with His unsearchable riches desires to make His home in our hearts. How pitiful is today's situation with respect to the profound revelation in the book of Ephesians!

We have seen that in Philippians 3 Paul counted all religious things as refuse. However, today not many use these verses in a proper way. Instead, it is common that verses are taken from Philippians in order to teach the believers to imitate the Lord Jesus by having the same mind that He had.

In Colossians 3 Paul says that Christ is everything in the new man. This matter certainly is not emphasized among today's Christians. Actually, it is difficult to say how most believers apply the book of Colossians.

Christians frequently quote Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

Some even use this verse in the attempt to argue against the truth that Christ today is the life-giving Spirit. According to the Scriptures, we teach that, as God, Christ became a man, and then, as man, He, the last Adam, became in resurrection the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Some falsely accuse us of teaching that Christ is always changing, and then they quote Hebrews 13:8, using it in the attempt to prove that Christ could not have become the life-giving Spirit in resurrection. The use of Hebrews 13:8 in such a way indicates that today's situation is miserable.

The four books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews have not been used properly and positively by most Christians for the taking up of Paul's burden in these Epistles concerning the carrying out of God's New Testament economy. Instead of using these books according to the intention of the author, many select certain verses and then interpret them in a way to promote a degraded situation. This is a sign of the poverty in the so-called churches. Actually, today's situation is worse than that in Jerusalem in Acts 21.

BURDENED TO CARRY OUT GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

We have pointed out that, during the years he was kept in custody in Caesarea, Paul had time to consider the situation of the Jewish religionists, the Roman politicians, and the believers in Jerusalem and to compare it to the revelation he had received from the Lord. We also need a time to consider today's situation. I would encourage you quietly to consider not only the world political situation, but also the situation in Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Consider where today's Christians stand in relation to God's New Testament economy. Are there not many who, like James, have compromised and who are promoting the things God has forsaken?

You also need to consider yourself, in particular where you are in relation to the carrying out of God's New Testament economy. What is on your heart? What have you seen as a heavenly vision regarding the divine

economy? How will you carry out the vision you have seen? Let us all spend time before the Lord in order to be filled with the burden of God's New Testament economy. Once we are filled with this burden, we, like Paul, should be ready to carry it out.

We thank the Lord for the Epistles of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews. Paul wrote these Epistles so that God's New Testament economy may be carried out. I hope that we all, through the help of the Life study Messages, will become saturated with these Epistles. I also hope that we all shall have a clear view of today's situation and need.

As we shall see in chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight of Acts, it took quite a long time for Paul to travel from Caesarea to Rome. By contrast, today it is very convenient for us to spread God's New Testament economy. Let us all bear the burden for the spread of God's New Testament economy and faithfully carry out this burden.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SIXTY-EIGHT

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(34)

Scripture Reading: Acts 26:1-32

In this message we shall begin to consider Paul's defense before Agrippa and Agrippa's judgment (26:1-32).

PAUL'S APPEAL TO AGRIPPA AND HIS LIVING AS A PHARISEE

After Agrippa told Paul that he was permitted to speak for himself, Paul stretched out his hand and began to make his defense, saying, "Concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate that I am about to make my defense before you today; especially since you are an expert in all the customs and questions among the Jews; wherefore I beg you to listen to me patiently" (vv. 2-3). As we have pointed out a number of times, in facing his opponents it was necessary for Paul to make a defense in order to save his life from his persecutors. By making such a defense to save his life, he would be able to fulfill the course of his ministry.

Paul appealed to Agrippa as being an expert in all the customs and questions among the Jews. The Greek words rendered, "Especially since you are an expert," may also be translated, "Since you are especially expert."

In verses 4 and 5 Paul continued, "Now, therefore, my manner of life from my youth, which from the beginning was among my nation in Jerusalem, all the Jews know, having previously known me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our

religion I lived a Pharisee." Here Paul vindicated himself by saying that, even before his conversion, he was a proper person and lived the strict life of a Pharisee. Of course, in the sight of God Paul was not proper. But humanly speaking, he did live a proper life, and there was no ground for anyone to condemn him.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RESURRECTION

In verses 6 through 8 Paul went on to speak of the resurrection: "And now I stand here being judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes, earnestly serving night and day, hope to attain; concerning which hope I am accused by the Jews, O king. Why is it judged incredible by you if God raises the dead?" In verse 6 the Greek word translated "for" literally means "upon," "on the ground of." In these verses Paul indicates that, in contrast to the Sadducees, he had always believed in the resurrection. The resurrection was taught in the Old Testament, especially in Daniel 12. It is a matter that requires our careful consideration.

In the Bible resurrection implies the coming judgment, and judgment implies eschatology. Resurrection, therefore, is related to one's eternal future, whether he will be happy in eternity or suffer perdition. A person's eternal future depends upon judgment, and judgment requires resurrection. From this we see that resurrection is an important matter in the Scriptures, for it concerns our eternal destiny. Even before his conversion, Paul, as a Pharisee, believed in resurrection.

The Lord Jesus spoke clearly concerning resurrection in John 5:28 and 29: "An hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth: those who have done the good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done the evil to the resurrection of judgment." We have seen that the resurrection of life is the resurrection of the saved believers before the millennium (Rev. 20:4, 6; 1 Cor. 15:23, 52; 1 Thes. 4:16). The dead believers will be resurrected to enjoy eternal life at the coming back of the Lord Jesus. The resurrection of

judgment is the resurrection of the perished unbelievers after the millennium (Rev. 20:5, 12). All the dead unbelievers will be resurrected after the thousand years to be judged at the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15). Even before he was saved, Paul believed in the resurrection of life and of judgment, as taught in Daniel 12:2.

DOING MANY THINGS CONTRARY TO THE NAME OF JESUS

In 26:9 through 11 Paul admitted to Agrippa that he did many things contrary to the name of Jesus: "I therefore thought to myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus the Nazarene; which also I did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints I shut up in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were being done away with, I cast a vote against them. And in all the synagogues, punishing them often, I compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even as far as foreign cities." Literally, the Greek word translated "foreign" in verse 11 means "outside." Paul not only opposed Jesus the Nazarene--he attacked Him. In his blindness, Paul considered the Lord Jesus nothing more than a poor Nazarene. He attacked the name of Jesus the Nazarene to such an extent that he put many of the saints in prison. Now before Agrippa he confessed his foolish deeds.

THE LORD'S APPEARING

Paul then went on to tell Agrippa that while he was on the way to persecute those who called on the name of the Lord Jesus, he himself was gained by the Lord. "Engaged in which, I journeyed to Damascus with authority and a commission from the chief priests. And at midday, on the way, I saw, O king, a light from heaven beyond the brightness of the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all fell to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads. And I said, Who are You, Lord?

And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (vv. 12-15). We have strongly emphasized the fact that this "Me" is corporate, comprising Jesus the Lord and all His believers. We have also seen that spontaneously Paul called Jesus Lord, even without knowing Him.

APPOINTED A MINISTER AND A WITNESS

When the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul, He commissioned him, appointing him a minister and a witness. Concerning this, the Lord said to him, "Rise up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you a minister and a witness both of the things in which you have seen Me, and the things in which I will appear to you" (v. 16). Here we see that the Lord appointed Paul both a minister and a witness. A minister is for the ministry; a witness is for the testimony. Ministry is mainly related to the work, to what the minister does. Testimony is related to the person, to what the witness is.

