



Holy Ghost Acts--II

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Introduction

The book of "Acts" is outlined in the 8th verse of the first chapter: Power for witnessing from the Holy Spirit coming upon them and the work to spread from Jerusalem to Judea and to Samaria and finally to the ends of the earth. The persecution at Jerusalem sent believers everywhere preaching the Gospel. God raised up new vessels for His Gospel outreach in men like Barnabas and Saul of Tarsus. Peter opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles when he preached to Cornelius and his household. It remained, however, for Paul to overcome the Jewish prejudice and take an unfettered Gospel to the Gentiles.

The last half of the book of Acts centers around the Holy Ghost ministry of this yielded vessel and the fruitful missionary journeys he made. It records the blessed beginnings of numerous Gospel assemblies in principal cities of the Roman Empire. The book of "Acts" really has an open ending. There is no final benediction or good bye. Although the canon of sacred scripture is closed, the acts of the Holy Spirit continue to this day and we ought to consider ourselves as a part of the latest chapter.

These lessons were written for the Emmanuel Pentecostal Sunday School by the pastor, Robert D. Kalis. This series is now complete. The titles are listed below and are available to any and all:

The Men and Women of Genesis
Lessons From Exodus
Wilderness Examples
Possessing the Land of Promise
The Days of the Judges
Israel's Early Kings
Lessons From the Kings
The Captivity and Return

The Miracles of Jesus
The Parables of Jesus
The Personal Ministry of Jesus
According to Luke - I & II
We Beheld His Glory (John - I)
Full of Grace & Truth (John - II)
Holy Ghost Acts - I & II
Matthew: The King & His Kingdom
I & II

GOSPEL LIBERTY QUESTIONED

Read: Acts 15:1-41; Galatians 2:1-21

Memory Work: Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear. (Acts 15:10)

What we should learn from this Lesson.

1. *Salvation is dependent on nothing but repentance and faith in Jesus.*
2. *Because of our salvation we abstain from things wholly, and avoid stumbling others by careless conduct.*
3. *If we prayerfully consider matters where opinions differ, the Holy Spirit will make the truth of God clear.*
4. *Good men sometimes have sharp differences of opinions, yet God can resolve those differences and use them for his glory.*

I Dissension and Disputation: Paul and Barnabas remained at Antioch, their home base, for a long time. Presently, some men from Judea came to Antioch. They taught the brethren that unless they were circumcised they could not be saved. Note that they were not just suggesting that now that they were saved that it would be wise for them to be circumcised, but they were teaching that without circumcision there could be no salvation. It caused a great discussion and dispute in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas could not accept such an assertion, for many in Antioch had been saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul had been taught the doctrines of the kingdom by revelation from the Lord. He preached salvation through grace without the works of the law. The many converts of the missionary enterprise had believed and been filled with the Holy Spirit. To think that these all should submit to the Jewish rite of circumcision in order to be saved was intolerable. They were saved and Spirit-filled. So Paul and Barnabas rejected this teaching of the men from Judea. They decided, however, to go to Jeru-

saalem to the apostles and elders to discuss this problem. The two leaders passed through Phenice and Samaria on their way, and reported in those cities how the Lord was moving in converting the Gentiles. The brethren in these places rejoiced to hear the good report of the missionary outreach.

II The First Church Council: At Jerusalem Paul and Barnabas first of all reported to the whole church those things that God had done through them among the Gentiles. Then some of the Pharisees which had been saved rose up and insisted that these many new converts had to be circumcised and taught to keep the rituals of the Mosaic law. To discuss this further a meeting was arranged for the leaders to come together and consider this matter. Those who had been saved from the sect of the Pharisees had received the light from the Lord that the Christian doctrine and faith was a further development of the Hebrew law. They saw Christ as fulfilling that law and they believed. These Gentile converts knew nothing of the law and how Christ fulfilled it. They simply believed that Jesus was the Son of God who gave His life for their redemption and who rose from the dead and ascended to heaven to send the Holy Spirit upon believers. It was difficult for the believing Pharisees to comprehend that these Gentiles, without knowing, let alone observing the rituals of the law of Moses, could just sort of jump right in and be saved and filled with the Spirit and enjoy the same privileges and blessings with the Jews who had been "God's people" and had the oracles of God so long.

According to Paul's letter to the believers of Galatia, he had a private conference with Peter and John and James, the Lord's brother. He shared with them the revelation granted him by the Lord and explained in detail the doctrine of salvation which he preached among the Gentiles. It is certain that if the leaders at Jerusalem had rejected the doctrine which Paul preached, he would have broken with the church at Jerusalem and continued to preach according to the revelation which God had given him. He warned the Galatians that even if an angel preached any other gospel than that which had been preached by Paul and Barnabas among them, that he should be accursed. Paul was not about to compromise the liberty of the Gospel no matter what the church council at Jerusalem decided.

The leaders, however, gave to Paul and Barnabas the *right hand of fellowship*. They did not even suggest that Titus, who was a greek Gentile believer and companion of Paul, be circumcised. In the great discussion which followed, Peter recounted how Cornelius had heard the Gospel through his preaching. He reminded them that God

had put no difference between "us and them." He logically concluded that they should not do what God had not seen fit to do by putting the whole yoke of the rituals of the law upon the necks of the new believers. "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved, even as they" (Acts 15:11).

After Peter's speech, Paul and Barnabas had the opportunity to recount the miracles which God had worked among the Gentiles. When they were finished, James explained his understanding of this important question. He noted that the ministry for the salvation of the Gentiles had been begun through Simon Peter. He explained that this should not have come as a surprise because the Old Testament prophets had foretold that in times to come the tabernacle of David would be built again and the residue of men would seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles (see Acts 15:16 & 17; Amos 9:11 & 12). The language of the King James version here makes it seem that it was James who made the decision for them all like a presiding judge. That is not the case. Where the text reads "my sentence" it should read, "my thinking" is. What James did think, however, is very important, for not only did all the leaders agree to it, but it was also owned or inspired of the Holy Spirit.

His thoughts were: that they not trouble the new believers with the yoke of circumcision and the ritual law, but that they urge them to abstain from the pollutions of idolatry and from fornication and from eating the blood of animals with the meat.

They decided to write these things in a formal letter to the church at Antioch. In the letter they repudiated the teaching of those who had come from Judea and taught that they must be circumcised. They endorsed, wholeheartedly, the ministry of Paul and Barnabas, "men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." They not only sent the letter, but also two witnesses, Judas and Silas to explain the same things by mouth. The first church council had an altogether satisfactory accomplishment, for it concluded in unanimity with the Holy Ghost to lay no burden of ritual upon believers, but only wise and sensible abstinence from evil.

III Back at Antioch: When the letter was read to the church at Antioch they understandably rejoiced. The two witnesses ministered in the Spirit to the church, also. The one, Judas then returned to Jerusalem, but Silas chose to remain at Antioch. Paul and Barnabas continued their ministry there for some time. There was, however, one further incident along the same line. Peter visited the assembly at Antioch and enjoyed the fellowship. He had free concourse with the Gentile believers until certain came from Jerusalem, friends of James. Then, fearing those of the circumcision Peter with-

drew and refused to eat with the Gentile believers any more. Barnabas went along with Peter, too. Paul saw the hypocrisy of Peter's action, and rebuked Peter openly for his dissimulation (hiding under false pretenses). The Apostle Paul, better than all the other godly ministers of the apostolic age, understood the importance of the liberty of the Gospel. He would not give place for one moment to the bondage of the rituals of the law as a means of salvation. This is not to say he disregarded the commandments of God. It was the rituals that were done away in Christ. Obedience to the commandments was fulfilled by Christ and continued in us as Christ lives His life through us. We are not saved by joining a church, or by accepting water baptism, nor by receiving holy communion nor confirmation, but by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, apart from all rituals.

IV *Revisiting the Cities and Brethren:* Paul suggested to Barnabas that they go once more and visit the brethren in all the cities where they had preached the Gospel previously. Barnabas was willing and ready to go, but determined to take John Mark, his nephew, along again. Paul remembered how he quit on the last endeavor and would not agree to take him again. The two, Paul and Barnabas, disagreed so sharply that they decided to part company. Barnabas took John Mark and revisited Cyprus while Paul took Silas and went to visit the assemblies in Syria and Cilicia. This took them to Tarsus and the places where, no doubt, Paul ministered before his call to Antioch. So the differences between the two missionary brethren resulted in two teams going forth. Later, Paul recognized a valuable co-worker in John Mark. So the patience of Barnabas with his nephew did eventually bear fruit. May God give us the zeal of Paul and the patience of Barnabas.

EUROPE RECEIVES THE GOSPEL

Read: Acts 16:1-40

Memory Verse: And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. (Acts 16:31)

What we should learn from this Lesson.

