



Holy Ghost Acts--I

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INTRODUCTION

Luke is second only to Paul as a New Testament author. The gospel of Luke and the book of Acts form a continuous narrative of the period of Jesus' ministry and the first forty years of church history. The gospel of Luke tells of all that Jesus began to do and to teach. The book of Acts tells all that Jesus continued to do through the disciples who were filled with the life of Jesus by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

After the three and one half years of Jesus personal earthly ministry, there was little visible evidence of His kingdom on earth. The disciples who stayed with Him were told to tarry at Jerusalem until they were endued with "power from on high." They obeyed and on the day of Pentecost the power from on high came down and filled 120 individuals. The world has never been the same. It was not long until Jerusalem was filled with "this doctrine" and even a great number of priests became obedient to the faith. What was never accomplished through Jesus' personal ministry was quickly achieved after Pentecost. The Holy Spirit sent into the believers and the church, made the difference.

These lessons were written for the Emmanuel Pentecostal Sunday School by the pastor, Robert D. Kalis. This is the eighteenth in a series of twenty quarterlies (5 years) covering the greater part of the historical portion of the Bible. Now available are:

The Men and Women of Genesis	The Miracles of Jesus
Lessons From Exodus	The Parables of Jesus
Wilderness Examples	The Personal Ministry of Jesus
Possessing the Land of Promise	According to Luke - I & II
The Days of the Judges	We Beheld His Glory (John-I)
Israel's Early Kings	Full of Grace & Truth (John-II)
Lessons From the Kings	Holy Ghost Acts - I
The Captivity and Return	
Matthew: The King and His Kingdom - I & II	

THE BEAUTIFUL GATE OF HEALING

Read: Acts 3:1-26

Memory Work: Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. Acts 3:6

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *Jesus' ministry of healing is carried on by His vessels in the church.*
2. *Those who are united to Christ by the indwelling Spirit may work in the name of Jesus.*
3. *We should not be astonished by the miraculous manifestations of the power of Christ, but expect them for the glory of God and as proof of the resurrection.*
4. *The Old Testament law and prophets all pointed toward Christ. The life and teachings of Jesus were not an alien threat to the worship of Israel, but a further development and fulfillment of what went before.*
5. *The gift of healing has never been taken from the church and we should exercise faith for the miraculous operation of this gift of the Spirit in the church today.*

I The Hour of Prayer: The new fellowship of believers was born in a prayer meeting. They were all together and of one accord in prayer, waiting for the promised Holy Spirit. We don't know how long after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, the scene at the Beautiful gate of the temple took place. Probably, it was quite soon after the outpouring of the Spirit. The believers must have continued to gather together for times of prayer at the temple (ch.2:42). Peter and John were on their way to the temple at the afternoon hour of prayer

(3:00 p.m.) when they came upon the lame man. Every Christian believer should learn to use the hour of prayer for his own spiritual benefit and for intercession for the needs all about us. Attendance at the prayer meetings and participation in them will work miracles in your life and in the lives of those for whom we pray. Don't neglect to go up to the "temple" for the hour of prayer!

II Opening the Beautiful Gate of Healing: When Peter uttered his remarkable confession at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus had commended him highly and stated that to him were given the keys of the kingdom. It is therefore very interesting to note that indeed it was Peter who, in a sense, opened several important doors in the era of the church. It was Peter who preached the first sermon and opened the door of repentance for the Jews on the day of Pentecost. Here, in chapter three, it is Peter with John who opens the gate of Divine healing for the church. Later, also, it was Peter who opened the door for the Gentiles to enjoy fellowship with the Jewish believers. So Peter really used the keys of the kingdom which Jesus gave to him.

As Peter and John were about to enter the temple by the eastern gate called the Beautiful Gate, there, outside the temple sat a beggar, lame from birth. Seeing Peter and John he asked for alms from them. Neither of them had silver or gold to give, but Peter fastening his eyes on the lame man said, "Look on us" (ch.3:4). The beggar expected to receive something. But Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (vs.6). Then Peter took the man by the right hand and pulled him upright. At once his feet and ankles were strengthened and healed so that he leaped and stood and walked and entered into the temple with Peter and John praising God. The scene created quite a stir. All the people in the temple were attracted by the commotion and quickly recognized the well known beggar. The thankful beggar held Peter and John as a great crowd gathered. They were all greatly amazed and looked wonderingly at Peter and John.

This was the first of many miracles of healing in the early church. Miracles such as this always attract crowds and afford the opportunity for preaching the Gospel of Christ. When Jesus commissioned the disciples to go and preach the Gospel in all the world, He promised that signs and wonders would be done to confirm their preaching. The Apostle Paul later explained by

the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the gift of healing was among the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the church. The gifts and callings of God are without repentance. Jesus Christ, in His mystical body, the church, is the same today as He was when He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the Devil. Healing is an integral part of our salvation, just as is the forgiveness of sin. Yesterday, today, and forever, our Lord is the same. There is no warrant for the rationalization that today the Lord uses doctors and drugs instead of His blood and the prayer of faith to minister to the sick. The comforter came to abide with us forever and the gift of healing still operates as does the prayer of faith. The Beautiful gate of Divine healing has never been closed. Let us all believe and enter in. We often pray "thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven," and we know that in heaven there is neither pain nor sickness nor infirmity nor feebleness. Let us expect the answer to that prayer and claim healing as God's will for His children in this age.

III In The Name of Jesus: As so often happens, when the Lord uses men to perform wonders, the people began to admire Peter and John. They attributed the remarkable healing to their holiness and power. Peter instantly reproved that mistake. He explained that their God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had glorified His Son Jesus, whom they had rejected and crucified, by healing the lame man. Peter reminded them how they, with their rulers, had insisted on the crucifixion of Jesus even when Pilate was determined to let Him go. They had denied and rejected the Holy and Just One and chose the murderer Barabbas to be released. They were therefore, guilty of the murder of the Captain of Life. Despite the unjust execution God raised Jesus from the dead and Peter and John were witnesses of that resurrection. It was through faith in the name of this Jesus that the lame man stood there whole before them. The miracle was a proof of the resurrection. They were now agents of the life and work of Jesus. What Jesus had previously done in his earthly body, the Spirit-filled vessels now continued "in His name."

"In the name of Jesus," was not just a phrase attached to the prayers of the apostles, but it was a significant truth. These men had become so united to Christ and His kingdom and His will, that all self seeking was dead in their lives. They existed only to live for the glory of Christ and to do His will.

It was this blessed oneness with the life and will of the Lord that enabled them to operate "in the name of Jesus of Nazareth." Often today believers use the phrase "in the name of Jesus" as a suffix to their prayers, but the real sense of using the name of Jesus effectively is that of dying to all selfish desires and wholly consecrating to live for the glory of God. As we dwell in Him, and He in us we cannot help ministering "in the name of Jesus."

IV The Prophets Fulfilled: Peter eloquently and boldly explained to the crowd that they should not have been surprised by the miraculous deliverance. The things which they were seeing were the natural outcome of the promises made to their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. All of the prophets had foretold of the sufferings of the Messiah. They had fulfilled these very prophecies in rejecting and crucifying Jesus. Peter recognized, as Jesus had, that they did it in ignorance. They knew not what they did. But the scriptures were now fulfilled. The suffering servant had been vindicated by resurrection. The prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled in Christ. The types and shadows of the old covenant were now superceded by the eternal realities of the new. The work and teaching of Jesus was not an alien threat to the religious beliefs of the Jews, but a forward progression and wonderful culmination of all that went before. The Bible is one. In some ways it is unfortunate that we separate the New Testament from the Old. We need to see the unity of the whole revelation of God. The Jewish people, in particular, need to see the development of all that they hold dear to their faith in the Old Testament is not contradicted by the New Testament doctrine, but fulfilled and developed. The Epistle to the Hebrews shows this in a very convincing way. May God haste the day when many religious Jews perceive the fulfillment and development of their law and prophets in the life and teachings and church of Jesus Christ.

V Repent and Be Converted: Just as on the day of Pentecost so here again, Peter called the people to repentance. How this message is neglected today! The quality of any conversion is directly related to sincerity and thoroughness of repentance in the believer. Tears are not necessarily the sign of repentance, but a turning away from all of unbelief. And conversion is not simply a change of religious affiliation or doctrinal beliefs, but a turning away from outward things to Christ within. The

The Jewish people were the first to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They were the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as the children of the prophets. Though most rejected the Lord and the Gospel, some did believe. Three thousand on the day of Pentecost and five thousand as a result of the healing of the lame man. May many, both Jews and Gentiles come to know and experience the indwelling life of Christ as a result of the wonder working Lord who still saves to the uttermost and heals all who put their trust in Him. May we never shut the Beautiful gate of Divine healing through unbelief.

NOTES:

LESSON 28

BEFORE THE COUNCIL

Read: Acts 4:1-37; Psalm 2

Memory Work: Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand before you whole. Acts 4:10

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *We can expect opposition to the preaching of the Gospel.*
2. *The manifestation of the Presence of Jesus within gives great confidence and boldness in witnessing.*
3. *Obedience to God takes precedence over obedience to the word of man.*
4. *As believers we may experience one Holy Ghost baptism, many fillings, and the constant anointing.*
5. *The powerful work of the Holy Spirit delivers the believer from selfishness and fills with genuine generous love.*

I By What Power or Name? While Peter and John were still preaching and teaching the doctrine of the resurrection to the great crowd that gathered as a result of the healing of the lame beggar, the captain of the temple, the priests and the Sadducees came upon them and arrested them. The Sadducees were greatly disturbed that the disciples were teaching the doctrine of the resurrection. They did not believe in angels or spirits or in miracles or resurrection. The apostles' emphasis in their preaching and teaching was always on the resurrection. This aroused the opposition of the Sadducees. It was the Pharisees, particularly, that opposed and conspired against Jesus in His ministry, but in the record of the "Acts" the persecution comes from the Sadducees. They were the intellectuals of their

day and they were materialists. Since they believed in no resurrection, spirit or miracle, the spiritual ministry of the apostles angered them.