We need to be impressed with the fact that what the ascended Christ wants to use to carry out His heavenly ministry for the propagating of Himself so that the kingdom of God might be established for the building up of the churches for His expression is not a group of preachers trained by man's teaching to do a preaching work. Rather, the Lord wants to use a body of His witnesses, who bear a living testimony of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. According to the book of Acts, Satan could instigate the Jewish religionists and utilize the Gentile politicians to bind the apostles and their evangelical ministry, but he could not bind Christ's living witnesses and their living testimony. The more the Jewish religionists and the Gentile politicians bound the apostles and their evangelical ministry, the stronger and brighter these witnesses of Christ and their living testimony became. In His appearing to Paul on the way to Damascus, the Lord clearly told him that He appointed him not only a minister but also a witness. We have seen that as a living witness of Christ, Paul had testified concerning Him in Jerusalem and would testify of Him in Rome (23:11).

In 1:8 the Lord said to the disciples, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the remotest part of the earth." Witnesses are those who bear a living testimony of the resurrected and ascended Christ in life. They differ from preachers who merely preach doctrines in letters. As recorded in Acts, the ascended Christ carries out His ministry in the heavens through these witnesses in His resurrection life and with His ascension power and authority to spread Himself as the development of the kingdom of God unto the remotest part of the earth.

In all the trials through which he passed Paul was not merely teaching or ministering; he was continually bearing a testimony. He was a testimony before the opposing Jews and before the commander of the Roman soldiers. Paul was a testimony before Felix, the governor of Judea, and before Festus, who succeeded Felix as governor. Now in Acts 26 we see that Paul is once again a living witness, this time before Agrippa. However, Paul did not preach to Agrippa saying, "King Agrippa, you must know that I am a witness of Christ." Instead of speaking this way, Paul testified to Agrippa that the Lord had met him and appointed him a minister and a witness.

A WITNESS OF THE THINGS IN WHICH WE SEE CHRIST

In verse 16 the Lord Jesus said to Paul, "I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you a minister and a witness both of the things in which you have seen Me, and the things in which I will appear to you." Notice that here the phrase "in which" is used twice. Here Paul is saying that the Lord had appointed him a minister and a witness of the things He revealed to Paul and of the things He would reveal to him. Although this is Paul's meaning, this is not the way he presented the matter. Rather, this verse speaks of the things in which Paul had seen the Lord and of the things in which the Lord would yet appear to him.

Acts 26:16 indicates that Paul did not receive the revelation of things without seeing Christ. Instead, he

received the things in which he saw Christ. In other words, Christ did not reveal things to Paul without Himself as the content of those things. This is the reason that Paul would be a witness of the things in which he had seen the Lord. In all the visions Paul saw he saw Christ. Furthermore, he would be a witness of the things in which the Lord was yet to appear to him. Here the Lord seemed to be saying to Paul, "In all the visions and revelations you will receive, I shall appear to you." This indicates that if we only see visions and revelations and do not see the Lord, then what we see is vanity.

We do not agree with studying the Bible merely in a theological way. Those who study the Bible in this way may learn theology, but they do not see Christ. There is a great difference between studying the Bible to learn theology and studying the Bible in order to see Christ.

As Paul was on the way to Damascus, Christ revealed certain things to him, and in those things Paul saw Christ. The Lord indicated that He would reveal more things to Paul, and in those things the Lord Himself would appear to him. Therefore, what Paul saw was not merely the things themselves, but Christ as the One appearing in all these things.

In your experience you may claim to receive light from the Lord or to see a vision or revelation. However, you need to consider if Christ has appeared to you in that light, vision, or revelation. In the supposed light, vision, or revelation, have you seen Christ?

Sometimes brothers have come to me excited about some supposed new light they have received. For example, a brother once said, "I praise the Lord that today during morning watch I saw some new light." When I asked concerning the light he had seen, he replied, "I have been enlightened to see that I should cut my hair short." I asked him what the significance of such light was, and he said that cutting his hair short would make him more clean. To this I replied, "What is wrong with having your

hair somewhat longer? The Nazarites in the Old Testament kept their hair long. Then at the conclusion of their vow, they shaved their heads, and in this way they were cleansed. It seems that your way of cutting your hair is not as good as that of the Nazarites." I spoke to the brother in this way concerning the light he claimed to receive from the Lord because the so-called light was without Christ.

In any light we receive of the Lord we must see Christ. Christ must appear to us in whatever we see in the way of enlightenment, vision, or revelation. If we see a vision without seeing Christ, that vision means nothing. Likewise, if we study the Bible and gain knowledge of the Scriptures without seeing Christ, that knowledge is vanity. We all need to learn to see Christ in the things that are revealed to us.

I appreciate the phrase "in which" that is used twice in 26:16. The Lord first spoke of "the things in which you have seen Me." Then He went on to speak of "the things in which I will appear to you." Here the Lord was saying to Paul, "I will not merely reveal certain things to you, but in the things revealed I Myself will appear to you."

The book of Revelation is an excellent illustration of the Lord appearing in the things revealed to the Apostle John. John saw a number of visions, but in these visions the Lord Himself appeared to him. Consider the first vision in Revelation, the vision of the golden lampstands. Concerning this vision, John says, "I turned to see the voice that spoke with me; and having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands One like the Son of Man..." (Rev. 1:12-13a). In this vision of the lampstands John saw the Lord walking among the lampstands as the High Priest dressing the lamps.

In another vision the Lord showed John God's universal administration. Regarding this, John says, "After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things. Immediately I was in spirit; and behold, there was a

throne set in heaven, and One sitting upon the throne" (Rev. 4:1-2). John went on to say that in this vision he "saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing as having been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth" (Rev. 5:6). Once again, in the things that were revealed to John he saw the Lord.

In principle, our experience today should be the same as that of Paul and John. Suppose that in your study of the New Testament you claim to have some understanding of Ephesians 5. However, the crucial question is this: Do you see Christ in Ephesians 5? If you see only the matter of husbands loving their wives and wives submitting to their husbands but do not see Christ, then your understanding of Ephesians 5 is very poor, even vain. You may know certain teachings in the Bible, but in those teachings you do not see Christ. You may learn the doctrines of the Scriptures, but in those things Christ has not appeared to you. May we all learn the importance of seeing Christ in the things that we claim to see and know in the Word.

Our consideration of the phrase "in which" in Acts 26:16 may be helpful in showing us the way to study the Bible. In our reading of the Scriptures, we need to dwell on matters such as this. If we spend time to consider the phrase "in which" used twice in 26:16, we shall realize how marvelous it was for the Lord to say to Paul that He had appointed him a minister and a witness both of the things in which he had seen the Lord and of the things in which the Lord would appear to him.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SIXTY-NINE

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(35)

Scripture Reading: Acts 26:1-32

In this message we shall continue to consider Paul's defense before Agrippa (26:1-29). Then we shall go on to see Agrippa's judgment concerning Paul's case (26:30-32).

In his defense before Agrippa, Paul testified of the Lord's appearing to him and saying, "Rise up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you a minister and a witness both of the things in which you have seen Me, and the things in which I will appear to you; taking you out from the people and from the Gentiles, to whom I sent you" (vv. 16-17). We have seen that Paul was appointed not only a minister but also a witness. In verse 17 the Lord told Paul that He would take him out from the people and from the Gentiles. This verse may also be translated "delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles."