1. *The Lord must have young people to carry on the work of the Gospel.*
2. *Sometimes the Lord closes doors of service in natural ways and then opens new opportunities to witness for Him.*
3. *The leading of the Spirit will inevitably be fruitful. Key souls will be brought to Jesus.*
4. *We must not doubt the leading of the Holy Spirit because opposition and difficulties arise.*
5. *The Lord is anxious to bring entire households into His kingdom.*

I Timothy: Paul and Silas set forth from Antioch with the prayers and benediction of the church behind them. They went by land visiting the churches of Syria and Cilicia. How these churches came to exist we are not told, but it is possible and even probable that Paul was used in the days before Barnabas "searched him out" to so witness that some of them were established. Now Paul and Silas visited these assemblies, encouraging and confirming them in the faith. Paul's native city was on this route, so they surely stopped there. From there they would have journeyed through the Taurus range of mountains and westward to Derbe and Lystra. Perhaps it had been five years since the last visit of Paul to these towns. Wholesome assemblies had been established at that time. Now Paul found the work going forward. He found a young and promising believer in Timothy. He was highly esteemed by the leaders of the church. He had a

godly mother, Eunice, and a faithful grandmother, Lois. His father, however, was a Gentile Greek. Paul invited young Timothy to join the missionary team. Perhaps Timothy had witnessed the stoning of Paul on his previous visit and had seen his remarkable restoration. If he had not witnessed it personally, he certainly had heard of it in detail.

Paul did an interesting thing regarding Timothy. He had Timothy circumcised. Paul had fought like a tiger against the requirement of circumcision for the Gentile converts as a prerequisite for salvation, but in this case he had Timothy circumcised. It is a beautiful example of the wisdom of God in Paul. It shows that he was not an inflexible and stubborn leader, but wise and with great common sense. The circumcision of Timothy removed any objection the Jewish believers might have had to his ministry. They knew that his father was a Greek. So Paul wisely had Timothy circumcised.

II *What Next?* Paul, Silas, and Timothy visited the churches in the cities along the way. They proclaimed the liberty which the council had decided on for the Gentile converts and delivered also the decrees which had been urged by the elders at Jerusalem. The churches where the missionary team ministered were blessed and built up spiritually and increased in number also.

As the team was about to go into the Roman province of Asia to preach the word, the Holy Spirit forbade them to go. They had come through Galatia and Phrygia preaching and now proposed to go north toward Bithynia since the Holy Spirit had forbidden them to go south to Asia. The Holy Spirit again, however, hindered and "suffered them not" (Acts 16:7). It must have been puzzling to Paul. He and Silas and Timothy passed through the province of Mysia to the city of Troas. Paul was always anxious to preach the Gospel. No difficulties could discourage his zeal. Yet the Holy Spirit forbade his preaching wherever he turned. So Paul tarried at Troas. He must have looked to the Lord for guidance. The Holy Spirit never works aimlessly. The forbidding of Paul to preach in Asia and Bithynia was caused by the plan of God for an important move into new territory. In the night there appeared, in a vision, a man of Macedonia requesting Paul to come over to Macedonia to help them. Paul instantly recognized the call of God. Now he could understand why the Lord did not allow him to turn to the right hand or the left. There was a great new door to be opened. Macedonia was in Europe in the place which we call Greece. At once then, Paul and his company set sail for Macedonia. The narrative changes at this point from the third

person to first person. "They" now becomes "we", leading many students to believe that Luke himself was the man from Macedonia who came in person as well as in vision to Paul. We cannot be certain of that, but it is sure that Luke joined the company here and travelled with Paul, Silas, and Timothy to Macedonia. They had to go by ship and the wind was with them so that they made the journey in two days' time.

III Success: They landed at Neapolis, the port city for Philippi. It was Paul's custom to visit the chief cities. From these the Gospel reached out to the surrounding places. Philippi was the most important city of Macedonia. It was a colony city, which meant it was like a miniature Rome, enjoying special privileges. There was no synagogue there. This indicates that there were not ten Jewish men in the city. There was, however, a place of prayer and that was, according to custom, by the river. Paul and his company went there and found a group of women praying. He sat down and taught these women the Gospel. One of these women, who was a business woman, "a seller of purple" from the city of Thyatira in the province of Asia, heard the word of the Lord. Her heart was opened by the Lord. She listened attentively to the teaching of Paul and believed the Word. She and her whole household were baptized and then she constrained Paul and his friends to dwell in her house. So the firstfruit of this great new move of God was a business woman. The church at Philippi had its roots in a prayer meeting of women down by the river. How many assemblies have roots in a ladies' prayer group! This church became a great encouragement to Paul and supported his missionary work like no other assembly.

IV Trouble: As Paul and his friends and the new converts went to prayer, a demon-possessed girl cried out after them, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation" (vs. 17). She certainly spoke the truth. The evil spirit in her inspired supernatural wisdom. Her soothsaying brought her masters great profit. For some days this girl continued to advertise Paul and his mission. He was agitated, however, by this unsolicited endorsement. Jesus, too, had been recognized by the evil spirits, and He bade them be still and leave their victims. Now, suddenly Paul turned on this possessed girl. He commanded the evil spirit to come out of her and in the same hour she was delivered. But now the men who used her lost their meal ticket. Their hope of profit from the exercise of her evil spirit-inspired wisdom was gone. They turned on Paul and his company. They caught them and dragged them before the magistrates in the marketplace. They accused them of troubling the city and teaching

customs which were not lawful for Romans to keep. The mob which assembled rose up and tore off the clothes of Paul and Silas with the consent of the officials and beat them with many stripes and remanded them to prison.

The jailer was charged to keep them secure. He brutally thrust them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in torturous stocks and forthwith went to sleep. At midnight in this miserable condition, Paul and Silas worshipped and sang hymns of praise to God. They did not murmur and wonder if they had missed the leading of the Lord, but steadfastly rejoiced and worshipped. The other prisoners heard the singing and worship and could not help but wonder in amazement what kind of men these could be.

Then there was an earthquake. The doors of the prison opened and the bands of all the prisoners were loosed. The sleeping jailer awoke with a start and saw the prison doors open. He was about to kill himself when Paul cried out that he should do himself no harm for all the prisoners were still there. The jailer called for a light and came before Paul and Silas trembling, and falling down before them asking what he must do to be saved. They urged him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ so he would be saved with his household. He took them, at that midnight hour, to his own lodging (probably above the prison) and washed the stripes of Paul and Silas and spread the table for them. He and all his family believed and were baptized. So another trophy was won for the Lord.

In the morning the magistrates sent word to "let those men go." The prison keeper told Paul and Silas the good news. Paul, however, would not leave things like that. He sent a message back that the magistrates should come personally and release them. Now Paul informed them that they had broken the law when they beat them for they were Roman citizens and uncondemned. Paul did this not for himself, but for the believers in Philippi. He could have avoided the beating by revealing his Roman citizenship sooner. He wanted to establish a climate of tolerance and respect for the believers. The magistrates were frightened when the message was delivered and brought Paul and Silas out and begged them to leave the city without any trouble.

Paul and Silas, however, first visited the house of Lydia once again and ministered to the brethren and then passed on their way southwestward. So the door was opened in Europe for the Gentiles of the Empire to enter the glorious kingdom of God.

PAUL AT ATHENS

Read: Acts 17:1-34

Memory Verse: And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent. (Acts 17:30)

What we should learn from this Lesson.

1. *The victories of the Gospel are usually followed by severe trials and tests.*
2. *Faith which is based on the solid study of the scriptures is a superior faith.*
3. *Religion, philosophy and art are poor substitutes for the living experience of the new birth and indwelling life of the resurrected Christ.*
4. *The natural man has an aversion to moral responsibility. The truth that we will be judged by the One whom God raised from the dead is detested and fought by the wise of this world.*

I Paul at Thessalonica: Even though the Jews had constantly been the persecutors of Paul and his company, he continued, in every place, to preach to the Jews first. Luke, it seems probable, was left behind at Philippi. Paul, Silas and Timothy left Philippi after the jail experience and took the main road to Thessalonica. They probably stopped one night in Amphipolis and another in Apollonia, but they did not establish any work in those places. In Thessalonica, however, they went to the synagogue of the Jews and Paul expounded the scriptures to them for three sabbaths. He used the scriptures, which, of course, were the Old Testament books, and made clear that the scriptures foretold that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise again. No doubt, Paul used Isaiah 53 and Psalm 16. He may have referred to Hosea or other passages. The Jews were looking for a conquering warrior to deliver them from the yoke of Rome. Some of the serious teachers of the Jews saw from scriptures that the Messiah was to suffer, so they developed a two Messiah theology. They expected one to suffer and the other

to conquer. Now Paul, after showing from the scriptures, that the Messiah must suffer, die, and rise again, declared that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled these prophecies and that He was indeed the Messiah.