Peter and John were put in prison overnight. It is worthy of note that although the first Holy Ghost sermon and call to repentance brought 3,000 penitents into the fellowship; when coupled with the ministry of healing the call brought 5,000 to the Lord. Healing is an important part of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The next morning Peter and John were brought before the elite ruling body of the Jews, the Sanhedrin. It was comprised of 71 members and dominated by the Sadducees. This was an awesome tribunal. When they had set Peter and John in the midst they demanded of them by what power or name they had done this. During His earthly ministry Jesus had assured His disciples that if and when they were brought before judges in courts of law that they need not premeditate and prepare their defence. Words would be given them in the same hour. Now that promise was put to the test and proven absolutely valid. Immediately Peter received a new anointing of the Holy Spirit (vs.8). He was delivered from any timidity or fear. Confidently, the words came. He first of all called attention that they were before the council as a result of no evil work, but rather the good deed performed on the lame man. Then Peter answered their question. The healing was done in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom they had crucified and whom God had raised from the dead. He showed them that the One whom they had rejected, their God had vindicated by resurrection. Peter concluded with the assertion that there was no other name under heaven whereby humanity might be saved. Good morals, sincere devotion to a good cause, even attempted worship of the creator through the creation, is futile as far as salvation is concerned. If there were any other possible way surely God would not have allowed His only begotten Son to suffer and die such a horrible death. Those who worship God without the mediation of Jesus are wasting their time and practising exercises in futility. Thank God, whosoever will may come to Jesus and through Him obtain access to the Father.

II With Jesus: The members of the Sanhedrin were greatly astonished at the boldness of Peter and John. Perhaps they expected the disciples to stammer and cower before their august body. No such response occurred. The Sanhedrin was impressed with the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were

common and uneducated men. They had to marvel at the bold and forceful answer. They concluded that this unexpected power was the result of their fellowship with Jesus. "They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus," Luke records (vs.13). This was a remarkable deduction, but still missed the mark somewhat. The boldness and authoritative answer was not the result of some carryover from the days they travelled with the Lord, but was the direct flow of the wisdom and power of the Lord Himself present within them. Yes, it was true that these men had been with Jesus, but more to the point is the fact that now Jesus was with and within them. We, too can claim the manifestation of the Lord's abiding Presence and indwelling life. Christ within gives us the boldness we need to witness and teach the Gospel.

III Threatened: The chief priests and rulers were in a tough spot. The lame man was walking and leaping and praising God and calling attention to the power of God manifested in his healing through the disciples who in turn credited the miracle to the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. The Sanhedrin could not find fault with the good and blessed deliverance on the lame man, but after secret consultation they decided to threaten the disciples and command them not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus. Peter and John answered immediately that the Sanhedrin would have to decide whether it was right to hearken (obey) their edict or the word of God. They could not help but witness to the things which they had seen and heard. The Sanhedrin responded with further threats but realizing that they had no legal cause to hold the two and that the general public were glorifying God for the marvelous healing, they let Peter and John go.

IV Prayer for Boldness: The response of Peter and John to this first opposition and persecution was to go at once to their own company. They told the entire story. Is it not wonderful that the Lord has so arranged it that we may bring our trials and troubles to "our own company" at the hour of prayer and find there strength and help in the unity of believing brethren? When the believers heard the report of Peter and John, they lifted up their voices in prayer with one accord. They used the scriptures in thier prayer, interpreting Psalm 2 as pertaining to Jesus and the crucifixion and the conspiracy of Pilate, Herod and the Jewish rulers against the Lord. They recognized

that all of that was "determined before" to be done and that now the wrath of the Jews was directed against them. They did not pray for a cessation of persecution nor for judgment on their persecutors, but for boldness to continue the witnessing which the Lord had commissioned them to accomplish. They had no second thoughts concerning the healing of the sick that had sparked the outburst of opposition. They asked the Lord to confirm their preaching by signs and wonders of healing in the name of Jesus.

There was an instant answer. The place was shaken where they were praying and once again they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. This is the third filling mentioned for Peter and John and this suggests an important truth: we are all entitled to new fillings of the Holy Spirit. There is one baptism to be sure, and that is a dramatic and life changing experience, but there are also many fillings where we are refilled for the tasks and trials before us, and then there is the constant anointing that is our right to enjoy. Thank God for the fullness of the Spirit and let us claim the one baptism and many fillings and the constant anointing. The result upon the praying believers including Peter and John was that they indeed did speak the word of God with boldness as we will see in the chapters to come.

V Generosity Displaces Selfishness: The result of these outpourings of the Holy Spirit was that the disciples overflowed with pure love one for another. Many gave generous offerings for the poor and needy among them. None of them held any of their possessions selfishly. Some even sold possessions and land and gave the price for the needy among the new believers. We meet here the man Joses, whom the apostles named Barnabas, for the first time. His name means son of prophecy and son of consolation. He was a remarkable man and well named by the apostles. He sold some land and laid the price he received at the apostles' feet. Such generosity created an ideal community of believers. The believers were of one heart and one soul. Great grace was upon them all and great power accompanied their witness of the resurrection. Every need was supplied in this beautiful fellowship. All this was absolutely spontaneous and voluntary. No rules were made about such things but the transforming power of the Holy Spirit displaced selfishness with Godlike generosity. May our hearts also, be delivered from the evil of self, and filled with the goodness of God.

LESSON 29

THE JUDGMENT OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

Read: Acts 5:1-42

Memory Work: And we are his witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. Acts 5:32

What we should learn from this Lesson

- 1. The power of God was so greatly manifested in the early church that the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira could not exist in it.*
- 2. The result of this Divine discipline was a pure fellowship to which no pretender dared join himself.*
- 3. The pure disciplined church was also a powerful church. Miracles of healing were commonplace and helped spread the Gospel message.*
- 4. The manifestation of the power of God gives believers a holy boldness to obey God rather than man.*
- 5. Total commitment to the cause of Christ enables the believer to rejoice in persecution and opposition.*

I The Sin of Ananias and Sapphira: In the book of "Acts" we have been observing first things in the church at Jerusalem. We have noted the first outpouring of the Spirit, the first Spirit-inspired sermon, the first in-gathering of believers, the first healing and the first opposition. In the chapter before us we encounter the first impurity among the believers and the first discipline in the church. The greatest harm done to the church of Christ throughout its history has come from within. Persecution and opposition from without has usually only strengthened the church while scandals and heresies and compromises from within have divided, adulterated and devastated the body of Christ.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit had a remarkable effect upon the believers. It obliterated selfishness and produced generosity. None of them held their possessions for their own. They willingly shared their surpluses with the needy among them. No rule was made about this. There was no commandment for anyone to be forced to do so. It was simply the spontaneous effect of the Spirit of the Lord changing the believers. We noted that Barnabas was one whom the Spirit moved to sell land and bring the money received from its sale to the apostles to be used to supply the necessities of needy believers.

Ananias, with Sapphira, his wife also sold a possession. They conspired together to pretend to give the whole amount while keeping back a portion for themselves. When Ananias brought his offering, Peter discerned the hypocrisy by the Spirit and asked why he had allowed Satan to fill his heart to lie to the Holy Ghost (vs.3). Peter carefully defined the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. The land was their own. It was in their power to do whatever they wanted with it. There was no sin in selling the land and in keeping the money for their own use, or in giving part, just as they had. The sin was in pretending that they were giving all. When Sapphira came looking for her husband she spoke the outright lie: that they had sold the land for the amount brought to Peter. Peter told Ananias that he had lied, not unto men, but to the Holy Ghost. Immediately, Ananias fell down dead. God smote the deceiver on the spot. Note that Peter did not pronounce this judgment on Ananias. The judgment fell from God. Perhaps Peter was even surprised by it. When Sapphira came, however, and implicated herself in the conspiracy, Peter did pronounce the judgment upon her. This unique and remarkable judgment took place, let it be clearly understood, in the day of grace. This was the Gospel age, yet powerful and sudden judgment fell on these conspiring deceivers. The day of grace is not an era when sin is overlooked and of no consequence. Believers in this age have even a greater responsibility and obligation to live free from sin and to overcome temptation because they have the blood of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit to empower them. The Lord purposely manifested this severe judgment at the very beginning of the Gospel age to underline the importance of real holiness. The Lord means business. Pretense and hypocrisy among the believers today is no less offensive to the Lord. The condition of the Church unfortunately is not what it should be and we do not see such powerful demonstration of the

cleansing power of God today, but the Spirit of God is a Holy Spirit and will produce a holy bride for Christ. Let us have faith for real holiness and overcoming power.

II The Results of the Discipline: There were tremendous results from this discipline from heaven. Among the believers there came a great fear to do evil. They walked very carefully before God as you may well imagine. Many signs and wonders were done by the apostles and there was a wonderful unity among the believers. They met constantly at the temple in the place called Solomon's porch. From among the nonbelieving Jews of Jerusalem this story made them very wary to join the company of believers. "No man durst join himself to them" (vs.13), and in spite of this fear believers were added to the Lord in great numbers, both men and women. The sick were brought from everywhere around Jerusalem and every one was healed.

How can we fail to note the wholesome results of this discipline in the early church? We certainly need to examine the present attitudes in the church to see if we cannot benefit by a reevaluation of discipline in the church. Certainly we are not considering striking people dead, but should we not be careful to maintain a high standard of holiness among believers? Local assemblies are often so anxious to gain members that little or no thought whatever is given to the necessity of thorough repentance and conversion. Many a pastor is in mortal fear of offending some influential member by denouncing a sin of which he is guilty. And so we have a mixed multitude in the church. The leaders are forbidden to root out the chaff by force, but are obligated so to preach and teach that fear will come upon any who propose to "add themselves" to the church. Is it not likely, also, that with a higher standard of holiness and an atmosphere of purity, greater miracles of healing and deliverance would be wrought?