THE CONTENTS OF PAUL'S COMMISSION

To Open People's Eyes

In verse 18 we have the contents of Paul's commission: "To open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." Here the opening of people's eyes is the carrying out of the fulfillment of God's jubilee, the acceptable year of the Lord, proclaimed by the Lord Jesus in Luke 4:18-21 according to God's New

Testament economy. The acceptable year of the Lord in Luke 4:19 is the New Testament age typified by the year of jubilee (Lev. 25:8-17), which is the time when God accepts the returned captives of sin (Isa. 49:8; 2 Cor. 6:2) and when the oppressed under the bondage of sin may enjoy the release of God's salvation. The first item of the spiritual and divine blessings of the New Testament jubilee, which are the blessings of the gospel of God, is to open the eyes of those who are fallen and turn them from darkness to light so that they may see the divine things in the spiritual realm. To see these things requires spiritual sight and divine light.

Many of us have had the experience of listening to certain messages that brought us into darkness and of listening to other messages that brought us into light. Suppose you are listening to a sermon given by a particular minister, pastor, or preacher. The more you listen to that sermon, the more you are brought into darkness, and everything becomes opaque. However, you may listen to another message, and the more you listen, the more the divine light shines in you. Day dawns, your eyes are opened, and you begin to see spiritual things. This is the kind of message that opens people's eyes.

Turning from Darkness to Light and from the Authority of Satan to God

Acts 26:18 speaks not only of the opening of the eyes but also of the turn from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God. This turn is what we mean by a transfer. To turn from darkness to light is to have a transfer from darkness into light, and to turn from the authority of Satan to God is to be transferred out of the authority of Satan into God. What a great transfer this is!

Darkness is a sign of sin and death; light is a sign of righteousness and life (John 1:4; 8:12). The authority of Satan is Satan's kingdom (Matt. 12:26), which belongs to darkness. Satan is the ruler of this world (John 12:31) and the ruler of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2). He has his authority and his angels (Matt. 25:41), who are his

subordinates as principalities, powers, and rulers of the darkness of this world (Eph. 6:12). Hence, Satan has his kingdom, the authority of darkness (Col. 1:13).

According to 26:18, we are transferred from the authority of Satan to God. Actually, to be transferred to God is to be transferred to the authority of God, which is God's kingdom belonging to light. Formerly we were in darkness and under the authority of Satan. But we have been transferred out of darkness and the authority of Satan into light and God.

Darkness is actually the authority of Satan. Whenever we are in darkness, we are under the satanic authority. Light is God Himself (1 John 1:5). Therefore, when we are in the light, we are in God. Just as Satan and darkness are one, so God and light are one. The greatest transfer we can have is the transfer from darkness to light.

In chapter twenty-one of Acts James was promoting the old things of Judaism. When he was doing this, he was in darkness. James said to Paul, "You observe, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed, and all are zealous for the law" (21:20). This word was spoken in darkness, and it indicates that James himself was blind and in darkness. Because he was in darkness, he was also under the authority of Satan. It is not too severe to say this concerning James.

Paul certainly was not blind. However, in Acts 21 he was in danger of being pulled back into darkness. Actually, for the days he was in the temple with the others for the completion of the Nazarite vow, he was in darkness.

The Forgiveness of Sins

In 26:18 we see that when our eyes are opened and we have a turn, a transfer, from darkness and satanic authority to light and God, we may receive forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of sins is the base of all the blessings of the New Testament jubilee. The genuine forgiveness of sins comes through the opening of the eyes and the transfer from Satan to God. Therefore, we need to have our eyes opened and to have a transfer from the authority

of Satan to God in order to receive the complete and perfect forgiveness of sins.

The Divine Inheritance

Christ as the Embodiment of the Triune God

As the result of having our eyes opened and of being transferred from the authority of Satan to God, we not only have the forgiveness of sins on the negative side, but also we receive an inheritance on the positive side. This divine inheritance is the Triune God Himself with all that He has, all He has done, and all He will do for His redeemed people. This Triune God is embodied in the all-inclusive Christ (Col. 2:9), who is the portion allotted to the saints as their inheritance (Col. 1:12). The Holy Spirit, who has been given to the saints, is the foretaste, the seal, the pledge, and the guarantee of this divine inheritance (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:13-14), which we are sharing and enjoying today in God's New Testament jubilee as a foretaste, and will share and enjoy in full in the coming age and for eternity (1 Pet. 1:4). In the type of the jubilee in Leviticus 25:8-13, the main blessings were the liberty proclaimed and the returning of every man unto his own inheritance. In the fulfillment of the jubilee here, liberation from the authority of darkness and receiving the divine inheritance are also the primary blessings.

Believers are generally taught that the inheritance in Acts 26:18 is a heavenly mansion. This is what I was told as a young Christian. But after more than fifty years of studying the Bible, I have learned that this inheritance is Christ as the embodiment of the processed Triune God. This Christ is the portion of the saints. In Colossians 1:12 Paul says that the Father has qualified us "for a share of the portion of the saints in the light." This portion is the "lot," the inheritance, of the saints. The inheritance is a lot, and this lot is a portion.

In the Old Testament the twelve tribes of Israel each received an allotment, a portion, of the good land for an inheritance. The good land is a type of the all-inclusive Christ given to us as our inheritance. Therefore, Christ,

the embodiment of the processed Triune God, is our inheritance. This inheritance is the processed Triune God fully embodied in the all-inclusive Person of Christ, who through resurrection has become the life-giving Spirit.

Among Those Who Are Sanctified

According to Acts 26:18, the divine inheritance is among those who have been sanctified by faith in Christ. This sanctification is not only positional but also dispositional (Rom. 6:19, 22). Sanctification (being made holy) is not only a matter of position, that is, not only a matter of being separated from a common, worldly position to a position for God, as illustrated in Matthew 23:17 and 19, where the gold is sanctified by the temple and the gift is sanctified by the altar through a change of position, and in 1 Timothy 4:3-5, where food is sanctified by the saints' prayer. Sanctification is also a matter of disposition, that is, a matter of being transformed from the natural disposition to a spiritual one, as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Romans 12:2. This involves a long process, beginning from regeneration (1 Pet. 1:2-3; Titus 3:5), passing through the whole Christian life (1 Thes. 4:3; Heb. 12:14; Eph. 5:26), and being completed at the time of rapture, at the maturity of life (1 Thes. 5:23).

To be sanctified positionally is only to have a change in position and usage; to be sanctified dispositionally is to be transformed in nature by and with the holy nature of God. Sanctification is a saturation with God as our possession for our enjoyment today. It will consummate in our maturity in the divine life so that we may resemble God and be qualified to fully possess and enjoy Him as our inheritance in the coming age and for eternity.

NOT DISOBEDIENT TO THE HEAVENLY VISION

In 26:19 and 20 Paul testified, "Wherefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and also in Jerusalem and all the country of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance." Paul's use of the word "vision" in verse 19

indicates that Paul was obedient not to doctrine, theory, religious creed, or theology, but to the heavenly vision, in which he saw the divine things concerning the Triune God to be dispensed into His chosen, redeemed, and transformed people. All his preachings in Acts and writings in his fourteen Epistles from Romans through Hebrews are a detailed description of this heavenly vision he saw.

ALLIED WITH GOD

In 26:21 and 22 Paul continued, "Because of these things the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to slay me. Therefore, having obtained the help which is from God, I have stood unto this day, testifying both to small and great, saying nothing apart from the things which both the prophets and Moses said were about to take place." The Greek word translated "help" in verse 22 also means "assistance." The root of this Greek word means alliance. This implies that the apostle was allied with God and realized God's assistance in this alliance.

TESTIFYING THAT THE CHRIST SHOULD SUFFER AND ANNOUNCE LIGHT

In 26:22 Paul did not say, "I have lived unto this day"; rather, he said, "I have stood unto this day." Paul had stood in front of the Roman commander and in front of Felix and Festus. Now Paul was standing before Agrippa. As Paul stood before Agrippa, he was bold, saying that he testified both to small and great. The great ones to whom Paul testified included Felix, Festus, and Agrippa.