Some of the Jews were persuaded by Paul's presentation and believed on the Lord. Many Greek proselytes also believed and especially many of the leading women of the Greeks. The unbelieving Jews became envious of Paul's success and in zeal for their traditions, stirred up the low down riff-raff of the city and created an uproar. They attacked the home of Jason, where the missionaries had been staying and desired to lay hands on Paul and his fellow-laborers. When they discovered that they were not there, they took Jason and dragged him before the rulers of the city and accused him of housing these troublemakers "which have turned the world upside down." The Jews distorted the teaching of Paul accusing him of treason for proclaiming another king, Jesus. This disturbed the rulers of Thessalonica. They made Jason post some bond or security and let him go. The brethren then sent Paul and Silas and Timothy away by night. They did not take the main Roman highway this time, but a back road which led to Berea.

The work in Thessalonica can be judged by its results. A solid Christian assembly was established there from which the Gospel "sounded out" to the surrounding region (1 Thess. 1:7-8). Two of Paul's epistles were addressed to the believers of Thessalonica and in the first he glowingly recalls "and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven" (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

II Paul at Berea: When Paul and his helpers arrived at Berea, they again entered into the synagogue of the Jews. These Jews were more noble than those of Thessalonica. Their "nobility" stemmed from the fact that they not only listened to Paul, but that they also searched the scriptures for themselves to see if what Paul preached was corroborated by the Word of God. Their faith was based then upon a personal conviction rooted in the Scriptures and not only on the preaching of the apostle. Here is certainly an important lesson for us today. We ought to search the scriptures ourselves concerning salvation and holiness and Divine healing and the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the Lord's return. To be sure, we may receive help and inspiration through the witnessing and preaching of God's servants, but the strongest faith is based upon personal enlightenment.

Of course, many in Berea believed the Gospel. Again many proselytes believed

and especially honorable women. There seems to have been an especially wonderful work among the women of Macedonia. Lydia in Philippi was the first to turn to the Lord in that province. Then both in Thessalonica and in Berea the honorable Greek women came to the Lord in large numbers. Later in Athens, Damaris, a woman of note, believed.

Somehow the zealous unbelievers at Thessalonica found out about the preaching of Paul at Berea. They came there, a journey of about 100 miles and stirred up opposition against the servants of the Lord again. So the new disciples sent Paul away. They made it appear that Paul fled by sea, but instead some brethren escorted Paul by land to Athens. Silas and Timothy remained at Berea for a time. When the brethren left Paul, he sent word with them that Silas and Timothy should come speedily to join him in Athens.

III *Paul at Athens:* There was plenty to see in Athens at that time. It was, of course, the capital city of Greece. Athens was the center of philosophy and art and architecture of that age. Four hundred years before Christ, Alexander the Great had conquered the whole world and established Greece as an empire. He died at the age of 35. The influence of Greek culture did not end with the overthrow of its empire by Rome. Although Rome conquered militarily, Greece still ruled in culture and intellect. The influence of Athens still permeated the empire. The Hellenist Jews were influenced by Greek thought. Paul himself, was raised in Tarsus which was a center of Greek culture. Athens truly was an interesting place. Another author who visited Greece and Athens nearly the same time as Paul wrote seven books to describe his travels. Athens was described at greater length in those books than any other place. The temples, the buildings, the philosophies, the statuary all are described at great length. Paul certainly was not oblivious of all of this, but it made him indignant. All this was nothing but dying or dead remnants of the past. He dismissed all of this with one phrase: "he saw the city wholly given to idolatry."

He could not idly wait for his companions but went to the synagogues of the Jews and disputed with them. Daily in the marketplace he held forth and attracted the attention of some. He preached Jesus and the resurrection to them. The two main groups of philosophical thought were the Epicureans, who taught that the greatest good was pleasure; and the Stoicks, who taught that the greatest good was virtue. They (both groups) took him to Areopagus where they would formally listen and consider this new doctrine. The Athenians' main vocation seems to have been to hear some new

thing. They were intellectually curious. No doubt, they would gladly have erected two new shrines in respect to Paul's message. One for Jesus and one for resurrection. Ideas as well as persons were deified in the statuary of the city. There were temples of all sorts. Paul, at Areopagus, set forth a beautiful presentation. He noted the super religious nature of the Athenians. He especially commented on the altar he had seen dedicated to "the unknown God." He declared that he would reveal this unknown God to them. He was the creator of all things on earth and in heaven. The creator could not dwell in temples made with hands. Neither did God need gifts and offerings from the shrines. He was almighty and had made of one blood all the people of the earth and set the bounds of their habitation. Paul told the listeners that this unknown God was very near them "for in Him we live and move and have our being" (vs. 28). The preacher quoted one of the Greek poets who asserted that "we are the offspring of God," and by this reproved all the statuary of Athens.

Finally, Paul insisted on the responsibility of the individual. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now all men were called to repent from the vanity of idolatry and self indulgence. God had appointed a day of accountability and a judge whom He had raised from the dead to judge all that dwell on the earth. At this demand of moral accountability the Athenians rebelled. Some laughed and mocked. Some put Paul off and proposed to hear him again. Intellectual curiosity stimulated the wise of Athens, but moral responsibility they could not bear to consider. The natural heart of man is the same today. The whole theory of evolution has found such a ready acceptance because of humanity's natural aversion to responsibility and accountability.

Not many wise, not many noble, accept the simple truth, but thank God, there are some. No flourishing assembly was established at Athens. No epistle was written to the believers there in particular. But a few believed, Dionysius and Damaris and a few others. Some outstanding and influential believers did come out of the church at Athens in the early centuries after Christ, however, among them are Publius, Aristedes and Athenegoras of the second century, and later Basil and Gregory. Too often the intellect hinders the understanding of the simple Gospel. It is hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed unto babes. How gracious of God to offer His redemption in such a way that children and simple men and women of every nation may obtain it.

VICTORY AT CORINTH

Read: Acts 18:1-28

Memory Verse: Then spake the Lord to Paul by night in a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee for I have much people in this city. (Acts 18:9, 10)

What we should learn from this Lesson.

1. *Even in very wicked places the Lord has people who will hear and believe the Gospel.*
2. *When we are in the will of God we can count on God's protection and care.*
3. *The Lord often uses behind-the-scenes vessels to minister to His preachers and teachers.*
4. *It is good for every Christian worker to be open to instruction and further light.*

I Wicked Corinth: From Athens Paul went northwest to Corinth. While Athens was still the intellectual and educational capital of Greece, Corinth was the Roman headquarters for the province of Achaia in southern Greece. It was a very wealthy city with flourishing commerce. About 200,000 free persons lived there and about 500,000 slaves. Corinth was one of the most wicked cities of the empire. The phrase "to live as a Corinthian," was an expression of that time to describe someone living in unbridled vice and lust. Corinthians were often portrayed in dramas as being always drunk. Their main heathen gods were Poseidon, god of the sea; and Aphrodite, god of love. The temple of Aphrodite housed 1,000 priestesses of vice and lust.

To this place the Lord led Paul. He went as his custom was, to the synagogue of the Jews where he preached on the sabbaths. He found employment in the tentmak-

ing community and supported himself by this means for some time. There, among the tent and sail makers, Paul found Aquila and Priscilla, Christians who recently were expelled from Rome by Claudius, the emperor. He had commanded all Christians to leave Rome. Paul stayed in their house and had good fellowship with them. These two are a notable pair for they were used of God behind the scenes to do a great work for the kingdom. It seems certain that the wife, Priscilla, was the prominent one. Custom would have caused her name to be omitted if she were not the more prominent of the two. Also every time the two are mentioned after Acts 18:2, Priscilla's name comes first which is completely contrary to custom. Translators have wrongly reversed the order of the names in the King James version.

II *Much People In This City:* After some time, Silas and Timotheus came from Macedonia. They may have brought offerings to Paul from Philippi. That assembly was the first and foremost supporter of the Apostle Paul's missionary work. After these two arrived, Paul was pressed in the Spirit to testify to the Jews that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. When the chief Jews opposed Paul and blasphemed the Gospel, Paul departed from them advising them that their blood was on their own heads.

Instead of the synagogue, Paul used the house of Justus Titus for his meeting hall. He was a Greek who worshipped God. He became a companion of Paul and then a fellow-worker. The epistle to Titus was addressed to him. From among the Jews, Crispus the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed with all his household. Also a good number of the Corinthian people believed the Gospel message. There probably were threats against Paul and his helpers from the unbelieving Jewish community, but the Lord appeared to Paul in a vision in the night and assured him that he need not fear. He was advised to speak boldly, for the Lord was with him and there were many in Corinth whom the Lord would bring into His kingdom. Although in other places Paul did suffer bodily harm and counted it a privilege to suffer for Christ, in this case, the Lord promised Paul full protection, "no man shall set on thee to hurt thee" (Acts 18:10). Paul continued his ministry in Corinth for one year and six months. A blessed assembly was established with many believers full of the Holy Spirit. All the gifts of the Spirit were in operation in that assembly. The congregation had many problems which Paul dealt with in his epistles to them. Their problems and excesses are relevant today to Charismatic groups and in Pentecostal assemblies where more attention is given to the gifts than to the Giver. It was to this church, in the vile lustful city of Corinth, where the corrupt worship of Aphrodite flourished, that Paul wrote the beautiful "love chap-

ter": 1 Corinthians 13. In the midst of a vile and corrupt society and in spite of active persecutions and threats from the Jews, a large and vital New Testament church was born to the glory of God.