III Ye Have Filled Jerusalem: The High Priest and the chief ruler, particularly those of the sect of the Sadducees, rose up against the apostles. They arrested Peter and John and put them in the common prison overnight. The entire Sanhedrin was called to session for the next morning to consider what to do about this great threat to their authority. During the night "the angel of the Lord" opened the doors of the prison and brought Peter and John out. The angel instructed them to go to

the temple and to speak to the people "all the words of this life" (vs.20). Of course, they obeyed and the morning sun found them boldly teaching once again in the temple. Meanwhile the prestigious members of the Sanhedrin pompously assembled. When all were present they sent for the prisoners. There is surely a touch of humor in this story. Quickly a messenger arrived to shock the high officials with the news that the prison was well guarded, but when they opened the doors they found no prisoners inside. On the heels of the first messenger a second arrives to announce that the men who were imprisoned the day before were once again preaching and teaching in the temple. The high officials were greatly perturbed. They wondered how far this thing would grow. They sent the captain and officers and again arrested Peter and John without violence, because they feared the people, and set them in the midst to intimidate and threaten them. Peter and John, however, were certainly emboldened by the angelic deliverance. The accusation of the High Priest is a remarkable testimony to the success of the ministry of the Spirit through the apostles. He reminded them that they had been specifically forbidden to teach in the name of Jesus. He accused them of filling Jerusalem with this doctrine and attempting to bring the guilt for the execution of Jesus upon them. These chief rulers were perplexed and distraught because despite executing Jesus, the leader of this sect, and forbidding these common and unlearned disciples to carry on His cause, the problem to them was worse than ever. There were more believers than while Jesus Himself lived and taught the people. The temple ceremonies were forsaken by the overshadowing ministry of the disciples at Solomon's porch.

Peter quickly answered that they must obey God rather than man. He again insisted that they were witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus whom they had crucified. Jesus was alive and exalted to the right hand of the very God these chief priests claimed to worship. From the place of glory and power Jesus had sent forth His Holy Spirit to those who obey God. The Sanhedrin was "cut to the heart" and took counsel to slay the disciples. Gamaliel interfered and hindered their conspiracy. Nevertheless, they beat Peter and John and commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus any more. They left the council rejoicing that they were worthy to suffer shame for Christ's name. They went right on teaching and preaching Christ in the temple and in every house. May God grant us boldness and power to be good witnesses of His glorious Gospel.

LESSON 30

STEPHEN, THE FIRST MARTYR

Read: Acts 6 & 7

Memory Work: And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. Acts 6:7

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *Even in the glory of the early church, problems and grievances arose.*
2. *The ministers of the Gospel must be careful to keep their priorities right. Prayer and preaching of the Word must take first place.*
3. *Laymen, full of the Holy Spirit, can do mighty works for the kingdom of God.*
4. *So full of the Holy Spirit was Stephen, that he was like Jesus in many ways.*
5. *God uses even things that seem like great disasters to further His kingdom.*

I A Problem Among Believers: Among the thousands of new believers were many needy people. The generosity of Barnabas and others made it possible for the new fellowship to minister to the needs of these. A program of daily distribution of food was begun. Almost at once there arose a complaint that the Greek-Hellenist widows were not treated equally with their Hebrew counterparts. This distinction requires some explanation. These people were all Jewish believers, but there was a sharp division amongst the Jews in that time. Some Jews, especially those scattered abroad had adopted the Greek language as the language of the cultured. They became known as "Hellenists". They still observed the Jewish feasts and traditions, but with somewhat less zeal than the Hebrews. The elite Hebrews refused to speak Greek. They stuck to the Hebrew language and Aramaic and despised the Hellenist Jews. The believers who

were added to the Lord came from both segments. Even in the glory of the early Pentecostal outpouring these distinctions and prejudices remained. They should have been obliterated by the new birth. Now the Hellenist widows complained that they were being neglected in the daily ministration of charity. The complaint may have had basis in fact or it may have been imagined. Probably there was some truth to the complaint and probably some exaggeration of the grievance.

Of course, the complaint was registered with the Apostles. This in turn created another problem for them. Now they would have to spend valuable time to set up a program that would be fair and without discrimination. They were conscious of the value of their time. They needed every moment for prayer and for the ministry of the word of God. They recognized the danger of neglecting that which was most important. Therefore, they asked the Hellenists to choose seven men from among the believers to oversee this ministry. They were to be men of honest reputation and full of the Holy Spirit and with practical wisdom. Certainly the apostles set a high standard for these first "deacons," if we may call them that. Six of the seven chosen were Hellenists themselves and the seventh was a converted Greek gentile. Surely this was great wisdom for all concerned.

We should not be surprised when complaints arise among believers. It is unfortunate, of course, but not surprising. It is a good standard for anyone chosen to serve in the local assemblies that they be first, "from among you," second, "with a good reputation," third and fourth, "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom." The ministers of the Gospel, today, must be watchful that they do not neglect their prayer life and the ministry of the word, by getting involved with secular matters that consume their time.

II The Word of God Increased: The seven laymen were set apart. The Apostles laid their hands upon them and prayed for them. Not only was the problem of the daily food distribution solved so that we read nothing further about it, but the seven began to minister in great power and wisdom. The result was that the "word of God increased, the number of disciples increased in Jerusalem and a great company of the priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). So the problem became the spring board for a new and mighty work of God. The addition of these seven deacons brought a new burst of glory

and power to the church. The word of God increased because there were now more men speaking in the power of the Spirit. Certainly the fact that "a great company of the priests became obedient to the faith," ranks as one of the most outstanding miracles in the Bible. Such a defection from the ranks of the priests was sure to stir up great hostility. That animosity was directed against Stephen. This man was full of faith and power and he did great wonders among the people. So powerful was Stephen's witness that the leaders of the synagogue could not resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

Surely the Lord desires to put His great power upon His witnesses today. May it be true of the church today that the word of the Lord may increase as men and women are anointed by the Holy Spirit to speak forth the wisdom of God in testimonies and exhortations. The number of believers will soon be multiplied and those who opposed the work of God will be won over to God's side.

III Stephen Accused: When the Jews of the synagogue of the Libertines could not stand before Stephen's powerful argument, they resorted to treachery and violence. They bribed witnesses to testify that Stephen had blasphemed Moses and God. They stirred up the people and the elders by inflammatory accusations and caught Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. There the witnesses accused him. Some declared that they had heard Stephen say that the temple would be destroyed and the customs of the Jews changed. This charge was, no doubt, true. Jesus had said the same things. The whole council of the Sanhedrin saw the face of Stephen glow as though it were the face of an angel. The High Priest asked him if this testimony against him was true.

Then Stephen interpreted the history of Israel in a most enlightening way. He showed how the great men of God stood alone and were persecuted by their brethren. Joseph was rejected by his brethren and sold into Egypt. But later that same Joseph ruled over all the land and his brothers had to come to him for sustenance. Moses was also rejected by the Jews in Egypt. "Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" they protested. Yet forty years later that same Moses was compelled by the Lord to bring Israel out of Egypt with a strong and mighty hand. The commandments of the Lord given by God at Mount Sinai were quickly broken and a golden calf set up. Forty years in the wilderness the children of Israel refused to obey the Lord.

IV Stephen Accuses the Jews: Stephen drove home his lesson from history. He called them stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears. He accused them of always resisting the Holy Spirit. They were just like their fathers who persecuted and killed the prophets who foretold the coming of "the Just One" (7:52). Now they had finished the transgressions and filled their cup of iniquity by betraying and murdering their own Messiah. Certainly Stephen did not mince his words. He was ready to lay down his life for the Lord. His words cut them to the heart. They were so infuriated that they "gnashed on him with their teeth." It did not bother Stephen one bit. He was full of the Holy Ghost and looking up saw heaven open and beheld the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of Jehovah. He declared to the Sanhedrin that he saw "the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." This was too much for the Sanhedrin and especially for the Sadducees. They stopped their ears and cried out against him and rushed upon him with one accord. They dragged him outside the city and there stoned him. Stephen called upon God, not to rescue him, but to receive his spirit. Then he kneeled down and with a loud voice called upon his Lord not to lay this sin to the charge of those who stoned him.

V Like Jesus: Certainly the Spirit of Christ was in Stephen. The similarities to Jesus are remarkable. Stephen did signs and wonders just as Jesus had done. With great power and authority Stephen taught the Word even as Jesus had, also. Stephen was falsely accused of blasphemy as was Jesus. Witnesses were bribed against Stephen as well as against our Lord. Stephen laid down his life willingly, committing his spirit to the Lord, just as the Saviour had done so recently. The first martyr prayed for forgiveness for his murderers just as Jesus prayed that His executioners should be forgiven.

The stones took their toll, no doubt, but the inspired word records that Stephen "fell asleep." He saw the Lord standing at the right hand of God. Jesus stood, no doubt, to minister to his suffering servant in the hour of need, and also to welcome him into the eternal abode where righteousness, peace and joy reign. What seemed like a terrible tragedy, God used for His own glory and the furtherance of the Kingdom. Saul of Tarsus was a witness of this execution. He held the coats of those who stoned the martyr. No doubt, a great impression was made on the young zealot. He could not erase the scene from his mem-

ory, nor hush the echo of the prayer for forgiveness for Stephen's own executioners. Only God can cause the wrath of man to praise Him and work all things together for good.

NOTES:

THE MINISTRY OF PHILIP, THE EVANGELIST

Read: Acts 8:1-40

Memory Work: And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. Acts 8:6

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *God is able to cause the wrath of man to work for His glory.*
2. *The Lord can use laymen, filled with the Holy Spirit to do great works for Him and His Kingdom.*
3. *There is no exclusive way in which believers are filled with the Holy Spirit. He works as He will.*
4. *It is a great evil to attempt to use the gifts of the Spirit for personal honor or power.*
5. *The individual believer is important in God's economy. We must recognize the value of the individual also.*

I Scattered Abroad: Saul of Tarsus had witnessed the death of Stephen. He had agreed with the sentence and execution of this man. The manner of his death must have made a deep impression on Saul. Probably, he could not erase the picture of Stephen's shining face or hush the echo of the deacon's forgiving prayer. Saul's only release was in a new and over-zealous hostility toward these disciples of Jesus. He instigated a great persecution against the church at Jerusalem. The result of this great hostility was that believers were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. The apostles remained at Jerusalem, but many others fled. Stephen was given an honorable burial. Devout men made a great lamentation over him.