Paul told Agrippa that he did not testify anything apart from the things which both the prophets and Moses said were about to take place, "that the Christ should suffer and that He first, from the resurrection of the dead, should announce light both to the people and to the Gentiles" (v. 23). Literally, the Greek words rendered "should suffer" mean "was to be subject to suffering." Furthermore, the Greek words translated, "He first, from the resurrection of the dead, should announce" may be rendered, "by the resurrection of the dead He should be the first to

announce," or, " He being the first to rise from the dead should announce."

In 26:23 Paul says that the Christ announced light both to the people and to the Gentiles. The word "light" here indicates the enlightenment of God, who is light (1 John 1:5), shining in Christ, who is the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5), through the preaching of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4, 6). Here Paul spoke of light instead of life because both the religious people and the Roman politicians were in darkness. Because they were in a dark "cell," Paul said that Christ first, from the resurrection of the dead, announced light both to the people and to the Gentiles.

FESTUS' REACTION AND PAUL'S REPLY

Acts 26:24 goes on to say, "And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with loud voice, You are insane, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane!" The Greek word for "insane" in verses 24 and 25 also means mad, crazy, beside one's self. Literally, the Greek word translated "driving" means turning. Festus, who was the host and not the guest like Agrippa, said with a loud voice that Paul's great learning, his scholarship, was driving him insane. As the host, Festus should not have said anything.

In verses 25 and 26 Paul replied, "I am not insane, most excellent Festus, but I am uttering words of truth and soberness. For the king knows about these things, to whom also I speak freely, for I am persuaded that none of these things has been hidden from him; for this has not been done in a corner." In these verses Paul first told Festus that instead of being insane, he was very sobered and also sobering, uttering words of truth and soberness. Then Paul said that Agrippa knew about these things. Agrippa, as a Jew by religion, knew the things of the Old Testament and of the resurrection. Paul seemed to be saying, "Agrippa already knows about these things, for he is one of the Jews."

In verse 27 Paul addressed Agrippa, saying, "King

Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." As a member of the Jewish religion, Agrippa surely believed the prophets.

In verse 28 Agrippa replied to Paul, saying, "By a little talk are you persuading me to become a Christian?" The Greek word translated "talk" may also be rendered "time." Literally, the Greek word for "become" is "make." In answer to Agrippa's question Paul said, "I would to God that both by little and by much, not only you, but also all those who hear me today may become such as even I am, except for these bonds" (v. 29). Paul's word in this verse is very eloquent.

AGRIPPA'S JUDGMENT

Acts 26:30-32 say, "And the king rose up, and the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them, and when they had withdrawn, they spoke to one another, saying, This man is doing nothing worthy of death or of bonds. And Agrippa said to Festus, This man could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar." Here we see that in Agrippa's opinion Paul could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar. However, without this appeal, the apostle might have been killed by the Jews through Festus' unjust handling of him (25:9), and thus his life might have not been preserved to that day. If Paul had not appealed to Caesar, he might not have had the opportunity to write the crucial Epistles of Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Hebrews.

In the section of Acts from 21:27 to 26:32, a long narration of the Jews' ultimate persecution of the apostle, the genuine characteristics of all the involved parties were made manifest. First we see the darkness, blindness, hatred, and hypocrisy of the Jewish religion. Second, we see the injustice and corruption of Roman politics. Third, we have the transparency, brightness, faithfulness, and courage of the apostle. Finally, there is the Lord's encouraging care for His witness and His sovereignty over the entire situation for the carrying out of His divine purpose.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SEVENTY

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(36)

Scripture Reading: Acts 27:1-44

In chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight of Acts Luke gives us a long narration of Paul's voyage from Caesarea to Rome. We may wonder why Luke includes such a lengthy and detailed record. In certain matters he is very brief, but the record of this voyage is very detailed and vivid. After considering this matter, I believe that the reason for this detailed account is that Luke intends to present a picture that conveys some important points.

SATAN'S ATTACK

The first of the points conveyed in Luke's lengthy narrative of Paul's voyage is Satan's attack on the apostle. Satan was constantly behind the scene attacking Paul. This is the reason that the voyage was difficult, with many hardships, and took such a long time. The weather in particular was very bad. Acts 27:4 says, "And from there we put out to sea and sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were contrary." Later, after boarding an Alexandrian ship, they "sailed slowly for a considerable number of days and came with difficulty off Cnidus" (v. 7). Then with difficulty they came to a certain place called Fair Havens. Eventually, after putting out to sea again, "there beat down from the island a hurricane wind called a northeaster" (v. 14). Satan was behind these difficulties, attacking the apostle.

THE LORD'S SOVEREIGN CARE

In the picture portrayed in Acts 27 and 28 we also see the Lord's sovereign care. The Lord is over all things, including the wind and the storms. The Lord was sovereign over the centurion named Julius who brought Paul to Rome and over all the soldiers who were with him. In His sovereignty, the Lord caused this centurion to show kindness to Paul. Concerning this, 27:3 says, "And on the next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, treating Paul kindly, allowed him to go to his friends to receive care." Probably some soldiers accompanied Paul, and it is likely that Paul was still in chains. Nevertheless, the Lord sovereignly took care of Paul.

In His sovereignty the Lord also sent an angel to Paul in the midst of a violent storm, when those on the ship had abandoned all hope of being saved (vv. 20, 23). Paul testified that the angel had said to him, "Do not fear, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you" (v. 24). As we shall see, this word indicates that there on the boat Paul had a little kingdom composed of two hundred seventy-six citizens.

Luke and Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, were with Paul on the ship. Luke functioned in two ways. First, as a medical doctor, he took care of Paul's health. Second, he functioned as a newsman to record the details of the voyage. We thank the Lord for this record. The more we read it, the more we realize how significant it is. In Luke's detailed account of the voyage we see that the Lord overruled Satan's attacks. Everything that happened took place at the right time so that Paul's life was preserved.

PAUL'S LIVING

The picture in these chapters of Acts also shows Paul's life, behavior, and character. We see Paul's ascendancy over the situation. We also see the wisdom and dignity of his human life. No doubt, Paul's life was a life of living Christ and magnifying Him.

If we read this portion carefully, we shall see that here

Paul was living the very life that he aspired to live in Philippians 3. In that chapter Paul says that he pursued Christ in order to be found in Him (vv. 9,12). When I read Acts 27 and 28, I find Paul in Christ. Throughout a rough and difficult voyage, Paul lived a life of ascendancy and dignity and full of wisdom. Although he was a prisoner, he behaved like a king. Furthermore, he had foresight and wisdom to handle matters.

No doubt, the Lord was with Paul. On the one hand, he was a prisoner, one among two hundred seventy-six passengers. On the other hand, he was the center, the focus, of the situation, whether on the ship or on the island where they wintered after the ship was destroyed. In every circumstance Paul lived a life of ascendancy.

FORETELLING THE DANGER OF THE VOYAGE

Let us now consider some of the details recorded in 27:1-44. Acts 27:1 says, "And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners to a centurion named Julius of the Augustan cohort." The pronoun "we" indicates that Luke, the writer, was included. The Augustan cohort may have been an imperial cohort named by Caesar Augustus (cf. Luke 2:1). A cohort was one of ten divisions of an ancient Roman legion and was composed of six hundred men.

Verse 2 continues, "And going on board a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to places along the coast of Asia, we put out to sea, and Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us." This is the beginning of the apostle's fourth ministry journey, which ended in 28:31.