Gallio, the Roman proconsul of Achaia was a very reasonable and fair man. When the Jewish leaders became alarmed over the success of Paul's ministry, they brought him before the judgment seat of Gallio. They accused Paul of teaching the people to worship contrary to the law, and hoped that Gallio would forbid Paul to teach and to preach any more. But the official perceived that Paul's preaching could be contrary only to the Jews' law and was no threat to Rome. Therefore, he refused to judge the matter and drove the Jews out of his court. Paul did not even get the opportunity to defend himself.

Then the Greeks took the occasion of Gallio's indifference to the Jews' cause and vented their anti-Jewish feelings on Sosthenes and the chief ruler of the synagogue. When Gallio paid no attention to these charges it was indirectly an assurance of the protection of Rome for the teaching and preaching of Paul. If Gallio had only become a Christian at this time he could have spared himself much grief, for he later took his own life. It may be that Sosthenes, the succeeding chief ruler of the synagogue became a Christian, however. At least, when Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthian church he included a Sosthenes in the salutation (see 1 Corinthians 1:1).

III Back To Antioch: When Paul was ready to leave Corinth, he took Priscilla and Aquila with him. They stopped at Ephesus on the way toward Jerusalem, and at Antioch. Paul entered into the synagogue of the Jews at Ephesus and reasoned with the Jews. They were interested and wanted Paul to remain there for a while, but he was very desirous to be in Jerusalem for the feast (probably the Passover). He left Priscilla and Aquila there, however, and promised to return to them if the Lord so willed. Then he set sail from Ephesus and landed at Caesarea. From there he went up (to Jerusalem) and greeted the church there. That is all that Luke records of Paul's visit to Jerusalem which was so important to the apostle. It may be that he was coolly received by the brethren there. At any rate, he then went "down" to Antioch. The "down" probably indicates the lower elevation of Antioch for Jerusalem is situated at an elevation of 2550 feet while Antioch is barely above sea level. After spending "some time" there he set out once again on a missionary enterprise (his third). Paul once again crossed the Taurus range and revisited "in order" the assemblies of Galatia and Phrygia moving inexorably toward Ephesus.

IV Ephesus: Meanwhile, Priscilla and Aquila remained at Ephesus, witnessing for the Lord. A visitor came to the synagogue and preached there with good results. He was Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria in northern Africa. He was an eloquent speaker and very fervent in spirit. Above all he was "mighty in the scriptures." We are told that he was instructed in the way of the Lord, but that he knew only of the baptism of John. From the things which are recorded here, it is difficult to determine just how much Apollos knew of the way of the Lord. He certainly preached repentance, and also certainly did not preach or personally experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Whether or not he knew of the redemption accomplished through Jesus is questionable. The converts of his ministry (Acts 19:1-3) seemed to know nothing of Jesus and had not received the Holy Spirit.

When Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos teach and preach, they took him aside and "expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." To his credit, this man who was mighty in the scriptures and eloquent in delivery and fervent in spirit, was also teachable in spirit. There is much for all of us to learn. Sometimes the Lord may use an unlikely vessel to instruct us in the way of the Lord more perfectly. Let us always be ready to listen and to prayerfully consider suggestions and advice the Lord may send our way. This man became a greater blessing to the churches and more valuable in the Kingdom of God when he took the teaching of Priscilla and Aquila.

Apollos went on to Achaia, taking with him letters of introduction and recommendation from the brethren in Ephesus. Paul came to highly esteem Apollos as a fellow laborer, urging him to revisit the churches. "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase," Paul wrote to the Corinthians. Luke tells us that in Achaia, Apollos helped the believers much and mightily convinced the Jews there from the scriptures that Jesus was indeed their Messiah.

THE HOLY SPIRIT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Read: Acts 19:1-41

Memory Verse: And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. (Acts 19:6)

What we should learn from this Lesson.

1. *Power for an overcoming life and a fruitful ministry comes from the infilling of the Holy Spirit.*
2. *Knowing the orthodox doctrines of the Gospel and even the methods of the servants of God, is not enough to overcome the power of Satan. The vessel of the Lord must have the Presence and power of the Lord Himself.*
3. *A real Christian rebirth will inspire a thorough cleanup of evil literature and art from our homes.*
4. *In three years' time the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the wholly yielded life of Paul transformed a group of twelve dull men into the foremost New Testament church.*

I Have You Received? True to his word, the apostle Paul returned to Ephesus (see Acts 18:21). Apollos had moved on from Ephesus, after being instructed more perfectly in the things of God, to Corinth where he did a good work. When Paul arrived at Ephesus he found a small group of believers. He must have noticed, as they worshipped together, a total lack of spiritual yieldedness. Their meeting may have been dead and dry. This led Paul to ask the twelve brethren if they had received the Holy Spirit since they believed. They responded that they had never even heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul questioned them regarding their baptism in water. They had indeed been baptized as John the Baptist had taught. It seems quite clear from this that these men were early converts of Apollos, for he had eloquently preached from the Old Testament, knowing

only the baptism of John.

When Paul learned this he explained that John's baptism was only preparatory to the coming of the Messiah. John's message was pointing to the one who was coming after him, who would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. So when the brethren heard this they were rebaptized in the name of Jesus. Then Paul laid his hands on them and prayed for them to receive the Holy Ghost. The Spirit came upon them and the twelve began to speak with tongues and to prophesy. Thus a Holy Ghost assembly was born. New life was infused into these believers.

What a difference the infilling of the Holy Spirit makes today also! New, glorious life and power from above possesses the believer. Zeal, faith and confidence are all greatly enlarged when the Spirit baptizes. Weak defeated and timid believers are transformed into powerful victorious and bold witnesses for the Lord. Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed? How long is it since you received a new infilling of the power from on high? Every believer has the right to a more abundant baptism. Don't forfeit that glorious experience by indifference or self satisfaction. Get your full portion. It is the promise of the Father for you.

II *The Word of God Prevails:* Paul as usual ministered first to the Jews at the local synagogue. He spoke boldly to the Jews persuading them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. For three months Paul ministered at the synagogue. We learn from Paul's testimony later to the elders of the church at Ephesus that he had worked with his own hands while there to support himself and his coworkers financially (see Acts 20:43). Presently, the Jews hardened their hearts against the teachings of Paul. They chose not to believe the Gospel and they spoke evil of the way of the Lord before the multitude.

Then Paul moved his headquarters to the school of a man named Tyrannus. The energetic ministry of Paul at this time is truly amazing. He reminded the leaders on his last visit to that area, how for three years he had ministered to them night and day with tears; both publicly and in house to house visitation. His teaching at the school of Tyrannus continued for two whole years. Luke records that all the people in the Roman province of Asia heard the word of the Lord at this time, both Jews and Greeks. There must have been an intensive missionary program carried out to accomplish this.

Wonderful miracles of deliverance were wrought by God through Paul at this time. Handkerchiefs and aprons from the touch of the apostle were taken to the sick

and to the demon possessed. The sick were healed and the demon possessed delivered. This is the only place in the scripture where such remote deliverances were wrought. These things, of course, brought many to the Lord.

Seven Jewish brothers decided that they would also attempt to cast out demons. They were all sons of Sceva. They attempted to exorcise a demon in the name of "Jesus whom Paul preacheth." This did not work at all. The demon cried out of the victim, "Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are ye?" Then the possessed man leaped upon the seven and beat them all up. They finally retreated from the house naked and injured. The story spread through the whole city, resulting in glory to the Lord and of course, greater respect for the apostle Paul.

Those who would minister to the sick and cast out demons must have the life to back up their work. Evil powers are very real and nothing to fool around with. There is a lot of careless "casting out of demons" in the name of the Lord today that is pure foolishness. Only in perfect union with the Lord did Paul cast demons out. Some who boast of ministries of exorcism today put more demons into people than they drive out. Satan loves attention. We are to pay attention to Jesus. While we look to Him, the power will come and the evil one will be cast out.

The believers of Ephesus became aware that the occult was contrary to the Gospel. They came and acknowledged their involvement with the works of darkness. They confessed and repented. They decided to have a great bonfire to burn all the books and literature on sorcery, astrology and demon power. They estimated the price of all the literature thus burned to be fifty thousand pieces of silver. Ephesus was known as the center for the occult. But the Word of God met and overcame the evil powers. The word of the Lord grew and multiplied and the evil occult and idolatrous and filthy worship so prevalent in the city declined.