Those who fled from Jerusalem were not a silent few. They preached the word of the Lord wherever they went. Philip,

another of the seven deacons, went to Samaria. The Lord had specifically told His disciples that when they had received power by the infilling of the Holy Spirit, they were to be witnesses for Him in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Up to this time the witnessing had all been done in Jerusalem. Indeed, by the testimony of the Sanhedrin itself, they had filled Jerusalem with the doctrine of the Gospel. But old prejudices remained and no plans for outreach were made. The sovereign power of God, however, brought about the outreach anyway. The persecution led by Saul of Tarsus forced believers to flee. They preached wherever they went and so the Gospel work spread throughout Judea and Samaria. Historians of the church recognize this as one of the great turning points in the history of the church.

II Philip Becomes An Evangelist: The second of the seven deacons who had been so carefully selected to minister to the temporal needs of the widows in the church at Jerusalem, took a prominent place in the new outreach. Philip fled to Samaria and there preached Christ unto the people. The people gave heed to the preaching of Philip and were impressed by the miracles which occurred under his ministry. Many demon possessed souls were delivered, and lame and paralyzed sufferers were healed. This brought great joy to the city of Samaria. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, but the Christians did. For whatever reason, Peter, John and the others were slow to follow the Lord's program to witness in Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. So God raised up Philip, a layman, and used him mightily.

Years later, when Paul, who was formerly known as Saul, was returning from a missionary journey he was entertained at the home of Philip the evangelist. That must have been an interesting visit. No doubt, Philip recalled how he had fled to Samaria to escape the misguided zeal of Saul the persecutor. And now here was the former persecutor returning from a fruitful journey to the ends of the earth. Philip had four spirit-filled daughters who were used of God to prophesy.

III Simon the Sorcerer: At Samaria, there was a popular leader who claimed to be someone great. He had bewitched the people of the city and they indeed regarded him as the great power of God. Note: this chapter is sometimes called the great chapter because of the frequent use of that word (six times).

When the people believed the word of the Lord which Philip preached and were baptized, Simon also believed and was baptized. He joined himself to Philip and was especially interested in the miracles and signs which were done. Interest in the sensational is not a healthy condition. Signs and wonders should attract attention and confirm the word preached, but they should never be thought of as an end in themselves. The healthy result of an evangelistic endeavor is for the believers to get hungry for Jesus and His righteousness.

IV Peter and John Sent: The apostles at Jerusalem heard about the awakening at Samaria. They decided to investigate the work and delegated Peter and John to go. None of the new converts in Samaria had received the infilling of the Holy Spirit. There certainly was no defect in the preaching or experience of Philip for he himself was chosen as a deacon because he was "full of the Holy Ghost." Most believers received the infilling of the Holy Spirit quickly when they believed. But not so in Samaria. Now Peter and John laid their hands on the new converts and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Thus the believers were filled. When Simon saw the manifestation of the power of God in those on whom Peter and John laid their hands, he coveted the power to do the same. He offered money to the apostles if they would confer on him the power to give the Holy Spirit by the laying on of his hands. But Peter rebuked the attempt vehemently. "Thy money perish with thee," he cried. "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God," Peter continued and extended the merciful call to repentance: "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." The sin of attempting to procure an official position in the church with money has become known as "simony" as a result of this episode. Let us note that using the gifts of God and the Holy Spirit to obtain money, directly or indirectly, is just as evil and gives occasion for the enemies of the Christian faith to find fault. This is all too prominent today.

Simon asked the apostle to pray for him that judgment should not fall on him. We must leave Simon's case with the Lord, for we are not told whether he found forgiveness and continued in fellowship or not. The extra-scriptural traditions are very hard on Simon. We leave him to God's mercy and know at least that Peter was led to urge repentance on him. It

is noteworthy that the three problems among believers recorded in these early chapters all involved material things. Ananias and Sapphira conspired to deceive the Holy Ghost regarding their gift of money. The problem of the Grecian widows concerned the distribution of food (which was, of course, bought with money). And now Simon seeks to buy apostolic power for money.

As Peter and John returned to Jerusalem they preached the word of the Lord in many of the villages of the Samaritans. So the prejudices against the Samaritans were obliterated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ as all prejudices and discriminations should be.

V From Revival to Desert: The angel of the Lord spoke to Philip to go south to the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. This was a desert area. Despite the great success Philip was having at Samaria, he did not hesitate to obey the guidance of the Lord. He went at once. Soon he came upon an Ethiopian man. He was a high official with great authority under Candace, the queen of that country. Evidently, he had become a proselyte of Judaism and was returning from Jerusalem and a time of worship and instruction. He had purchased a copy of the sacred scroll of Isaiah and was reading the portion which we recognize as the 53rd chapter. He read aloud as his chariot drove southward. The Lord instructed Philip to join himself to this chariot. Hearing the eunuch read, Philip asked if he understood what he read. The Ethiopian admitted that he did not since no one had instructed him. He asked the very important and intelligent question, whether the prophet wrote of himself or of some other. That question is still asked today. Philip thoroughly answered all the Ethiopian's questions and preached unto him Jesus. No doubt, Philip explained water baptism to the man and when they came to a certain body of water the eunuch asked to be baptized. Philip inquired if he believed with all his heart and the man testified that indeed he believed "that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." On that confession Philip agreed to baptize him. So they went down into the water and the Ethiopian eunuch was immersed by Philip the evangelist. After the baptism Philip was "caught away" by the Spirit of the Lord, so the eunuch saw him no more. He proceeded, no doubt, to his home and position in Ethiopia to be Christ's witness there, while Philip was found at Azotus and there preached the word and in all the cities along the road to Caesarea.

This story illustrates the importance of one individual to the Lord. He took His faithful servant from a great outpouring to meet and instruct one Ethiopian man. May we recognize the importance of the individual and allow the Lord to use us not only to testify to the crowds, but also to the needy and hungry individuals to whom He sends us.

NOTES:

LESSON 32

SAUL, A CHOSEN VESSEL

Read: Acts 9:1-31

Memory Work: But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. Acts 9:15

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *Christ and the church are one. Persecution against the church is persecution against Jesus our Lord.*
2. *The sovereign power of the Lord can transform a furious enemy into a zealous advocate.*
3. *The Lord may use a plain disciple to minister to His chosen vessels.*
4. *The Lord is ready and anxious to reveal the truths of His kingdom directly to His vessels. We must seek Him and give Him the time and opportunity to do so.*

I Saul's Hostility: Saul had witnessed the death of Stephen. He had "consented unto his death." But what Saul witnessed in Stephen's death had obviously torn him up. He had heard and seen Stephen witness to the reality of resurrection and spiritual powers. Saul was a Pharisee and Stephen's witness supported the views of the Pharisees as opposed to the Sadducees. Yet Saul was sure that Jesus was dead and disgraced. He consented to Stephen's execution but began to have convictions about his beliefs. His zealous persecution and feverish activity was, no doubt, an attempt by Saul to eradicate the persistent picture of Stephen's glorious death and to hush the echo of his forgiving prayer.

Saul made havoc among the believers in Jerusalem. Men and women he caught and cast into prison. Hearing of a community of believers in Damascus, Saul applied for authority from the High Priest to arrest any he could find there to bring them

back to Jerusalem as prisoners. It seems Saul was attempting to silence the whispers of his conscience by this feverish activity against the believers.

II - Saul's Conversion: As Saul and the men who were traveling with him drew near to Damascus, a startling thing happened. A light brighter than the midday sun (Acts 26:13) shone round about Saul. He fell to the ground and then heard a voice from heaven, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" He responded by asking, "Who art thou, Lord?" and the voice responded, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the goads." Nothing could have astonished Saul more. The entire foundations of his life and beliefs were shaken as by an earthquake. Astonished and trembling he asked what he should do. The Lord directed him to go on his way to Damascus and it would be told him what he must do. The men with Saul heard the voice but saw no man. They led Saul on by the hand, for when he picked himself up from the ground his eyes were blinded. They brought him to Damascus, no doubt, to the very place from which Saul intended to operate against the believers. There he remained for three days without sight. He neither ate nor drank during that time, but, no doubt, sought the Lord with all his heart.

Notice that Jesus counted Saul's persecution of the believers as persecution against Himself. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities also. What a comfort this is. What we do, whether good or bad to Jesus' disciples is done unto Him. That should make us careful how we act toward fellow believers. Saul's immediate response was to question who was thus speaking to him. But he immediately recognized that whoever it was, He was the Lord. The Lord's answer identified the speaker beyond the shadow of any doubt. When Paul later related the experience, he quoted the Lord as saying, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest" (Acts 22:8). That was Jesus' earthly designation. No doubt could be left in Saul's mind. Jesus was not dead and disgraced, but resurrected and glorified. When Jesus upbraided Saul for kicking against the goads, He suggested that the things that Saul had recently witnessed were intended to awaken his conscience and turn him from his violent hostility. To Saul's credit, he surrendered unconditionally at once when he was convinced of the truth of the resurrection and glorification of Jesus. He was immediately ready to commit his life to the cause of Christ.

III Behold, He Prayeth: While Saul was praying during those three days of blindness, the Lord revealed Himself to Ananias a disciple of the Lord in Damascus. He heard the Lord direct him to the street called Straight and the house of one named Judas where Saul of Tarsus was praying. The Lord told Ananias that while Saul was praying he had seen a vision also of a man named Ananias coming and putting his hand upon him that he might have his sight restored. Ananias protested to the Lord that this Saul was a dangerous enemy with authority to arrest believers in Damascus. But the Lord assured Ananias that He was not making a mistake, but this Saul of Tarsus was a chosen vessel to bear the name of Jesus before kings and the Gentiles as well as before the children of Israel. Ananias was told to show Saul that he would suffer for Christ's sake.

So Ananias obeyed and found the house and the chosen vessel. He called the converted enemy Brother Saul and explained that the same Lord who had appeared to him on the way to Damascus had sent him to minister to him. He put his hands upon Saul and invoked healing for his blinded eyes and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Instantly scales fell from Saul's eyes and his eyes were opened. He arose and was baptized in water and though not specifically mentioned was also filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus the Lord used an obscure disciple to minister to His chosen vessel. Ananias was neither an apostle nor a deacon. He was just a plain disciple. Yet it was by the laying on of his hands that healing was ministered to Saul and the infilling of the Holy Spirit communicated. Every believer is called to be a king and a priest in Christ's kingdom.