In his account Luke says that at Myra "the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy, and he put us aboard it" (v. 6). Verses 9 and 10 say, "And when considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, and also because the Fast had already passed, Paul advised them, saying, Men, I perceive that the voyage will be with damage and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." The Fast in verse 9

refers to the day of atonement (Lev. 16:29-31; 23:27-29; Num. 29:7).

In verse 10 Paul voiced his feeling about the danger of the voyage. The sailors were experts in sailing the ship, and they knew all about the wind and the sea, but they did not have the insight that Paul had. Although Paul warned them of the damage and loss they would face, "the centurion was persuaded by the navigator and the ship's owner rather than by what was being said by Paul" (v. 11). The navigator and the ship's owner convinced the centurion not to take Paul's word. Therefore, according to their mistaken concept, they continued the voyage. Paul, of course, was neither a sailor nor a navigator. Rather, he was a preacher who at that time was a prisoner. However, he had more insight than the centurion, the soldiers, the sailors, the navigator, and the owner of the ship. Here we have a view of Paul's character.

THE STORM AND PAUL'S PREDICTION OF SAFETY

Acts 27:13-26 describes the storm and Paul's prediction of safety. Verses 13 and 14 say, "And when a south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete close inshore. But not long afterward there beat down from the island a hurricane wind called a northeaster." Literally, the Greek word translated "the island" means "it" and refers to Crete.

Verses 15 through 17 continue: "And when the ship was caught by it and was not able to face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. And running under the shelter of a certain little island called Clauda, we were hardly able to get control of the small boat, which having hoisted up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on Syrtis, they lowered the gear and so were driven along." "To get control of the small boat" was to secure on deck the small boat which, in calm weather, was attached by a rope to the vessel's stern (Vincent). The helps mentioned in verse

17 were things such as ropes and chains. To undergird the ship with these helps was to pass the cables around the body of the ship. Syrtis, on which they feared that they might run aground, was a shoal southwest of the island of Crete. For the sailors to lower the gear means either that they lowered the sails or dropped the sea anchor.

According to verses 18 and 19, they began to jettison the cargo and throw the ship's gear, or furniture, overboard. Verse 20 indicates that the storm was so severe that eventually they lost hope: "Now, when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, all hope that we might be saved was now abandoned." As we shall now see, that time was a good opportunity for Paul to say something to those on the ship.

Concerning this, verse 21 says, "And when they had gone a long time without food, Paul then stood in their midst and said, O men, you should have listened to me and not set sail from Crete and incurred this damage and loss." Although Paul was a prisoner in bonds, his behavior displayed much ascendancy with dignity. Luke's narration, as an account of the Lord's move on earth, does not stress doctrine but the testimony of the Lord's witnesses (1:8). Hence, in his narration there are no details of doctrines but of the events that occurred to His witnesses, in order to portray their testimonies in their lives. It is especially so with Paul's voyage in the last two chapters.

Here Paul was a witness of the Lord. Therefore, we should not read Luke's account merely as a story of a storm at sea. Rather, we need to see in this story the description of the life of one of Christ's living witnesses.

In 27:21 Paul was frank. The others on board the ship did not have a word to say. Everyone, including the centurion and the navigator, was subdued.

In verse 22 Paul went on to say, "And now I advise you to cheer up, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship." They all had lost heart and were waiting for death. Paul, however, told them to cheer up, assuring them there would be no loss of life but only of the ship. Here Paul seems to be saying, "There will be no loss of life

among us, but the ship will be lost. Because you did not listen to me, you will lose your ship."

Verses 23 and 24 continue, "For this very night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood by me, saying, Do not fear, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you." In verse 23 Paul indicated first that he belonged to God and then that he served Him. The Greek word rendered "serve" means to serve as a priest.

In verse 24 the angel assured Paul that he would stand before Caesar. This was to fulfill the Lord's promise in 23:11 and the apostle's desire in 19:21.

According to verse 24, God granted to Paul all those who were sailing with him. This indicates that God had given them to Paul and that they were all under him. Apart from Paul's presence with them, they all would have lost their lives. Here Paul seems to be saying, "Because of me, your lives will be preserved. The Lord has given all of you to me."

In verses 25 and 26 Paul went on to say, "Wherefore, cheer up, men, for I believe God that it shall be so, even in the way in which it has been spoken to me. But we must run aground on a certain island." We may regard this word both as an insight and as a prophecy. Paul had the wisdom to see into the situation and to realize what would happen. Because he spoke such a definite word about running aground on a certain island, we may consider this word a prophecy.

THE BASE THOUGHT AND FOLLY OF THE SAILORS AND SOLDIERS AND THE ASCENDANT WISDOM AND CARE OF PAUL

In 27:27-44 we have a contrast between the base thought and folly of the sailors and the soldiers and the ascendant wisdom and care of Paul. This indicates that those without Christ are base and foolish. The sailors attempted to flee out of the ship, but they were caught by Paul, who was watching over them like a king. "And when the sailors were seeking to flee out of the ship and were

lowering the small boat into the sea under pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, Unless these men remain in the ship, you cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the small boat and let it fall off" (vv. 30-32). Paul told the centurion and the soldiers that they could not be saved unless the sailors remained in the ship. It seems that Paul was the one in charge, giving orders to his "army" to do what was necessary.

Verses 33 and 34 continue, "And until day was about to come, Paul was encouraging them all to take some food, saying, Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued watching without food, taking nothing. Wherefore I encourage you to take some food; for this is for your salvation; for not a hair will perish from the head of any one of you." They had been watching over the storm for fourteen days, and they did not have the heart to eat anything. Now Paul encouraged them to take food, for it would be for their salvation. The word "salvation" here means that without eating the men would not be saved from the storm. They needed to eat in order to have the strength to swim and to do what was necessary once they were on land.

Verse 35 says, "And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God before all; and he broke it and began to eat." Here Paul conducted himself like a king, or at least like the head of a large family. He gave thanks for the food and went on to eat. The storm was still raging, the boat was shaking, and they were afraid of losing their lives. Nevertheless, Paul told them to cheer up, to be at peace, and to take some food in order to have the strength they needed. Then, in front of them all, he took the lead to eat. All the others were frightened and did not have the heart to eat. For this reason, Paul set up an example and seemed to be saying, "I am cheerful and at peace. I encourage you to follow me, for I am a man living Christ." Because Paul took the lead to be cheerful and to eat, "all became cheerful, and they took food" (v. 36). According to verse 37, there were in all "two hundred and

seventy-six souls in the ship." As we have indicated, they all were actually subjects in the kingdom ruled over by Paul.

In 27:30 the sailors wanted to flee, and in verse 42 the soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners: "Now the counsel of the soldiers was that they should kill the prisoners, lest anyone should swim away and escape." However, the Lord in His sovereignty protected Paul. "The centurion, intending to bring Paul safely through, prevented them from their intention and ordered those who were able to swim to throw themselves overboard first and get to the land; and the rest, some on planks, and others on some of the things from the ship. And so it happened that all were brought safely through onto the land" (vv. 43-44). What the centurion did in keeping the soldiers from their intention was once again the sovereignty of the Lord to preserve His servant's life. Because of the Lord's sovereign protection of Paul, all those on the ship were brought safely to land, to an island called Malta (28:1).