III *Diana Deserted:* So many people believed on the Lord Jesus in and around Ephesus that there was a noticeable decline in the worship of Diana. During the month of May each year there was a festival honoring Diana. It was a yearly orgy of fleshly indulgence of the most vile type. Visitors came from far and near to indulge their grosser lusts, and that in the name of religion. Silver shrines were sold to the revelers which they took with them. But now, so many people had received Jesus as Lord, that the silver shrines were not selling. The silversmiths who made their living from this trade had a severe recession. One of them, Demetrius, called the craftsmen together to discuss this problem. Their first concern was not the honor of their goddess but their pockets. The

desertion of worshippers from Diana to Jesus hit them where it hurt most: right in the pocketbook. It was a trade union meeting of sorts and the craftsmen got very excited when they realized that their profits were in jeopardy. They cried out "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." They shouted as they left their meeting and the whole city soon became involved. They caught several of Paul's companions and dragged them into the theatre (stadium). Paul was restrained by his friends from entering the arena to attempt to speak to the mob. As is true in most mass meetings, the majority knew nothing at all. When Alexander, attempted to speak to the crowd, they mindlessly roared for two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

Finally, the town clerk quieted the people and then reasoned with them. He explained that there was no reason to cry out the greatness of Diana, for all the world was aware that Ephesians worshipped Diana and the image which had fallen down from Jupiter. He explained that Paul and his companions had not robbed the temple of Diana nor even blasphemed the goddess. If there were any complaints by the tradesmen, the town clerk insisted, they should be heard in a lawful assembly of deputies and officials. In effect the official gave protection to Paul and his companions and sanctioned their ministry as being within the law. At the same time he warned the tradesmen and the mob that they had endangered the privileged status of their city by the unlawful uproar.

After this episode Paul hastened his departure from Ephesus. He had intended to stay until Pentecost, but then decided to be in Jerusalem for that feast. He wrote to the Corinthians that a great and effectual door was opened to him in Ephesus and that there were many adversaries. So from a dull meeting of twelve followers of John the Baptist there sprang the greatest of all the New Testament churches. God is able to accomplish much when He has a group of yielded, Holy Ghost vessels at His disposal who are not afraid to labor night and day with tears of intercession. May God raise up such laborers in our midst in these days.

PAUL: FAITHFUL PASTOR

Read: Acts 20:1-38

Memory Verse: Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. (Acts 20:26 & 27)

What we should learn from this Lesson.

1. *Those who are saved through the Gospel need exhortation and teaching in order to develop into mature and fruitful believers.*
2. *The faithful pastor will keep nothing back from his flock, sharing with them all that they need to be fully developed Christians.*
3. *Afflictions and trials may come to the servant of God, but they ought not to deter him from finishing his ministry with joy.*
4. *Though apostles and pastors are taken from the church, the Lord and the word of His grace are always available.*

I Much Exhortation: Paul labored for about three years at Ephesus. It was the longest stop on any of his journeys. It was a fruitful ministry to be sure, for a group of twelve dull converts developed into the foremost New Testament church. Early history reveals that John, the beloved, also ministered to the saints at Ephesus. In the book of Revelation the very first of the letters to the seven churches of Asia is addressed to the church at Ephesus. Abbott in his *History of Christianity* records that John returned to Ephesus after his exile on Patmos, where he continued his ministry though he was very old. So the high point of Paul's third missionary journey was the establishment of a vigorous church at Ephesus.

After the great uproar instigated by Demetrius and the craftsmen which made silver shrines to Diana, the goddess of love, Paul bid farewell to the disciples at Ephesus

and went into Macedonia. There he revisited the assemblies which had been founded on his second journey. Though we are not specifically told which cities he visited nor the order of his stops, we can safely suppose that Paul stopped at Thessalonica and Berea, perhaps also Philippi, before going to Corinth. The church at Corinth in the province of Achaia was of great concern to Paul. He had written them a very strong letter in response to a letter from the church there to him. The epistle of first Corinthians was sent from Ephesus and carried by Titus. After it was written, Paul was deeply concerned as to how they would respond to his strong teaching. He left Ephesus and went to Troas to wait for Titus. When Titus did not come, Paul went on to Macedonia. There he met Titus and was overjoyed to learn of the positive response to his letter. The church at Corinth took his advice and corrected things that had gotten out of line. From somewhere on this third missionary journey in the region of Macedonia Paul wrote and sent the second Epistle to the Corinthians. It was a joyful letter occasioned by their wholesome response to his teaching. Paul followed his letter to Corinth where he remained for the three winter months. In all the places Paul revisited he gave the believers much exhortation.

Let us be sure to recognize the importance of spiritual growth and fruitfulness. The new birth of believers is a beginning. Many were born into the kingdom of God on these missionary journeys, but Paul was not satisfied to see many babes born into the kingdom. He determined, by the grace of God to teach and exhort them until they became mature and fruitful disciples. In our society today in the United States an astonishing percentage of the population testifies to being born again. Unfortunately, that is as far as it goes with the great majority of them. They never learn the lessons of overcoming and of the victorious Christian life. They do not have much interest in self-denial, let alone death to self and the resultant resurrection life. There is no greater need among believers today than for teachers and pastors who will teach and exhort and discipline the babes in Christ till they come to the stature of mature believers: like Christ. Be sure that you do not remain an infant in the Christian way. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior.

II *Troas and Miletus:* Paul was about to leave Corinth, sailing directly to Syria when he learned of a plot of the Jews against his life. No doubt, the hand of the Lord was guiding Paul for he then changed his plans and retraced his steps to Thessalonica, and Philippi. His fellow-workers, however, sailed before Paul and waited for him to join them at Troas. Paul finally did leave Philippi at the time of the Passover. The voyage

took five days. The reunited workers spent a week at Troas and had a meeting on the first day of the week (Sunday). They partook of the Lord's Supper and then Paul preached to them. Being there for only one Lord's day and intending to journey on in the morning, Paul spoke at great length. At midnight he was still going strong. The meeting was in a large room on the third floor of a building. The room was lighted by many lamps. No doubt, these lamps used much of the oxygen in the room and contributed to the deep sleep which young Eutychus fell into. He sat by the window, and while asleep, unfortunately fell through that opening. Those who rushed to his aid from the third floor found him dead. Paul also came down and urged the believers not to be troubled. He assured them that Eutychus' life was still in his body. Then Paul fell on the young man and embraced him till his life returned. The believers were greatly relieved to have the young man restored once again. Paul and the disciples of Troas returned to the meeting hall and after a pause for food the meeting continued until the break of day. All who attended that meeting certainly would never forget it. In the morning the party journeyed on. Paul's fellow workers went by ship on to Assos, but he went by foot. We can only conjecture why he went thus. Perhaps for solitary meditation and for the exercise of the long walk, or perhaps he met and ministered to some chosen vessel by the way. He rejoined his companions at Assos and they sailed together to Mitylene and the next day to Chios. Then to Samos, Trogyllium and Miletus. From Miletus Paul sent messengers to Ephesus to call the elders of the church there to a conference with him. He hoped to be at Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. It was about thirty miles from Miletus to Ephesus, so there were several days of waiting involved.

III All The Counsel of God: The elders of Ephesus did come and Paul ministered to them. He told them that the Holy Spirit witnessed to him in every place he stopped that bonds and afflictions were before him in Jerusalem. He confided to the elders of Ephesus that these warnings did not shake him. He did not draw back even from martyrdom for the cause of Christ. He expected to finish his course with joy. Paul told the elders that they would not see His face again. He reminded them how he zealously labored night and day with tears (Acts 20:19 & 31). He had ministered both publicly in meetings, and privately in visitation, keeping nothing back which was profitable for them. He had preached to both the Jews and to the Gentiles and testified to the assurance that he had discharged his duty faithfully. He was "pure from the blood of all men" (vs. 26). The greatest testimony of Paul's ministry is in those words, "I have

not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (vs. 27). Many good ministers of the gospel emphasize one aspect of truth which has been made real to them. Some preach healing all the time to the neglect of the truth of sanctification. Others teach the new birth and lead many to the Lord and stop there. Some speak only of tongues and the baptism of the Spirit and the gifts. Still others over emphasize the manner of the second coming and the rapture and millennial kingdom to the neglect of holy living and service now. Paul preached the whole truth of God. He gave the church a well-rounded diet of milk and strong meat. We need pastors like that today, who are not content to enlarge the membership and meet the budget of their church, but determine to instruct the believers in the whole counsel of God that they may become mature fruit-bearing workers themselves.