IV Saul at Damascus: Immediately Saul went to the synagogues in Damascus and preached that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah) and indeed the Son of God. His preaching created quite a stir. The Jews were puzzled and asked if this was the same man who had come to Damascus for the express purpose of arresting the followers of Jesus. But Saul increased in spiritual strength and confounded the Jewish leaders of Damascus by his persuasive arguments that Jesus is the Christ of God.

In his letter to the Galatians Paul explained that he went to Arabia for a season from Damascus and then returned to that city (Gal.1:17). His retreat to Arabia was certainly for the purpose of seeking the Lord. Some think that he spent two years there. This is highly doubtful. But what is certain is that the Lord Jesus revealed the doctrine of redemption and

justification and indeed the deep truths of His Kingdom to Saul directly. He was taught by no man. When he did compare notes with the apostles later, he found that his teaching agreed completely with that of the twelve. How anxious the Lord is to teach His chosen vessels Himself. Commentaries and systematic theologies are certainly valuable tools for the Lord's servants, but nothing is more important than waiting on the Lord until He reveals Himself to the vessel and teaches His truth Himself.

The account in Galatians, chapter one, explains that Saul turned from Arabia to Damascus again. Perhaps he spent forty days waiting on the Lord and learning from Him. His preaching of Jesus in the synagogues so aroused the hatred of the Jews that they conspired to kill him. They watched the gates of the city night and day. He escaped, however, when the disciples let him down over the wall by night in a basket.

V Saul Revisits Jerusalem: It was three years after his conversion that Saul returned to Jerusalem. The disciples were still afraid of him. They did not believe that he was a true disciple but suspected that he was cleverly attempting to infiltrate their ranks. Finally, Barnabas spoke for Saul. He had confidence in the reality of his conversion and explained to the apostles how the Lord had appeared to Saul in the way and had spoken to him and how Saul had boldly preached Christ in Damascus. Then Saul had fellowship with the believers in Jerusalem.

Then Saul seems to have taken up the ministry of Stephen. He disputed with the Grecians (ch.9:29) as Stephen had done. The Greek word here translated "disputed" occurs only in one other place in the book of Acts: in connection with Stephen's dealings with the Grecians (ch.6:9). The defection of Saul, the most zealous persecutor among them to the ranks of the followers of Jesus was too much for those Jews. They conspired to kill him as they had Stephen. But the brethren warned Saul and the Lord appeared to Saul and told him to flee. He was brought by the brethren to Ceasarea and then went to his native town, Tarsus.

Meanwhile, the church throughout Judea, Samaria and Galilee, had rest and was built up spiritually and pressed on in the fear of God. The Gospel began to break down prejudices. The Jews of Jerusalem despised those of Galilee and the Jews of Jerusalem and Galilee had no dealings with the Samaritans. But the church of Jesus flourished in all three of these locations.

Truly the real kingdom of God breaks down all prejudice and makes all believers baptized into Christ to be one in the Holy Ghost.

Saul, was a carefully chosen vessel. Stephen, Philip and now Saul added a new dimension to the outreach of the church. The number of believers was multiplied. Saul disappears from the narrative for a while, but was, no doubt, active in his witness. In Tarsus, he had had in his youth, the benefit of Greek culture. In Jerusalem, he had been the foremost student of Gamaliel, the greatest teacher of the Pharisees. He had been born as a free citizen of the Roman empire. His background encompassed every important segment of the world of that time. His thorough conversion and absolute commitment to Christ made him ideally a chosen vessel for the Lord to use.

NOTES:

THE MINISTRY OF PETER

Read: Acts 9:32-43 & 10:1-48

Memory Work: Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. Acts 10:34

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *The ministry of Jesus was continued in the work of Peter and the disciples, and should be expected to continue through His servants today.*
2. *The Lord sees and recognizes the sincere seekers after truth. He will go to miracle lengths to reveal Himself to such.*
3. *Prejudice and respect of particular persons is obliterated by the redeeming work of the Lord.*
4. *The baptism of the Spirit in this case fell on the people before they were baptized in water and without the laying on of hands.*
5. *God often works on both ends to bring key souls into His Kingdom. Let us expect Him to work similarly today.*

I Throughout All Quarters: When Peter and John had visited the revival at Samaria, they stopped and preached the Gospel in many of the villages of the Samaritans on their way back to Jerusalem. Those who fled from Jerusalem because of the persecution that arose after the martyrdom of Stephen, went everywhere preaching the Gospel. Philip was led to the Ethiopian eunuch and then caught away by the Spirit to Azotus from whence he went to Caesarea preaching in all the cities along the way. So the Gospel of the Lord Jesus escaped from Jerusalem to the regions beyond. Local groups of believers sprang up everywhere. On the road between Azotus and Caesarea was Lydda. Philip probably stopped there and preached. Peter, visited "the saints" at Lydda as he "passed throughout all quarters"

(ch.9:32). While ministering in this small town the plight of Aeneas was called to the Apostle's attention. The poor sufferer had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years. Peter spoke in faith to the man, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole. Arise and make thy bed" (vs.34). Immediately, the man was healed and obeyed Peter's instruction. The results were dramatic. "All that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord" (vs.35).

Meanwhile another local group of believers had tragedy strike. At Joppa, a prominent and well loved believing lady, full of good works, became very ill and suddenly died. Her name was Tabitha, or Dorcas by interpretation. She had a wonderful record of kindness and almsdeeds which she had done (vs.36). When she died so suddenly the believers at Joppa sent quickly to Lydda, for Peter. They had heard of his ministry in that nearby town. Peter came without delay! The body had been washed and put in an upper chamber. Peter found the widows to whom Dorcas had been so kind all weeping and displaying the coats and garments which Dorcas had made and given to them while she lived. Peter put them out of the room (they no doubt hindered the operation of faith) and knelt by the body and spoke two words, Tabitha cumi." How similar is this miracle to the one Jesus performed when He raised Jairus' little daughter from death. Jesus, too, had to expel mourners from the house and then He spoke two words, "Talitha cumi." Only one letter is different. Dorcas immediately opened her eyes and sat up when she saw Peter. He took her by the hand and lifted her up and presented her alive to the saints. The miracle inspired many in Joppa to believe in the Lord.

II Peter at Simon the Tanner's House: The Apostle Peter remained "many days" at Joppa and accepted the hospitality of one Simon, a tanner, whose house was by the seashore. This is noteworthy because the Jews counted the occupation of tanning leather as unclean. It necessitated the constant contact with the dead bodies of the animals whose skins were tanned and this was unclean in the Jewish traditions. The house of a tanner had to be located at least 50 cubits outside the city. Yet Peter had come this far at least, that he was not afraid to accept the hospitality of this believer even though he was a tanner by trade.

While Peter was praying upon the housetop about noon one day he fell into a trance. He was very hungry and food was

being made ready. In this ecstasy he saw heaven opened and a great sheet whose four corners had been tied in a knot descending to earth. In it were all manner of animals and creeping things as well as fowl. A voice bade Peter rise, kill and eat. Peter protested instantly, "Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean" (ch.10:14). Then the Lord rebuked Peter, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (vs.15). This vision was repeated twice more so that three times Peter saw and heard it. Surely the lesson was extremely important for the Lord to give it three times. Twice was enough to establish it as from the Lord (Gen.41:32), but three times made it of supreme importance. Peter was puzzled as to what this should mean. Then the Holy Spirit revealed to Peter that three men were seeking him and that he should go down to them and go with them without questioning for they were sent by the Lord.

III Cornelius at Caesarea: The three men had been sent from Caesarea by a Roman centurion named Cornelius. Very remarkable events had caused Cornelius to send these messengers for Peter. The man was most unusual. He feared God as did his whole household. He was very devout and prayed to God faithfully. He also gave generously to worthy causes. Two days before Peter's vision, while Cornelius was earnestly praying, he too had a vision. It was at the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.), the Jews' hour of prayer, when an angel assured Cornelius that his prayers and his generosity had been recognized by God. Cornelius was specifically instructed to send to Joppa for Peter who was lodging with Simon the tanner. The angel promised Cornelius that Peter would tell him what he should do. So Cornelius was perplexed by some question. Could it have been that the preaching of Philip who visited Caesarea (Acts 8:40) had gripped Cornelius and made him wonder whether he should be a proselyte of the Jews or a follower of Christ? At any rate, Cornelius sent two of his household servants accompanied by a devout soldier (a rare combination in that time) to Joppa to get Peter. It was the next day as the three were nearing Joppa and Simon's house, that the vision appeared to Peter to prepare him to accompany these men. As the custom was, they called aloud in the street inquiring for Simon's house and then before the gate, inquiring whether Peter was lodged there. Peter went down and acknowledged that it was he they were seeking. He asked why they had come looking for him, and

they explained that an angel had "warned" their master to send for Peter and to hear his message. Peter invited the three in to Simon's house where they were lodged overnight. The next day Peter found six men to go with him and the whole company set out for Caesarea to minister to Cornelius.

IV The Meeting: When Peter arrived, Cornelius fell down before him, doing obeisance as to a king. Peter told him to stand up for he was only a man like Cornelius. Peter found that many had gathered together. Peter told Cornelius that it was unlawful for a Jew to enter the home of one of another nation but that God had showed him that he should not call any man common or unclean. The old prejudices still stuck in Peter. He should not have said such a thing to Cornelius. Nevertheless, Cornelius was not in the least offended but explained how he had been instructed to send for Peter and how they were now gathered in the presence of God (a remarkable discernment) to hear the words which God had commanded Peter to preach.

Peter simply preached the Gospel. He perceived that God was not a respecter of persons and that he was Lord of all. He told of John's ministry of preparation and repentance and of Jesus' ministry of healing and of the power of the Spirit on the Lord Jesus. He told of His crucifixion and resurrection on the third day. He assured his audience that he was an eye-witness of these things and that he, with the other apostles, had actually eaten and drunk with Jesus after He rose from the dead. Peter told how Jesus had commanded the Apostles to preach to the people and to warn them that God had ordained Jesus to judge both the living and the dead. Peter explained that all the prophets of the scripture testified of Jesus that through faith in His Name whoever believed in Him would receive forgiveness of sins. It was simple and concise Gospel. While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and the whole company which heard the word. Those six Jewish converts which Peter brought along were astonished that the Holy Spirit would fall on Gentiles. The whole household spake with other tongues and magnified the Lord in exactly the same way Peter and the 120 had on the day of Pentecost.