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-ONE

THE PROPAGATION IN ASIA MINOR AND EUROPE THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF PAUL'S COMPANY

(37)

Scripture Reading: Acts 28:1-31

In this message we shall cover chapter twenty-eight, the last chapter of Acts. In 28:1-10 Paul comes to the island of Malta and there does many miracles. Then in 28:11-31 he arrives in Rome, ending the fourth journey. First he passes through Syracuse, Rhegium, Puteoli, the Market of Appius, and Three Inns (vv. 11-16). He contacts the Jewish leaders (vv. 17-22) and ministers in Rome (vv. 23-31).

TO THE ISLAND OF MALTA, DOING MIRACLES

Acts 28:1 and 2 say, "And having been brought safely through, we recognized then that the island was called Malta. And the natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for, having kindled a fire, they took us all in because of the rain coming on and because of the cold." The Greek word translated "natives" in verses 2 and 4 also means barbarians, referring to those who spoke neither Greek nor Latin but who are not necessarily uncivilized.

Verses 3 through 5 continue, "But when Paul had collected a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. And when the natives saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to one another, Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, whom, though he has been brought safely out of the sea, Justice has not allowed to live. However he shook off the snake into the fire and suffered no harm."

Literally, the Greek word for "snake" in verses 4 and 5 is "beast." But medical writers used this term to denote poisonous snakes. At first, the natives thought that Paul was a murderer because he was bitten by a viper. However, as verse 6 indicates, they eventually changed their minds concerning him: "But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But while they were expecting for a long time and beheld nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god." The apostle was not a god in the superstition of the curious natives, but he expressed, in his living and ministry, the true God, who in Jesus Christ has gone through the processes of the incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection and who was then living in Paul and through him as the all-inclusive Spirit.

In his teaching as recorded in his Epistles Paul emphasized the matter of walking in the Spirit. Throughout the voyage and now on the island of Malta Paul certainly was walking in the Spirit. He surely lived a life that was the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. Paul's living was actually the expression of the life-giving Spirit. In every situation of his daily living, Paul was the expression of the very Christ he preached. He preached the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ as the life-giving Spirit, and on the island of Malta he lived such a Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit. This is indicated by Paul's word, written later, in Philippians 1:20 and 21a: "According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, even now Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death; for to me to live is Christ..." Paul cared only to live Christ and to magnify Him. On the island of Malta Paul lived Christ and magnified Him as the life-giving Spirit. As we read Luke's account of Paul's living, we see that his living was the all-inclusive Spirit as the consummation of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and God-exalted Christ.

Verses 7 and 8 say, "Now in the vicinity of that place were the lands of the leading man of the island named

Publius, who welcomed us and gave us hospitality three days in a friendly way. And it came about that the father of Publius was lying down sick with fever and dysentery; and Paul went in to him, and having prayed and laid his hands on him, cured him." Dysentery was a common disease, but it was difficult to cure. However, Paul, who had been living like a king ruling over his kingdom, now became a physician to heal the father of Publius.

Verse 9 goes on to say, "And when this happened, the rest also in the island who had sicknesses came to him and were healed." Here we see that Paul became the physician, and even a savior, to the whole island. All the sick who were brought to Paul were healed.

On the sea in the storm, the Lord had already made the apostle not only the owner of his fellow voyagers (27:24), but also their life-guarantee and comforter (27:22-25). Now on the land in peace, the Lord made him further not only a magical attraction in the eyes of the superstitious people (vv. 3-6), but also a healer and joy to the native people (vv. 8-9). All during his long and unfortunate imprisonment-voyage, the Lord kept the apostle in His ascendancy and enabled him to live a life far beyond the realm of anxiety, but fully dignified with the highest standard of human virtues expressing the most excellent divine attributes, a life that resembled the one that He Himself had lived on earth years before. This was Jesus living again on the earth in His divinely enriched humanity! This was the wonderful, excellent, and mysterious God-man, who lived in the Gospels, continuing to live in Acts through one of His many members! This was a living witness of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and God-exalted Christ. Paul in His voyage lived and magnified Christ. No wonder the people honored him and his companions with many honors (v. 10), that is, with the best respect and highest regard!

Acts 28:10 says, "And they honored us with many honors; and when we put out to sea, they put on board the things for our needs." This verse indicates that the natives on the island of Malta treated Paul and his companions as

if they were members of a royal family. Paul was the king, and Luke was one of the family.

According to verse 10, the natives put on board everything that was needed for the voyage. The Lord sovereignly provided food for two hundred and seventy-six people. Any king must provide food for his people. As a king, Paul received the supplies from the natives. However, he did not owe them anything for this, because he had healed so many of the sick among them. In a sense, the people paid Paul by putting on board the food supply needed for the voyage.

TO ROME, ENDING THE FOURTH JOURNEY

Through Syracuse, Rhegium, Puteoli, the Market of Appius, and Three Inns

Acts 28:11 says, "And after three months, we put out to sea in an Alexandrian ship which had wintered in the island, with the twin sons of Zeus for its figurehead." The Greek word rendered "twin sons" is Dioscuri, the twin sons of Zeus, Castor and Pollux. This was the figure of the guardian deity of the sailors affixed to the stern.

After staying three days in Syracuse, they arrived at Rhegium, and then they came to Puteoli, where they found brothers (vv. 12-14). In verse 14b Luke says, "And thus we came to Rome." In verses 15 and 16 he continues, "And from there the brothers, having heard the things concerning us, came to meet us as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns; and when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. And when we entered into Rome, Paul was permitted to remain by himself with a soldier guarding him." In Latin Market of Appius is *Appii Forum*, a place over forty miles from Rome. In Latin Three Inns is *Tres Tabernae*, a place over thirty miles from Rome.

The warm welcome of the brothers from Rome and the loving care of those in Puteoli (vv. 13-14) show the beautiful Body life in the early days among the churches and the apostles. This life was a part of the heavenly

kingdom life on the Satan-darkened and man-inhabited earth. Apparently the apostle, as a prisoner in bonds, had entered the area of the dark capital of the Satan-usurped empire. Actually, as the ambassador of Christ with His authority (Eph. 6:20; Matt. 28:18-19), he had come into another part of the participation in His church's Body life in the kingdom of God on earth. While he was suffering the persecution of religion in the empire of Satan, he was enjoying the church life in the kingdom of God, which was a comfort and an encouragement to him.

According to verse 15, when Paul saw the brothers, he thanked God and took courage. This indicates that the apostle was quite human. Although he was encouraged by the Lord directly (23:11) and he was very courageous all the way in his voyage (27:22-25, 33-36), he still took courage at the brothers' warm welcome. It was in Paul's uplifted humanity with its human virtues that Christ with His divine attributes was expressed in his voyage. He magnified Christ all the way in his adverse situation (Phil. 1:20).

Before Paul arrived in Rome, the brothers there heard news concerning him and his companions and came to meet them as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns. How did they receive the news about Paul? This is very difficult to decide. Perhaps some brothers from Puteoli, where Paul was urged to remain seven days, brought the news to the brothers in Rome, who then came to meet him. The important matter is that here we see a picture of the church life in ancient times, a church life that was very enjoyable. We need to have such an enjoyable church life today and follow the pattern presented in these verses.

In chapter twenty-eight Paul's desire to see Rome was fulfilled. The Judaizers had tried to frustrate him from going to the Gentiles, but the Lord sovereignly brought Paul to Rome. It was a great matter in the ancient times to make a journey from Jerusalem to Rome. But the Lord brought Paul far into the Gentile world, even into the capital of the Roman empire. Paul must have been full of joy when he arrived in Rome. Outwardly he was in bonds, but inwardly he was full of glory and unspeakable joy.

Contacting the Jewish Leaders and Ministering in Rome

Immediately after arriving in Rome, Paul contacted the Jewish leaders (vv. 17-22). Paul was wise in doing this. Then Paul began to minister to them. Of course, his ministry was accepted by some and rejected by others.