Paul also had a double warning for the elders of the church at Ephesus. He warned them of wolve-like workers who would visit the assembly at Ephesus not sparing the flock. Jesus also warned of false teachers and prophets (see Matt. 7:15). He also called them wolves. They are to be recognized by their manner of life. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Loose and high living workers are a disgrace to the kingdom of God. Let us beware also. The apostle also warned that from within the church at Ephesus there would also arise men who would attempt to draw the disciples after themselves and teach perverse and permissive things to gain popularity. The epistle of Jude deals with just this type of thing. What an example Paul had set. He had coveted nothing material. In fact, he had supported himself and his co-workers by working with his own hands. He had taught and preached publicly and privately, and prayed with tears until a wholesome church was established. Now he commended the leaders of that church to God and to the word of His grace. Paul would see them no more. For this they sorrowed greatly and "wept sore," but God would still be there, and the word of His grace would still guide and instruct them in the faith. With this confidence, Paul bid the elders farewell. They fell around his neck and wept much because Paul told them that they would see him no more. They kissed Paul and he reboarded the ship and set sail for the return to Jerusalem.

PAUL'S LAST VISIT TO JERUSALEM

Read: Acts 21:1-40

Memory Verse: Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 21:13)

What we should learn from this Lesson.

1. *Wherever we go we should search out the believers and enjoy fellowship with them.*
2. *Loyalty to Christ and love for lost souls should be the foremost motive for our choices.*
3. *Compromise of principles will not accomplish anything for the glory of God.*
4. *God's mercy and faithfulness overrules our mistakes.*

I Finding the Disciples: Paul told the elders of the church of Ephesus that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him by the Spirit-filled vessels in every city which he visited that bonds and afflictions awaited him in Jerusalem. He told them that these warnings did not move him. He intended to finish his course with joy. His life was not more precious to him than the glory of God. He was fully persuaded that it was God's will for him to go to Jerusalem even though he would suffer there.

From Miletus where Paul met with the elders of Ephesus, Paul and his companions sailed to Coos and to Rhodes and then Patara. There they changed ships and sailed south of Cyprus directly to Tyre. The ship was to unload her cargo there before proceeding to Ptolemais and Caesarea. At Tyre, Paul and his company found the disciples and enjoyed fellowship with them for seven days. The Revised Version accurately translates this passage, "having searched for and found the disciples." That

was what they did. They looked for the believers. Isn't that what we should do when we travel to places away from our homes? Too many Christians avoid the precious fellowship with other believers while they travel. There is no record of how there came to be a group of believers in Tyre. It could have been that some from Tyre were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and took the Gospel back there, or perhaps during the persecution after Stephen's martyrdom some had fled to Tyre with the message. These believers also warned Paul, by the Spirit, of the suffering and bonds which awaited him at Jerusalem. When Paul left after seven days, the disciples with their wives and children brought Paul and his company on their way. They knelt down on the shore and prayed for their fellow disciples. It was a touching scene.

The ship stopped briefly at Ptolemais and Paul had one day of fellowship with the believers there. The next day they went on to Caesarea and there they disembarked from the ship and located Philip, the evangelist. They stayed many days with Philip. This is the same Philip who fled Jerusalem during the persecution which arose after the death of Stephen. That persecution was instigated primarily by Saul of Tarsus. Now, about twenty years later the same man, transformed by the grace and power of God, is a guest in the house of Philip. What interesting talks they must have had. Philip had a heart for souls. He was the first to preach to the Samaritans, and he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch even before the conversion of Cornelius. Now Paul could tell much of the work of God among the Gentiles. Philip had four unmarried daughters who were all filled with the Holy Spirit and who prophesied. It is not specifically recorded, but it seems likely that these young women also warned Paul of the bonds and afflictions before him at Jerusalem.

While there at Philip's house in Caesarea the prophet Agabus came. He is the same man who foretold the great drought which took place in the time of Claudius Caesar (see Acts 11:28). This man came down from Judea and when he found Paul, took his belt and dramatically bound his own hands and feet with it and proclaimed, "Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles" (Acts 21:11).

When Luke and the other companions of Paul heard and saw this, they were frightened and begged him not to go to Jerusalem. But Paul would not be moved. He reproved his companions and asked them why they were attempting to weaken his determination to do the will of God. He was ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem. It is interesting that there seems to be a great difference in the guidance of the Spirit here. Some think Paul made a mistake in plunging ahead despite

the warnings. Some feel that Paul should have delayed his visit. Others believe that Paul was right and that the apparent warnings of the Holy Spirit were a test of Paul's consecration. Luke and the other fellow-laborers did the wise thing. They saw that Paul was determined to go and stopped their protests and said, "The will of the Lord be done" (vs. 14). Then they picked up the baggage and went on.

Those who warned Paul of the danger ahead had good motives. They loved Paul and recognized the value of his ministry. Paul's motives, however, were superior to this, for he was committed totally to loyalty to Christ and love for souls. The test of motives is revealing when differences arise. Jesus, too, was tempted to save Himself from the cross by Peter's suggestion, but Jesus cast it quickly behind Him.

II *Thousands of Jews...Zealous of the Law:* When the company came to Jerusalem it was at the time of the feast of Pentecost. The city was crowded with Jews who came from everywhere for the feast. As many as two million may have been in the city at that time. Paul and his company were gladly received. Paul carefully related all that God had wrought among the Gentiles through his ministry. When James (the Lord's brother) and the other leaders heard the report they glorified God. Quickly, however, James expressed his fears for the safety of Paul. He explained that there were now thousands of Jewish believers and that they were all zealous for the rituals and traditions of the old law. They had been informed that Paul taught the Jews who lived in Gentile cities to forsake the law of Moses and particularly not to circumcise their sons or walk in the old Jewish customs. He asked Paul to identify himself with four men who had taken a Nazarite vow. James wanted Paul to "purify thyself with them," to prove and show the Jews that he did still revere the Jewish rituals and customs. This was a misguided request. It was unfortunate in the first place that there would be an assembly of thousands of Jews who were so zealous of the outdated and superceded rituals and types of the Old Testament. They should have directed their zeal toward the propagation of the Gospel and toward real Holy Ghost liberty. The church at Jerusalem was an assembly which had gone backwards and become entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Paul should not have yielded to this request for compromise. Why should he pretend to be purifying himself when he was perfectly pure? Years before, Paul had rebuked Peter for his dissimulation before the Galatians. Now he was asked to dissimulate before the Jews of Jerusalem. Again Paul's motives were pure. He did not do this to protect himself from physical harm. He did it, most assuredly, so that he might have the opportunity to minister and speak to his "brethren after the flesh."

So earnestly did Paul desire their conversion that he once said that he could wish himself accursed if that would accomplish the salvation of his people. In this case the principle of Christian liberty should have taken precedence over the noble motive of love for the people.

In any case, the compromise was a total failure. James, who sought the protection of Paul, failed completely to secure this end. Paul, who desired by this compromise to befriend the Jews in order to minister to them, failed totally too. Just as the seven days of purification were ending some Jews of Asia saw Paul in the temple. They supposing (wrongfully) that Paul had brought the uncircumcised Trophimus of Ephesus into the temple thereby polluting that "holy place" cried out an accusation against Paul. A mob quickly assembled and they laid hold of Paul and dragged him out of the temple intending to kill him.

Fortunately, the chief captain of the Roman garrison was alert for trouble. As soon as he heard of the uproar he rushed in and took Paul out of the hands of the mob of Jews. They stopped beating Paul when the soldiers came. The captain could not find out from the mob what Paul had done, or even who he was. He assumed that Paul was the same revolutionary Egyptian who had led 400 men in a murderous revolt. The soldiers carried Paul up the stairs of the fortress to keep him from the violence of the mob. Paul asked if he could speak with the Captain who was surprised that he could speak Greek. Paul explained who he was and asked for permission to speak to the mob of Jews. When permission was granted the soldiers called for silence and from the stairs Paul addressed the mob of Jews in the Hebrew tongue. He was at home either with Greek or Hebrew and to the Jews he spoke in their tongue and gave his testimony before them. May we always be ready to witness for Christ and give our testimony to a lost world.

PAUL'S TESTIMONY AT JERUSALEM

Read: Acts 22:1-30

Memory Verse: For thou shalt be his witness to all men of what thou hast seen and heard. (Acts 22:15)

What we should learn from this Lesson.

1. *Prejudice can blind us to the great purposes of God. The kingdom of God allows no respect of persons.*
2. *The church of Jesus Christ cannot afford to compromise. The great power of God is lost to the church as soon as it compromises its principles for the sake of popularity.*
3. *The motivation for our service for Christ should be a sincere passion for the fulfillment of the Divine purpose.*
4. *Our personal experience of the glory and power of God is more effective than all theological persuasions and arguments.*

I Paul's Defense: The attempt by James to avoid antagonism against Paul by having him appear to follow the Jewish rituals was a total failure. Despite this compromise the mob of Jews caught Paul and accused him falsely of polluting the temple. They probably would have killed him had not the Roman captain alertly rescued him from the mob. When Paul requested permission to speak to the frenzied Jews, the captain was surprised at Paul's ability to speak Greek. When that permission was granted and silence and attention achieved, Paul spoke in the Hebrew tongue to the Jews. His speech was not aimed at defending himself but in explaining and defending the great purposes of God. He was unable to finish his address to the Jews, so we cannot be absolutely sure of all Paul had in mind to say. But it is clear from what he did say that he was aiming at showing that the Jewish view of exclusive preference for themselves

of the love and blessing of God was incorrect. His argument was quite conclusive and persuasive, but in the end totally rejected in a frenzied outcry.