Note how the Holy Spirit works in many different ways. No one laid their hands on these Gentile believers, nor were they baptized in water first as most others were. We cannot make the Holy Spirit into our mold or formula. "The wind bloweth where it listeth" and even so the Spirit works where and as He

pleases. We can expect the unexpected because of the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit.

Peter then commanded the new believers to be baptized and in response to their invitation he remained there some days. What a blessing it is for the preacher to have such an attentive audience as Cornelius and his household.

So the door was opened for the Gentiles to be fellowheirs with the believers of the Jews. The Lord miraculously worked on both ends, Caesarea and Joppa, in Cornelius and Peter to bring about a glorious new burst of life in the church of our Lord. Note on both ends the individuals were in prayer when the Lord revealed Himself to them. Let us not neglect the house of prayer and let us expect that God will bring about the salvation and baptism of key souls with their whole households for the glory of God and the furtherance of the Kingdom of our Lord.

NOTES:

LESSON 34

THE CHRISTIANS OF ANTIOCH

Read: Acts 11:1-30

Memory Work: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. Acts 11:26

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *It is the will of the Lord that all people of the earth be saved. The song of praise to the Lamb in heaven is sung by the redeemed of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.*
2. *Wherever we go we must be ready to witness for our Lord. God is able to bring about great victories through faithful servants.*
3. *Our manner of life should reflect credit on the name of Christ.*
4. *The ministry of the Holy Spirit warns and prepares us for things to come.*

I Peter's Explanation: When Peter went to Caesarea to minister to Cornelius he took along "certain brethren" from the church at Joppa (Acts 10:23). This was a wise move, for these brethren confirmed Peter's testimony of what happened in the house of Cornelius. There were six of them that accompanied Peter to Caesarea. The news of Peter's encounter with Cornelius and his household reached the ears of the other Apostles and leaders. When Peter came to Jerusalem they contended with him. Imagine Peter being called on the carpet for his ministry! They were concerned not that Peter preached Christ to Cornelius and his household, but that he ate with these uncircumcised men.

The word that is used to describe their action is contended and it is the same Greek word that the Lord used when He told Peter to go with the men who had come for him from Cornelius,

nothing doubting (Acts 10:20). The words contended and doubting are from the same root Greek word. The Lord told Peter to go and not contend, but the Jerusalem leaders did contend this move of God. Let us always be open to some new departure and advance in the ministry of the Spirit.

Peter could do no better than to recount how the Lord had dealt with him to enable him to overcome his prejudices. He told of the vision on the housetop and of its threefold repetition. He told the brethren that the voice bade him go, nothing doubting, and again that same word is used. Peter explained that he had taken six men along who were witnesses of all that occurred. He also told the investigators that an angel had appeared to Cornelius and specifically told him to send for Peter. The angel even told Cornelius where to find Peter. These were all strong vindications of the actions of Peter, but the most conclusive defence of his conduct in this matter was what happened at the house of Cornelius. Peter told the brethren that as he began to speak the Holy Ghost fell on his audience just as it had on the 120 on the day of Pentecost. Peter concluded with the remark, "who was I, that I could withstand God?"

It is to the credit of these leaders of the early church that they were persuaded by this evidence and testimony. They not only "held their peace" but they even glorified God, recognizing that He had granted also unto the Gentiles, repentance unto life (11:18). Many leaders find it difficult to accept a new move of the Lord. Some find it difficult to admit that their attitudes were wrong. These leaders were persuaded, however, and glorified the Lord. Note again that it was Peter who was used of God to open the door of "repentance unto life" to the Gentiles. The Lord Jesus had given to him "the keys of the kingdom" and on three occasions it was he who was used of God to inaugurate a forward movement in the development of the church. He opened the door of repentance to the Jews at the close of his sermon on the day of Pentecost. Peter with John was used of the Lord to open the beautiful gate of Divine healing for the church, and here he opens the door to the Gentiles. If Peter opened the door, however, it remained for others, Paul in particular, to go through that door and effectively evangelize the Gentiles.

II The Ministry at Antioch: We have already seen that the Lord used the persecution that arose about Stephen to accomplish

His sovereign will. Samaria received the Gospel. Many cities and towns in Samaria and Judea received the word of the Lord and groups of believers were established all over. The Lord was marching on. Those who were scattered abroad witnessed always to the Jewish people exclusively. Some of the witnesses, however, were men of Cyprus and Cyrene who fled to Antioch. They preached to the Greeks of that eminent city. The hand of the Lord was with them and a great number of Gentile Greeks accepted and turned to the Lord. The salvation of Cornelius was the first sample of a great new move of God. Jews represented only a very small fraction of the population of the Roman Empire and Christ's redemption was for the whole world. Here then was the opening of a vast new field of endeavor. A great new market for the commerce of the Kingdom of God. The Lord was preparing for great and important advances in His economy. There has been much speculation as to who these men of Cyprus and Cyrene were whom God used to preach the Gospel to the Greeks at Antioch. Such speculation is vain. It misses the point. Is it not wonderful to recognize that God can use obscure and unnamed witnesses to begin a move of God in the earth that surpassed everything that preceded it? We need not always track down the originators of every work of God. It is God that moves. The men and women are simply His tools or vessels and as such need no worldly honors to reward them. Many flourishing churches of the present time were begun as prayer meetings in some obscure home. Others have sprung from children's meetings and Sunday schools.

III Barnabas Sent: The apostles soon heard of this new departure. They sent Barnabas to investigate the work. This was a wise choice. He was a close associate of the apostles, and he, too, like some of the leaders in the church at Antioch, was from Cyprus. Barnabas perceived at once that the work was genuine and that the grace of God was at work in that great metropolis. Antioch was esteemed to be the third most important city in the Roman empire. Only Rome and Alexandria surpassed Antioch in importance. Now there was a thriving assembly of believers in this thriving city. Barnabas exhorted the disciples to "cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart" (vs.23). His name means son of comfort or son of exhortation. His ministry and his character produced good results. Here we read that Barnabas was "a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith" (vs.24). Truly, Barnabas is one of the most remarkable

characters in the New Testament. He had confidence that Saul was genuinely converted, even when the apostles doubted. He was instrumental in launching Saul on his God-appointed ministry. His long patience with his nephew, Mark, finally bore good results and he became profitable for the ministry. He was one, also, who in the very beginning sold some possession and donated the money for the use of the church in its ministry to the poor.

IV Saul Joins the Team: Certainly Barnabas was led by the Spirit to seek out Saul. He may have heard from Saul himself or from Ananias in Damascus, that Saul's call was especially to the Gentiles. He found Saul and brought him back to Antioch. There, for a whole year, they had meetings and taught the believers. What an important ministry this is. We need Holy Ghost teachers in the church today. Apostles, prophets, and teachers is the order of God's supply for His church. Teaching takes patience and perserverance. Evangelization is quickly done, but teaching takes time. May God raise up teachers who, like Saul, have themselves been taught by the Holy Spirit.

It was here at Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians. The word is a Greek and Latin combination. "Christ" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Messiah" and the English "anointed". The "ian" is the Latin for "adherents of" or "followers of". It was certainly not coined by the Jews because they would not admit that Jesus of Nazareth was "Christ" (Messiah). Some think that the name was used by the unbelievers to mock the disciples. Whatever the case, it is a good name. Probably the name was given to the believers because they were always talking about Christ. Would to God that believers today would get the nick-name of Christian because they always spoke of Jesus. Too often Christian gatherings discuss politics and economics and inflation and business rather than Jesus. Let Jesus be uppermost in our minds at all times and His Kingdom more important than all the things of this world.

V Agabus the Prophet: We are told that men with prophetic gifts came to Antioch at this time. One of them foretold that there was to be a drought throughout the empire. This did indeed come to pass in the days when Claudius was emperor of the Roman Empire. We know that the prophetic word warned the

Christians in Jerusalem to flee before the destruction of that city in 70 A.D. The prophetic word is not limited to foretelling coming events, but includes all utterances inspired by the Lord through the Holy Spirit. The prophetic ministry is of immense value to the people of God in this age. May we have faith for its operation in all of our assemblies.

When the Christians at Antioch heard of the coming famine they felt constrained to send an offering of relief to the brethren at Jerusalem and Judea. They gathered the offering from the believers in proportion to their ability to give. It was surely a voluntary offering. Barnabas and Saul were delegated by the assembly to bring the gift to Jerusalem. The next chapter is a very interesting interlude in the story. The interest and the beauty of this sacred story is beyond human ability to compose.

NOTES:

PETER'S DELIVERANCE

Read: Acts 12:1-25

Memory Work: And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. Acts 12:11

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *We must be aware that Satan can stir up governments to oppose and persecute the church.*
2. *We should remember that fervent prayer and faith can change any situation.*
3. *We should expect answers to our prayers and not be surprised at quick deliverances.*
4. *It is important for us to give glory to God for all things. Self glorification will bring abasement.*

I Now About That Time: The time referred to in the opening words of this chapter is the time when Barnabas and Saul brought the relief offering from the assembly at Antioch to the elders of the believers of Jerusalem. The last verse of this chapter records that Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem to Antioch taking with them John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas. Doesn't it seem likely then that Barnabas and Saul were at Jerusalem during the events recorded in this chapter? And if so, where would they be most likely to lodge but at the house of Mary the sister of Barnabas. Now that is the very place to which Peter came when he was released from the prison by the angel of the Lord. The fact that John Mark went back to Antioch with Barnabas and Saul gives added weight to these conjectures. It makes the story all the more interesting, at any rate. The events of James' death and Peter's deliverance are sandwiched between the mention of Barnabas and Saul's coming to and going from Jerusalem.