Paul's being in Rome was a strengthening to the church in Rome, in particular because a good number of Jews had been saved. Paul came to Rome not too long after writing his Epistle to the Romans. A few years after writing this Epistle, he, the writer, came to Rome.

Acts 28:23 and 24 say, "Now when they had appointed a day for him, many came to him in his lodging, to whom he expounded and solemnly testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning until evening. And some were persuaded by the things which were said, but others did not believe." Here Paul testified concerning the kingdom of God. As we have pointed out, the kingdom of God was the main subject of the apostles' preaching. This is not a material kingdom visible to human sight, but a kingdom of the divine life. It is the spreading of Christ as life to His believers to form a realm in which God rules in His life.

Verses 25 through 27 say, "And when they disagreed with one another, they began to leave, Paul having said one word, The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying, Go to this people and say, Hearing you will hear and by no means understand, and seeing you will see and by no means perceive; for the heart of this people has grown fat, and they hear heavily with their ears, and they have closed their eyes, lest at any time they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn, and I will cure them." God the Father spoke this word to the stubborn children of Israel in Isaiah 6:9-10. God the Son quoted this word to the rejecting Jews in Matthew 13:14-15. And now God the Spirit through the apostle repeated this word again to the hard-hearted people. This indicates

that in all the moves of the divine Trinity the children of Israel were disobedient to the God of grace. Then He turned to the Gentiles for the carrying out of His New Testament economy in the spreading of His kingdom for the building up of the churches through the propagation of the resurrected and ascended Christ (v. 28).

Acts 28:30 says, "And he remained two whole years in his own rented dwelling, and welcomed all those coming in to him." During this time the apostle wrote the Epistles to the Colossians (cf. Col. 4:3, 10, 18), Ephesians (cf. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20), Philippians (cf. Phil. 1:7, 14, 17), and Philemon (cf. Philem. 1, 9). In Philippians 1:25 and 2:24 and Philemon 22 Paul was expecting to be released from his imprisonment. Probably after two years he was released and visited Ephesus and Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3), from where it is likely that he wrote the first Epistle to Timothy. Then he visited Crete (Titus 1:5), Nicopolis (Titus 3:12), from where he wrote the Epistle to Titus, Troas, and Miletus (2 Tim. 4:13, 20), from where he probably wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Acts 28:31 says that during the two years Paul was in his rented dwelling in Rome, he was "proclaiming the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, unhindered." The kingdom of God is one of the emphases of this book. Luke's writing both begins (1:3) and ends with the kingdom of God.

Paul's proclaiming the kingdom of God was the propagation of the resurrected Christ. How do we know this? The fact that the proclaiming of the kingdom is the propagation of the resurrected Christ is proved by the words "teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ" in verse 31. This indicates that the kingdom of God goes together with the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. To teach people the things concerning Christ is to spread the kingdom of God. Therefore, the kingdom of God is actually the propagation of the resurrected Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF ACTS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-TWO

A CONCLUDING WORD

Scripture Reading: Acts 1:8; 27:20-26, 33-37; 28:15-16, 23-31; Phil. 1:19-21a; Eph. 2:14-18; Phil. 3:2-8; Col. 3:10-11; Heb. 1:1-3; 9:12; 10:9-10, 12, 14; 13:13

In this concluding word to the Life-study of Acts, I shall cover two matters. The first concerns Paul's living as portrayed in Acts 27 and 28; the second concerns the revelation in the four Epistles of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews.

A PORTRAIT OF PAUL'S LIVING

Chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight of Acts do not present anything of doctrine. Rather, in these chapters we have a record of a man living Christ to the uttermost. Paul was imprisoned, bound in chains, and surrounded by guards. The sea was very stormy, and the sailing was rough. Furthermore, Paul was away from his homeland and from most of his friends. Although he was in such a difficult situation, he lived like a reigning king.

Paul's living as presented in these two chapters of Acts reminds us of his word written while he was imprisoned in Rome: "I know that for me this shall turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, even now Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death; for to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:19-21a). This describes Paul's living during the voyage from Caesarea to Rome. Regardless of the situation, Paul magnified Christ in his body.

As we ponder the picture in Acts 27 and 28, we see

that Paul was an outstanding witness of Christ. He was the kind of witness the Lord Jesus spoke about in 1:8: "You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the remotest part of the earth."

In 1:6 the Lord's disciples had asked Him if He would at that time restore the kingdom to Israel. The Lord indicated that it was not for them to know times or seasons, which the Father had placed in His own authority. Instead, after they had received power through the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them, they would be His witnesses. Paul was such a witness in Acts 27 and 28. In these chapters Paul was living among Gentiles. There were very few Jews on the ship, if any. Everything on that voyage was Gentile. The food, the environment, and the atmosphere were Gentile. Furthermore, there was nothing Jewish on the island of Malta. Paul was surrounded by Gentiles and the Gentile way of living. But in that situation Paul lived like a king in a palace. I very much appreciate the picture of Paul's living in these chapters.

We all should live Christ in the way Paul did in Acts 27 and 28. If we live Christ only in a situation that is according to our culture, character, constitution, and disposition, our living is not genuine. Here in Acts 27 and 28 Paul lived Christ in a situation that was altogether contrary to his culture and character. Many things were disappointing and discouraging, but Paul nevertheless lived a life of the highest standard. As we have pointed out, in Paul the wonderful, excellent, and mysterious God-man, who lived in the Gospels, continued to live through one of His many members. This was Jesus living again on earth in His divinely enriched humanity. Paul's living, therefore, was a repetition of the living of Jesus.

After Paul arrived in Rome as described in chapter twenty-eight, he wrote the Epistles of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews. Paul was imprisoned in Rome twice. The first was about A.D. 62-64, due to the Jews' accusation (28:17-20). During that time he wrote the Epistles of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. After his release from the first

imprisonment, it is likely that he visited Ephesus and Macedonia, and then Crete and Miletus, from where he probably wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. Paul's second imprisonment, about A.D. 65, was due to Caesar Nero's sudden persecution of the believers.

Paul passed through many things in chapters fifteen through twenty-eight of Acts. Without his experience of the events recorded in these chapters, he could not have written Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews, or he could not have written these Epistles in such a thorough way.

THE ABOLISHING OF THE ORDINANCES

In Ephesians 2:14 and 15 Paul says, "He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition, the enmity, having abolished in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, making peace." I believe that what Paul saw and experienced in Acts 15 through 28 caused him to write such a strong word. As he was writing this, Paul may have been saying to himself, "All the ordinances of the law have been abolished. Circumcision, the Nazarite vow, and even the vow I had have been abolished."

Paul may have regretted his vow in Acts 18 and also his circumcising Timothy in Acts 16. If I had been with Paul when he wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians, I might have said, "Brother Paul, I would like to learn of you. Since Christ abolished all the ordinances, why at Lystra did you still circumcise Timothy?" It is possible that if Paul had been asked such a question, he might have said, "I did that quite a while ago, and I am sorry about it. Never again will I circumcise anyone."

By the time Paul wrote Ephesians 2, he was much more thorough than he was when he circumcised Timothy in Acts 16. His experiences in chapters fifteen through twenty-eight of Acts caused him to be more thorough regarding circumcision. I do not believe that apart from

his experience in these chapters, Paul could have written such a chapter as Ephesians 2.