Paul identified himself with the prejudiced Jews. He had grown up as a Jew and in Jerusalem had been a student of the renowned Gamaliel. He had been taught the traditions and rituals of the law and had imbibed the national pride and prejudice common in that day. He had become exceeding zealous for his religion, just as these Jews to whom he spoke were zealous. Paul explained how that when he was confronted by the followers of "this way", he responded with violent persecution even to death. He had caused many to be imprisoned. Some were present as Paul spoke now, who knew and remembered his violent opposition to the followers of Christ. The High Priest and some of the elders would remember that they had given a written commission to him to arrest and bring to Jerusalem any whom he found in Damascus who were believers in Jesus of Nazareth. Then Paul told of the life-changing experience on the road to Damascus. Near noon on that historic day, there shone suddenly a light brighter than the sun. When he had fallen to the ground he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" When he asked who it was that spoke to him, the answer came clearly at once: "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest." Paul explained that those who traveled with him saw the light but did not hear the voice. Immediately, Paul responded and asked what the **Lord** would have him to do. He was an activist. He had been active and zealous for his religion and nation in ignorance and then he was immediately ready and willing to be a zealous activist for Christ and the truth he now had apprehended. He explained to the attentive listeners how he had been sent, temporarily blinded, to Damascus to await further instructions and revelations. Accordingly, a devout old and respected disciple, named Ananias came and ministered to him. He laid his hands on Paul and prayed for him. His sight was restored and a new vision granted him. Ananias told Paul that the God of his fathers had chosen him "to know His will and to see that Just One, and to hear His voice" (ch. 22:14). He told Paul that he was to be God's witness to **all men**. Thus Paul was turned about. After he had been baptized he began to preach the Christ he so recently had persecuted.

In his speech of defense of the purposes of God, Paul told the crowd of his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. He told how that while he prayed in the temple the Lord appeared to him in a trance and warned him to flee from Jerusalem because the Jews would not accept his testimony of Christ. In his trance Paul reminded the Lord that the Jews all knew of his former hatred and zeal against the believers and how he had stood by and consented to the murder of Stephen. Still the Lord insisted that he

leave Jerusalem. He told Paul that He would send him "far hence unto the Gentiles" (verse 21).

II Prejudice: When Paul said that word, "Gentiles" the mob exploded. They cried out, "away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live." They hysterically tore off their garments and threw dust into the air. The captain, who probably did not understand the speech of Paul in the Hebrew language, forcibly bound Paul with thongs and gave orders to torture him till he would tell what he had said to cause such a violent eruption of the crowd. Calmly, Paul asked if it was lawful for them to beat and bind a Roman citizen. The centurion who bound Paul at once told the captain of Paul's Roman citizenship. Paul was loosed from his bonds and not beaten. There is no value, of course, in unnecessary suffering. God rewards generously every bit of suffering for His name's sake when it is unavoidable, but to suffer unnecessarily is foolish.

The cause of the great outcry against Paul was, of course, the Jewish prejudice. The Jews had misunderstood the dealings of God from the beginning. They never understood that God's purpose in revealing Himself to them as a nation was intended to show and persuade all the nations about them of the glory of Jehovah, the Creator. It had been the intention of God, to so bless the nation of Israel as **they obeyed His commandments**, that all the other nations of the world would forsake their idols and created gods in favor of the living God of Israel. The Jews, however, chose to interpret the revelation of God to themselves as an indication of His love for **them** to the exclusion of all the rest of the world. God's love is and always has been for all the people of the world. In the Gospel era there is absolutely no respect of persons. God's kingdom cannot prefer any one above another. No nation not even the Jewish nation, is favored by God at the expense of another nation. Social standing makes no difference to the Lord. Equal rights are offered to women in the economy of God. Young and old have the same opportunity to know and serve the Lord. Systems of doctrine that put down the black race as inferior, or put up the Jewish nation as the privileged people of God are in error. All are concluded as sinners and all are offered full salvation and redemption through the atonement of Christ and **no other** way.

III The Compromised Church: It is a sad commentary on the Christian church at Jerusalem which James, the Lord's brother, gave to Paul: "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe: and they are all zealous of the law"

(ch. 21:20). The "law" which James referred to was the ritual law, circumcision, vows, washings, new moons etc. When the question of Christian liberty had arisen at Antioch in Syria, the church council had ruled in favor of liberty by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. They sent letters to this effect to the church in Antioch. This proclamation was read in many Gentile assemblies and caused joy. Paul understood it well and taught it clearly, that nothing could be superadded to repentance and faith in Christ as a necessity to salvation. He said that if anyone taught so he should be anathema (cursed). But this is exactly what happened in Jerusalem. There was no clear, clean break with the outward traditions and rituals. One wonders if there would have been so "many thousands of Jews...which believe" if there had been the clean break with the works of the law. And perhaps the church at Jerusalem would have had more of the power of God had they not compromised the fundamental principles of the liberty of the Gospel.

Should we not learn from the church at Jerusalem to avoid compromise? A compromised church is a weak church. We cannot afford to do less than make a clean break from all the world and the flesh in our preaching and teaching of the Gospel. How many thousands there may be in our assemblies is not nearly so important as the quality of the converts and the power of God in our lives and work. The compromises made by churches today are more likely to be in the area of holy living and separation from the world. Often when holy living is taught a cry of "legalism" is raised against it, but "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." It is sheer stupidity to speak of holiness imputed by the grace of God when we continue to deliberately live fleshly and careless lives. The main argument of the Epistle of 1 John is against such a heresy. The motivation for compromise in the church is still the same: to gain popularity and add numbers. May God help us to refuse to compromise the principles of the Gospel and to seek more for the approval of God than for the approbation and popularity of man.

PAUL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

Read: Acts 23:1-35

Memory Verse: And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. (Acts 23:11)

What we should learn from this Lesson.

1. *We should be alert to seize each opportunity to witness of and for our Lord.*
2. *It is important for us to always live in "good conscience before God."*
3. *The more real the hope of resurrection is to us, the more freedom we will enjoy from the bondage of earthly fears.*
4. *When we live for God's glory and in all good conscience, the Lord will manifest Himself to us and undertake to lead and guide us to the end.*
5. *The Lord often uses natural means to accomplish supernatural results.*

I I Am A Pharisee: Claudius Lysias, the chief captain of the Jerusalem garrison determined to find out what accusation the Jews had against Paul. The day after the uproar when he had rescued Paul from the Jewish mob, the captain ordered the Jewish leaders to appear before him. He loosed Paul from his bonds and brought him before the council. Now Paul had an opportunity to answer for himself. He began by saying that he had always lived in good conscience before God. This was certainly true. Before his conversion Paul was doing what his conscience told him was right. When the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus and he finally realized that his zeal was misguided, he immediately turned about and preached the faith he had formerly attacked. He testified in another place that before his conversion he had lived, according to the traditions of the law which the Pharisees set forth; blameless. Now,

as he testified to his righteousness and sincerity, Ananias, the high priest, commanded him to be smitten on the mouth. Paul at once rebuked him for actions contrary to the law. He called the high priest, a "whited wall" (hypocrite). When Paul was told that he was rebuking the high priest, he apologized for he quoted: "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people" (Acts 23:5).

When Paul perceived that there were Pharisees among the council, he cried out, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question." (vs.6). This caused a great discussion and dissension in the council. The multitude was divided. Those who were Pharisees or followers of them would have withdrawn the charges against Paul. The Sadducees, however, who did not believe in life hereafter nor in spirits or angels, were insistent in their prosecution of Paul. Such an argument ensued that the chief captain feared they would tear Paul limb from limb. He therefore, once again, pulled the apostle from the clutches of the mob and brought Paul within the safety of the fortress.

Paul's motive in identifying himself with the party of the Pharisees was certainly not to create dissension and division. He rather attempted to use his former connection to win a hearing for his testimony. He wanted to witness, to his people after the flesh, of the glory and reality of the Lord he had come to know so intimately who was risen from the dead. He did not foresee the uproar he would cause by identifying himself with the cause and doctrine of the Pharisees.

II *Be Of Good Cheer:* Paul did not get to finish his testimony before the Jews. He had come to Jerusalem with high hopes for winning many of his own people after the flesh to the Lord Jesus Christ. He had collected a generous offering from the various Gentile assemblies where he ministered, received a cool reception from the "thousands of Jews which believed." They seemed more interested in maintaining the obsolete and superceded traditions and types of the law, than in the glorious liberty and power of the Gospel of Jesus. Now, with Paul in the hands of unbelieving Jews, there is no sign of help or support from these "thousands" of believers. No one came forward on Paul's behalf to explain his actions in the temple or to exonerate his motives though they were quite aware of his guiltlessness. No prayer was made of the church for his deliverance (that we know of) as was made for Peter.