II Herod Vexes the Church: This Herod is identified as Herod Agrippa I. He is the grandson of Herod the great who killed the babes of Bethlehem, and the nephew of Herod Antipas who beheaded John. This man had lived in Rome for 30 years. He was the companion in every evil vice of the son of the Emperor. Yet he always considered himself a Jew and observed the feasts. When he came to Jerusalem he carefully fulfilled the morning and evening sacrifices. He was responsible for persuading Caius the Emperor not to insist on erecting an image of himself in Herod's temple. He was an astute politician and discerned cleverly the things that pleased the Jews under his jurisdiction.

Herod arrested James, the brother of John and executed him with the sword, probably by beheading him. James was thus the first of the twelve to lay down his life for the Lord. Years before he and John had requested from Jesus that they be given the seats on His right hand and on His left in the coming kingdom. Jesus responded by telling them that they did not know what they were asking for. He asked if they were able to drink the cup (of suffering) which He would drink or be baptized with the baptism that He would endure. They presumptuously asserted that they were able. Still Jesus said it was not His to assign the places of honor in His kingdom. Now James did indeed drink the cup of martyrdom. John, on the other hand drank that cup by being a living sacrifice. He was the only one of the twelve, according to church traditions, to die a natural death.

When Herod saw that the execution of James pleased the Jews, he arrested Peter also. He put Peter in prison, delaying the execution because of the Passover celebration and the days of unleavened bread. "Four quarternions" (sixteen) soldiers were assigned to guard Peter around the clock. No doubt, Herod was aware of the escape from prison of Peter and John on an earlier occasion (Acts 5:19).

III But Prayer Was Made: It was Herod's purpose to execute Peter "after Easter" (vs.4). Now the believers gathered together to pray for Peter's deliverance. There were probably a number of prayer meetings at different locations. The believers prayed "without ceasing." It must have been Easter night when the remarkable deliverance occurred. Despite impending execution Peter slept soundly in the jail. He was chained to two soldiers with others guarding the doors of the prison. Suddenly the an-

gel of the Lord came to Peter. The light of God shined into the dark prison. Still Peter slept. The angel had to strike him on the side to awaken him. The angel pulled him up. The chains fell off. Peter was still sleepy. He was a good sleeper (see Luke 9:32 & 22:46). The angel had to tell Peter to get his robe on and his sandals. Then the angel instructed Peter to follow him. Peter absently thought it was all a vision or dream. He followed the angel past the first ward and the second until they reached the great iron gate of the prison. God's "electric eye" opened that one and the angel led Peter forth into the city and after leading Peter one block the angel disappeared leaving Peter alone on the dark street. At last Peter pulled himself together and realized that it was not a dream but the angel of the Lord had delivered him from the hand of Herod and the evil expectation of the Jews.

After considering the matter carefully, Peter came to the house of Mary the mother of John Mark and the sister of Barnabas. It certainly is possible that Barnabas and Saul were there at the time. What is absolutely sure is that many were gathered there praying earnestly for the deliverance of Peter. Now he came and knocked on the locked and bolted door. Finally, a young girl heard the knock and went to inquire who was there. She recognized Peter's voice, but in her excitement she forgot to open the door. Instead she rushed into the prayer meeting and announced that Peter was at the door. They ridiculed her by saying she must be mad. When she insisted that it was Peter they said it must be his angel. Meanwhile, poor Peter was still pounding on the door. Finally, the door was opened. When they saw Peter they were astonished. He beckoned to them to be quiet, for they must have all excitedly been asking how he came to be there, and he then told how the angel had delivered him from the prison. He told the believers to relate these things to James and the brethren. This James was the brother of Jesus and the brethren were the other apostles and leaders of the church at Jerusalem. Then Peter bid them farewell and "went into another place." At this point Jerusalem is no longer the home base of the church. The headquarters now shifts to Antioch and the emphasis hereafter is on the evangelization of the Gentiles.

The doubts and misgivings of the believers at that prayer meeting is unfortunately quite typical of prayer groups. It is encouraging to see that the Holy Spirit saw fit to record their unbelief. This is a strong proof of the reliability of the record

of the events in the early church. But, please let us not just have a little joke about their unbelief and recognize the similarity between them and ourselves. The Lord is not pleased with unbelief. He would teach us to pray the prayer of faith and to pray through until we know the prayer is heard and the answer given. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

IV The Lord Smote Him: What a rude awakening the soldiers had after Peter's deliverance. What consternation there was among them. No doubt, they blamed each other. When Herod sent for Peter and found that he had escaped, he was furious. He interrogated the soldiers who had been assigned to guard Peter and then sentenced them to death in Peter's place. Hopefully, the sentence was never carried out.

Herod then went to Caesarea, probably in anger. The church had come into conflict with the nation of the Jews. The might and purpose of Herod had been frustrated and the word of God grew and multiplied (vs.24). At Caesarea, a delegation came from Tyre and Sidon to negotiate a settlement of differences with Herod. On a set day Herod made a great speech to the representatives of Tyre and Sidon. Josephus describes the scene vividly. The king dressed himself in highly polished metal spangles. He arranged mirrors to reflect the rays of the sun to focus on himself as he stood to speak. The appearance was dazzling. When he finished his oration, the audience shouted. They cried, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." At once, the angel of the Lord smote Herod because he did not give glory to God. He accepted the worship as if he indeed were God. His beauty faded fast. The dazzling glory was turned into disgusting corruption. He was eaten of worms and quickly died. How fleeting is the glory of this world. Yes, and how enduring is the glory of the kingdom of God. In that heavenly kingdom James wears the crown and Herod is not present.

The chapter closes with Barnabas and Saul on their way back to Antioch, having fulfilled their ministry of bringing the offering for the help of the believers in Jerusalem. They return to Antioch, however, with John Mark, Barnabas' nephew. He is one who will be used later in many ways to further the work of God and the spread of the Gospel.

MISSIONARY WORK BEGINS

Read: Acts 13:1-52

Memory Work: And as they ministered to the Lord, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. Acts 13:2

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *A healthy Christian assembly should have a number of individuals who are consecrated to the Lord as vessels to be used by the Holy Spirit in different ways.*
2. *Where believers have ears to hear, the Holy Spirit will speak and call men and women to their work and field.*
3. *It would be a blessed awakening if the local assemblies would set aside days of fasting and prayer.*
4. *The strongest denunciations of the scriptures are directed at such as hinder sincere seekers from receiving the truth of God.*
5. *The program of God continues despite the failure of men.*
6. *Jealousy and prejudice blind people to the obvious truth.*

I Sent Forth By the Holy Ghost: It was a remarkable assembly of believers at Antioch. It was begun by some disciples from Cyprus and Cyrene. They had departed from the established tradition of preaching to the Jews only. The Greek Gentiles of Antioch believed the word of the Lord and a lively assembly developed. It was a move of the Holy Ghost. The Apostles at Jerusalem had no part in the birth of this assembly. They did however, send Barnabas. He recognized the work of grace and

exhorted the believers to cleave unto the Lord. He also went to Tarsus and searched out Saul to bring him back to Antioch. There Saul assisted Barnabas in the ministry for more than a year. The Lord blessed this church with a multiplicity of ministers. Though they had no apostle resident, they did have "prophets and teachers." There were men set into the assembly and gifted by the Holy Ghost to edify the believers. Five men are named. Barnabas is first named, and we know that he had a prophetic ministry of exhortation. Saul of Tarsus is last named. The three others were Simon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, possibly one of the founders of the work, and Manaen, who was the half-brother of Herod Antipas, who had beheaded John the Baptist. The church needs Holy Ghost filled preachers and teachers. Some of these men were edifying the church at Antioch with the Spirit inspired gift of teaching. The difference between preaching and teaching is that (prophetic) preaching proclaims the Word of the Lord, while (prophetic) teaching explains the Word of the Lord, and examines the truth from every standpoint. The assembly that has both ministries is a fortunate one.

There evidently were times set aside in the church at Antioch for fasting and prayer. In the early years of the Pentecostal movement most assemblies observed a weekly day of fasting and prayer. Unfortunately, this wholesome habit has been largely abandoned because of fanatical abuse of it in recent times. We should consider that the Lord said that while He was absent physically, his disciples would fast (Mark 2:20). He also explained that certain deliverances from evil powers could not be accomplished except through fasting and prayer (Matt.17:21). While the leaders (and perhaps the entire assembly) were fasting and praying, the Holy Spirit commanded them to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work which the Holy Spirit had called them to do. There was a ready response to this call. They fasted again and prayed and laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul and they released them. The phrase "sent them away" is an unfortunate translation and should read, "released them." Barnabas and Saul were not sent by the church at Antioch but by the Holy Spirit (vs.4). They were, however, released from thier service by the assembly at Antioch.

This is another great turning point in the history of the church. The great thrust of Spirit inspired ministry, from this time on, is to the Gentiles. Except for the one council which

considered the Gentile believers' liberty, Jerusalem disappears from the narrative. The missionary movement is launched from Antioch in Syria and when the missionaries return, it is at Antioch that they report what God has done through them. So the direction of the ministry changed toward the Gentiles and the earthly headquarters moved to Antioch from Jerusalem.

II First Stop: Barnabas was born on the island of Cyprus and it seems quite natural that he should set out there on his first missionary enterprise. Also, some of the founders of the work at Antioch were men of Cyprus. It is easy to conclude therefore, that there was interest and prayer for a work of God in Cyprus. Surely it was by the leading of the Spirit and not simply natural inclinations that led the missionary partners to Cyprus. They also took John Mark with them as their helper.

Luke, the author of the account of the Acts, is selective. He does not attempt to record a full account of the whole missionary enterprise, but selects, by the inspiration of the Spirit, those things of importance. They landed at Salamis, on the eastern end of Cyprus and travelled inland westward to Paphos on the south-western coast of the island. All we know about this part of the journey is that they preached the word of God in the synagogues. We find, however, in Paphos the deputy of the country, Sergious Paulus, requesting that the word of God should be spoken to him. He was probably a Roman and desirous to know truth and reality. Whatever Barnabas and Saul had done in the island had made this sincere seeker aware at least that these two men claimed to speak the word of the Lord. There was, however, in the court of Sergius Paulus, a sorcerer and a false prophet who was also a Jew. His name was Bar-jesus, which means "son of Jesus." This Jew who should have known better, practiced sorcery. He performed supernatural manifestations through evil powers. He resisted Barnabas and Saul and attempted to turn the deputy away from the faith. At this point there comes a threefold startling development. Saul is called Paul for the first time and he is suddenly filled with Holy Ghost authority, and he takes the leadership of the missionary endeavor. Paul is the missionary's Gentile name. It may have been the first time that Paul used apostolic authority, but it was certainly not the last. Hereafter the account always lists Paul and Barnabas whereas before this moment it was always Barnabas and Saul.