It is profitable to compare Paul's word about circumcision in Galatians to what he says concerning the abolishing of the ordinances in Ephesians 2. Probably Galatians was written before Acts 16. In Galatians 6:15 Paul said, "For neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." Actually, this word still leaves some amount of ground for the practice of circumcision. But in Ephesians 2 Paul's word is absolute, and not one bit of ground remains for the practice of circumcision.

Paul learned from all that happened in Acts 15 through 28. I believe that while he was in custody for two years in Caesarea, he reviewed all that had taken place. As he made such a review, Paul may have said to himself, "If there is an opportunity, I would like to write another letter and say something more thorough concerning circumcision than I said in Galatians. I shall not say simply that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything. Instead, I shall say that all the ordinances, especially the ordinances regarding circumcision, have been abolished. If I could rewrite the Epistle to the Galatians, I would tell the believers that circumcision has been abolished on the cross. I would tell them not to practice circumcision, for it is offensive to the Lord, an insult to Him. We should not continue to practice anything that the Lord has abolished on the cross."

In studying the Bible, we may compare Ephesians and Galatians with respect to the ordinances concerning circumcision. If we make this comparison, we shall see that what Paul says in Galatians is not as strong or as thorough as what he says in Ephesians. In Ephesians 2 Paul does not leave any ground for circumcision.

A WARNING REGARDING THE CONCISION

In Philippians 3 Paul uses a very strong negative term for circumcision: concision. In Philippians 3:2 he says, "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of

the concision." The word "concision" here, meaning mutilation, is a term of contempt for circumcision. Since there is no conjunction used in this verse between these three clauses, they must refer to the same class of people. Dogs are unclean (Lev. 11:4-8), the workers are evil, and the concision are those deserving contempt. The "dogs" refer to the Judaizers. In nature they are unclean dogs, in behavior they are evil workers, and in religion they are the concision, people of shame. Paul certainly is very strong in charging the Philippians to beware of the dogs, the evil workers, the concision. Here Paul is saying that the Judaizers, those who promote circumcision, are dogs.

What do you think Paul would have said if, in the light of his word in Philippians 3:2, he were asked about James? Paul might have said, "James surely is not a dog, but he acted somewhat like a dog. James is my dear brother. Because I respected him, I went to see him. But when he spoke to me, I heard something that was like the barking of a dog."

As we read Philippians 3, we see that Paul was strengthened through his experiences in Acts 15 through 28 and especially through his time in Caesarea. Because of this strengthening, he told the believers to beware of dogs, to beware of the concision. In Philippians he would not even speak about circumcision, but instead used the contemptuous term "concision." How strong he was in writing this Epistle!

When Paul was writing Philippians 3, he was stronger than he was in writing both Galatians and Romans. In Romans 2:28 and 29 Paul said, "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither the circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter, whose praise is not from men, but from God." Here Paul's word about circumcision is actually not very strong. Once again, some ground remained for the practice of circumcision. But in Philippians 3:2 there is no ground for circumcision, which now is called concision, a practice promoted by "dogs."

In Philippians 3:8 Paul says, "But surely I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them refuse that I may gain Christ." The word "refuse" denotes dregs, rubbish, filth, what is thrown to the dogs; hence, dog food, dung. First, Paul charges the believers to beware of dogs, and then he indicates that what these dogs, the Judaizers, minister is dog food. Once again, we see Paul's improvement in his writings.

When Paul was in Caesarea reviewing the past, he may have regretted that he was not thorough enough in his previous writings concerning the Judaic things. He may have said to himself, "Why did I write in such a vague manner? Why was I not more clear and thorough concerning the Judaic things? These things are dog food, circumcision is actually concision, and those who promote these things are 'dogs.'" As we have seen, in writing Philippians Paul was much stronger than he was when he wrote Galatians. In Galatians he spoke of "false brothers" (2:4), but in Philippians he told the saints to beware of the dogs. Paul seemed to be saying, "They are not brothers or even men--they are dogs!" How thorough Paul was in his later writing!

THE NEW MAN, WHERE CHRIST IS EVERYTHING

In Colossians 3:10 and 11 Paul says, "And having put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him; where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." Here we see not only that there is no natural person in the new man but that there is no possibility, no room, for any natural person. In the new man there is room only for Christ. He is all the members of the new man and in all the members. He is everything in the new man. Actually, He is the new man, His Body (1 Cor. 12:13).

In writing these words, Paul may have said to himself,

"I should not have spoken with the brothers in Jerusalem about Jews and Gentiles. I did not go to the Gentiles--I went to God's chosen people. All those who have been saved through my ministry are God's people. He chose them before the foundation of the world. There certainly was nothing wrong in going to them. In the new man there is no Jew and no Greek, only Christ." In Colossians 3:10 and 11 Paul is clear, thorough, and absolute. This clearness, thoroughness, and absoluteness may have been the result of Paul's two years in custody in Caesarea.

Whereas Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians were written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, Hebrews was written after he had been released from that imprisonment. In Hebrews Paul advanced even further. Before writing this Epistle, he may have said to himself, "Why did I say so little in Ephesians about Christ's abolishing all the ordinances? I should have gone into much more detail. Also, my word in Philippians and Colossians was too short. I need to write a longer epistle to show that all the things of Judaism are over and that Christ is superior to these things."

CHRIST AS REVEALED IN HEBREWS

In the thirteen chapters of Hebrews Paul depreciated the things of Judaism. He even cut every crucial matter in Judaism into pieces. In Hebrews Paul indicates that the Jews have God, but the believers have the God-man, Jesus Christ. Paul goes on to point out that the angels are servants. Furthermore, he shows that Christ is superior to Moses, Aaron, and Joshua.

In Hebrews Paul also tells us that there is no longer a sin offering. According to God's will, Christ, the all-inclusive One, is the unique offering. Therefore, in the universe there is only one offering that is according to God's will. In Hebrews 10:9 and 10 Paul says, "Then He said, Behold, I come to do Your will. He takes away the first that He may establish the second; by which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." This indicates that all the Old

Testament offerings have been taken away and replaced by Christ as the unique offering. In Hebrews 10:12 and 14 Paul says, "This One, having offered one sacrifice for sins, sat down forever on the right hand of God.... For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified."

In Hebrews 13:8 Paul says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever." Prior to 13:8, Christ changed in that He passed through incarnation and resurrection. Through incarnation, He put on human nature. This means that He changed from being One who had only the divine nature to the One who now has both the divine nature and the human nature. Once He was merely God, but He changed to become the God-man. Furthermore, in His resurrection He, as the last Adam, changed to become a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Since passing through the process of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, Christ has not changed and will not change. Therefore, Paul had the boldness to say that Christ is the same today, yesterday, and for eternity.

In Hebrews 13:13 Paul continues, "Let us therefore go forth unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach." Here "the camp" signifies human organization, especially that of Judaism. Paul's word here is based on the fact that Christ was crucified outside the city, outside the camp. Since Christ was rejected and suffered outside the camp we should go forth unto Him outside the camp. When Paul wrote this portion of Hebrews, he may have been saying to himself, "I was wrong to go back to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the camp. There was no need to go back to Jerusalem in order to take care of Judaism, for that was to go back to the camp. We should forget Jerusalem and go out of the camp and bear Christ's reproach."

Paul went outside the camp and bore the Lord's reproach. When he was making the voyage from Caesarea to Rome, he was outside of Judaism bearing reproach as one in bonds. But as he bore reproach outside the camp, he magnified Christ.

I hope that we all shall spend time to dwell on the two matters covered in this message--Paul's living as a wonderful witness to Christ and the thoroughness of the divine revelation in the books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews. In these books no ground is left for any kind of mixture. In these Epistles there is room only for Christ.