Then Paul, filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on Bar-

jesus and rebuked and denounced him with a fearful judgment. Fortunately, it was a temporary judgment. Paul called this perverted Jewish false prophet, a "child of the devil." He pronounced a temporary blindness on him. Instantly the sorcerer was blind and groped for someone to lead him by the hand. Such a demonstration before the sincere governor was impressive. He believed the word of the Lord and was astonished at the doctrine of the Gospel. As for the sorcerer, we know nothing but can hope that the temporary blindness had a similar effect to that of Saul's on the road to Damascus.

III Give Audience: From Paphos in Cyprus, Paul, Barnabas and John Mark sailed to Perga in the small Roman province of Pamphylia. John Mark left the team here and lost the respect of Paul for a good while. From Perga, the two went north to Antioch in the province of Pisidia. There, in the synagogue, after the reading of the law and the prophets, the visitors were asked if they had any word of exhortation for the people. Paul stood and addressing the crowd asked that they give audience (attention). Paul had preached many sermons before this one, beginning immediately upon his conversion at Damascus. But this is the first one recorded in the scripture. Paul attributes all the events of the history of the Jews to the overriding government of God. There is a noteworthy and remarkable similarity to the apology of Stephen (see Acts 7). He reviews the history of the Jewish nation from Egypt to David. He attributes the exodus from Egypt to God with a strong arm. Then despite forty years of rebellion and failure, God subdued seven nations and gave them the land for an inheritance. God gave Israel judges to rule them but they desired to be like other nations and desired a king. Despite this rebellion God gave them Saul and then it was God who removed him replacing him after 40 years with David the man after his own heart. The rest of the history of the monarchy is ignored and Paul continues the narrative by proclaiming that God raised up from the seed of David, the Saviour, Jesus. The rejection, and the crucifixion of Jesus fulfilled the prophets. But God raised Jesus from the dead and by Him forgiveness of sins is preached, and by Him justification is accomplished which could never be done through the law of Moses. This word "justified" is a remarkable word and used much by Paul. It carries much more with it than forgiveness of sins. It is worthy of serious study.

When the meeting broke up the message must have been dis-

cussed everywhere. Somehow the Gentiles got wind of the meeting and the sermon and requested that they might hear the same message on the next sabbath. The next week a huge crowd assembled. Such popularity produced jealousy in the Jewish leaders. This jealousy blinded them to the truth. They could not imagine the Gentiles worthy of hearing the word of God, let alone partaking of the promises on an equal basis with themselves. So they raised up persecutors to harass the missionaries. Many of the Gentiles, however, believed and a solid fellowship was left behind when the Jews expelled Paul and Barnabas from their city. But the word of the Lord was published throughout all that region. So the light began to shine in the Gentile centers of the empire. The new believers were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost.

NOTES:

LESSON 37

NEW CHURCHES ESTABLISHED

Read: Acts 14:1-28

Memory Work: And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein. Acts 14:15

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *The preachers of the Gospel may believe for the anointing of the Holy Spirit on their message in such power that many will be compelled to believe.*
2. *The adulation of the public is a grave danger to the anointed preacher. He must always remember, no matter how greatly he is used of God, that he also himself is a man of like passions.*
3. *The new born babes in Christ must be nurtured and taught the doctrines and responsibilities of the kingdom of God.*
4. *The praises of the fickle public can quickly change to accusations and persecution.*

I They So Spake: When the unbelieving and jealous Jews of Antioch in Pisidia had stirred up opposition and persecution against Paul and Barnabas, the missionaries shook off the dust of their feet as a testimony against them (note Matt.10:14), and journeyed on to the east 50 miles to Iconium. They left behind them, however, a solid nucleus of believers. The Word of the Lord was published throughout the entire region. At Iconium the two pioneering missionaries found a synagogue of the Jews. There, in the synagogue, Paul and Barnabas so spake that a great multitude of the Jews and Greek proselytes believed. That little word so is very interesting. Certainly, the meaning is not eloquence nor logic. Paul writing to the Corinthians explain-

ed that he did not minister to them with excellency of speech nor with the wisdom of men, but in demonstration of the Spirit and in power (see I Cor.2:1-5). He spoke of being among them in weakness and fear and much trembling. But that weakness and fear drove Paul to God for the message and the anointing. That is what is needed in Gospel preaching today. Not enticing words of men's wisdom. Not entertaining words cleverly planned to win the approval of the audience, but powerful words owned by the Spirit of God that convince the hearers of their need and God's provision. Preachers can only so speak when they have been much alone with God. Then the words may be ever so simple, but they are backed up by the power of God.

Immediately, a difficulty arose in Iconium. The unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles against Paul and Barnabas. They probably spread some evil rumor about these men of God which they knew would influence the Gentiles against the men and the message. Because of the difficulty the servants of the Lord stayed a long time at Iconium until the difficulty was overcome. They boldly spoke "the Word of His grace" (vs.3). Finally, the entire city was divided. Part followed the Gospel preachers and the others were persuaded by the unbelieving Jews. The Lord confirmed the preaching of Paul and Barnabas by granting signs and wonders to be done at Iconium. Finally, there was a conspiracy to catch and stone Paul and Barnabas. But they became aware of it and left Iconium and went to Lystra.

II Turn From These Vanities: There is no mention made of a synagogue at Lystra. The missionaries were now getting into real Gentile areas. There was a crippled man in the audience who had never walked. He listened intently to the preaching of the Gospel. Paul noticed the intense interest in the man and discerned that he was absorbing faith for healing. Paul interrupted his message to cry out with a loud voice commanding this man to stand upright on his feet. Instantly he obeyed and began to leap and to walk. Faith came to this man, just as the scriptures teach, by hearing the Word of God (Rom.10:17). Note the important fact that the preacher discerned faith in the man. Often, as the Word is preached faith will rise in those who listen. The discerning vessel of the Lord should stop and urge the believers to respond to God's offer and claim the deliverance or victory they need.

The people of Lystra were astonished at this miracle. They immediately concluded that Paul and Barnabas were gods which

had come down to visit them. The traditions of Lystra told of a visit by Jupiter and Mercury in the past. There were temples and priests to these Greek mythological personages at Lystra. The people began to praise and worship Paul and Barnabas. They called Paul Mercury because he was the chief speaker, and Barnabas they called Jupiter. Quickly, the priest of Jupiter came with oxen and garlands to offer sacrifices for the people to Paul and Barnabas. Has it not been common, even today, that when a servant of the Lord has been used of God to perform some miraculous deliverance that the people begin to adore and worship the servant as if he were a god? There is a great danger there. How many anointed workers have gone astray and some down the drain because they began to accept the adulation of the public. After doing all the will of God, the successful minister must consider himself an unprofitable servant.

When the two apostles realized what was happening, they ran in among the crowd and restrained the people. They rent their clothes to show their displeasure and cried out for the people to stop. They emphatically insisted that they were themselves men of like passions with them. The whole purpose of their visit to Lystra was to enlighten the people to turn from these vanities unto the God which made heaven, earth, and sea, and all therein. The preachers explained that in times past the Creator allowed them to walk in their own foolish ways. He had manifested Himself even then in His good gifts. Only with great difficulty did Paul and Barnabas restrain the superstitious people from making sacrifices to them.

The Biblical account of the religious traditions at Lystra is most interesting because it is completely confirmed in the writings of Ovid, the Roman poet of that time. He specifically tells of the legend of Jupiter and Mercury coming down to visit men at Lystra. It is interesting also to note how Paul used the situation to impress the people that while they, Paul and Barnabas themselves, and also the gods of their superstitions were men of like passions, God the Creator and Christ, the Redeemer are above such passions.

Alas, the unbelieving Jews of Antioch and Iconium pursued and caught up to the apostles at Lystra and they persuaded the people to turn against them. Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city and left for dead. But the new believers of the city came and stood around Paul. To their astonishment and joy, he revived stood upon his feet and returned to the city until the next day when he left with Barnabas for Derbe.

III Through Much Tribulation: Little is said of the ministry at Derbe. It is mentioned that there they "preached the Gospel and taught many." The two ministries compliment each other. We need both preaching and teaching to grow as we should. From Derbe it was most convenient to return to Antioch in Syria, their home base, via Tarsus, Paul's native city. From Tarsus it was but a short trip by land and sea back to Antioch. Yet Paul and Barnabas chose the long and dangerous alternative to revisit the places where they had preached the Gospel. Only the love of Christ and love for the brethren could compel them to do this. It was a much longer route and certainly much more dangerous. Their purpose was to confirm the new believers in their new found faith. They felt constrained to exhort the groups of believers to continue in the faith. They prepared the converts for the days to come by warning them of trials and tribulations which would be the means of opening to them the kingdom of God. In each city which they revisited, Paul and Barnabas ordained elders. They were ordained with fasting and prayer and the laying on of hands.

They returned to Perga, where John Mark had turned back, and preached the Word there. However, in this place there were apparently scant results. Every campaign, even of such a great preacher as Paul, is not a flaming success. Perga seems to be a place of scant results. From there they went to Attalia where they boarded a ship which took them back to Syria and Antioch and the home church.

IV They Rehearsed All God Had Done: When they arrived in Antioch they called for a gathering of the believers and there they gave their missionary report. It is devoid of statistics. The report emphasizes the activity of God. They rehearsed all that God had done with them. They did not report what they had done, but what God had done. The greatest work for God is done when He is the One who acts and the preachers or missionaries are His helpers and agents. We need to be sure that we are following Him and doing what He wants. The report of the apostles revealed how the Lord had truly opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. This was to cause a great discussion and dispute in the days to come. But now Paul and Barnabas remained a good while at Antioch with the disciples there.