Safely back in the castle, Paul probably was tempted to be a bit discouraged. If so, it was natural enough. He was apparently disowned of the church at Jerusalem. His zeal for the salvation of the Jews was repudiated. His outlook for the future concerning

his ministry was dim. It would be quite natural for him to wonder if he had after all erred in coming to Jerusalem or in his compliance to James' compromising request. Perhaps, Paul tossed and turned while thinking of the events of the last few days. That night a wonderful thing happened. The Lord appeared to Paul and stood by him. "Be of good cheer," the Lord encouragingly said. This certainly suggests that Paul was at least tempted to be a bit discouraged. But the Lord had not forsaken him, though the church seemed to have disowned Paul. Now the Lord reassured Paul, "as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness at Rome" (vs.11). What an encouragement to Paul. First of all, the Lord assured Paul that he had indeed testified in Jerusalem. Paul probably felt that his efforts to witness for the Lord there had been a failure. But the Lord owned his attempt as a true testimony. There was no doubt some fruit from this effort. Any misgivings Paul may have had disappeared when the Lord appeared and stood by him that night. Also, any doubts concerning his future ministry also were dissipated by the clear assurance that he **must** bear witness at Rome. When Paul awoke in the morning, he was surely encouraged to press on. It was in fact a long and hard time before Paul bore witness at Rome, but this vision of the Lord in the night and His reassurance would keep Paul steadily pressing on despite disappointments until the word was fulfilled. Conspiracies, imprisonment, injustice, storms, wrecks, vipers and barbarians could not block the fulfillment of the vision. Often in the darkest night, the Lord stands by us and manifests His glory to us. Let us faithfully press on and finish our course with joy.

III Conspiracy: The next day also saw the Jews renew their determination to eliminate Paul. More than forty of them banded together and conspired to kill Paul. They vowed to eat or drink until they had accomplished their purpose. They also bound themselves under a curse if they should fail. They requested the chief priests and elders of the Jews to notify the chief captain of the Romans that they must question the prisoner more exactly concerning him. They assured the council, that before he ever appeared before them they would kill him. The conspiracy was strong, but the Lord was protecting Paul. In this case, the Lord used perfectly natural means to accomplish a supernatural deliverance. Somehow, a young nephew of Paul discovered the plot against his uncle. He somehow gained entrance to the fortress and revealed the conspiracy to Uncle Paul. The apostle then called for a guard and asked him to take the lad to the captain for he had an important message for him. Claudius Lysias took the lad aside and listened to his warning. The captain believed the boy and commanded him not to tell anyone

that he had revealed the plot to him. Perhaps the captain was a bit amused at the prospect of more than forty fanatical Jews starving to death. At any rate, he immediately summoned two centurions and issued orders for two hundred foot soldiers, and two hundred spearmen and seventy horsemen of the cavalry to escort Paul in the dead of night to Caesarea and to Felix, the governor. The captain wrote a letter to Felix explaining with some exaggeration how he had come to the rescue of this Roman citizen, Paul, and granted him asylum in his fortress until he could ascertain the charges they had against him. He told Felix that those charges were related to their law and religion and were not serious enough to warrant imprisonment or death. Lysias also explained how that when he learned of the conspiracy to kill him from ambush that he thought it best to send Paul to Caesarea.

So Paul was afforded the comfort and protection befitting a king as he left Jerusalem by night. The spearmen and footsoldiers accompanied the horsemen and Paul to Antipatris and then returned while Paul, conducted by seventy horsemen continued on to Caesarea. Thus by very natural means, the supernatural protection of Paul was accomplished. Felix postponed hearing Paul's defense until the accusers should come from Jerusalem. The conspirators, no doubt, continued their efforts for a while to eliminate Paul but, no doubt, finally gave up, defeated in their purpose. The Lord often uses small incidents to accomplish great purposes. We have the promise of our Lord in His Word that He is with us always, even unto the end of the age. He has all power in heaven and earth. Let us be sure that we live always in good conscience before Him.

PAUL BEFORE FELIX AND FESTUS

Read: Acts 24:1-27; 25:1-27

Memory Verse: But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets. And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. (Acts 24:14-15)

What we should learn from this Lesson.

1. *While a Christian should endure misunderstanding and persecution, he should defend himself against criminal charges.*
2. *The hope of Israel does not lie in their national restoration, but in the resurrection kingdom of Jesus Christ.*
3. *When the Spirit of God convicts us of sin, we dare not put off repentance. Delay produces hardening of heart and conscience.*
4. *The resurrection of the dead which Paul so effectively taught was the central cause of the great hatred of the Jewish leaders.*

I Before Felix: Paul was safely delivered to the Roman governor Felix at Caesarea by the 70 horsemen of Claudius Lysias. Felix read the letter sent by the chief captain at Jerusalem concerning Paul. He asked Paul of what province he was and then satisfied that the matter was within his jurisdiction declared that he would hear the case as soon as the accusers would appear. It was not long before they came. It surely must have been difficult for Ananias the high priest to journey those 70 miles. He was very old and the way difficult. Despite the inconveniences, he and the elders of the Jews came five days after Paul. They brought with them an orator, Tertullus, who was practiced in courtroom presentations and orations. It was this man who presented the charges against Paul for the Jewish rulers. He began his speech with insincere flattery of Felix.

The governor knew only too well the hatred the Jews had for him. After the flattery the charges were made. Three formal complaints were registered against Paul. He was accused of being a pestilent fellow. This was a serious charge. The implication was that he was a man with no morals or scruples; a troublemaker of the worst type. He also was charged with inspiring sedition among the Jews throughout the empire. They may have had the uproar in Ephesus in mind or the outcry at Philippi, in this regard. Finally, Paul was charged with being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. Tertullus charged that Paul had deliberately attempted to profane the holy temple. The orator explained that the Jews would have judged Paul themselves but for the interference of Lysias the chief captain. The Jewish leaders agreed with these charges as presented by Tertullus.

Felix motioned for Paul to speak in his own defense. The apostle stood and with sincere courtesy but without flattery, eloquently defended himself and explained his faith and doctrine. He explained convincingly that he had come to Jerusalem to worship and to bring alms and offerings to his nation. He told how he had ceremonially purified himself at the temple. He assured Felix that he had neither assembled a multitude nor caused any tumult there. The burden of proof was on the accusers according to the admirable system of Roman law, and Paul asserted that the charges they had brought against him could not be proved. Paul carefully confessed that he had inadvertently sparked an outcry when he had cried out in their council, "touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question."

Paul also readily admitted that he worshipped the God of his fathers in a way which the Jews called heresy. Paul showed that his way of worship was founded upon all that was taught in the law and the prophets. It was not he that was the heretic, but the Jews who refused to accept the progressive revelation of their own God. The heart of the matter was the hope which Paul held of the resurrection of the dead. This hope was based on the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Paul asserted that the Jews, the Pharisees that is, recognized intellectually the hope of resurrection, but when confronted by the reality of the resurrection in Jesus, denied it. Their hope was all bound up in the reemergence of their nation as a world power. The real hope of Israel was and is to experience the new birth which opens the gate into the eternal kingdom of heaven. The regressive teaching linking the reemergence of the nation of Israel with the second coming of the Lord is a return to the error of the Jews in the days of Jesus and the apostles. Only through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ can the Jewish people, as well as all other people, enter that kingdom which is the true Israel of God. That is the hope of Israel!

II A Convenient Season: Felix refused to judge Paul guilty. The Jews were disappointed in their desire to see Paul executed. Felix had some previous contact with **the way**. There is in secular traditions the suggestion that Simon the sorcerer of Samaria found his way into the court of Felix. The house of Philip, the evangelist, was in Caesarea where Felix had his seat of government. There may have been some contact there. At any rate, we know that Felix knew something of the doctrine of the Gospel of Jesus and he deferred any verdict in Paul's case for the time being. He waited for the testimony of Lysias. Meanwhile, Felix allowed Paul liberty. He had freedom to have fellowship with all his friends and acquaintances.

Some days later, Felix, with his wife Drusilla, with whom he was living in flagrant adultery, sent for Paul to hear him concerning his faith in Christ. Paul powerfully reasoned of righteousness and temperance (self-control) and of judgment to come. The faithful servant of Christ did not soften his message of holiness to curry the favor of his judge. In reality it was Felix who was on trial. So anointed was the warning of Paul, that the powerful governor trembled. It was a merciful opportunity for Felix to repent and believe. Alas, he sent Paul away without a response and promised weakly that at a convenient season he would call for the apostle. The enemy of our souls sees to it that the convenient season never comes. When conviction comes it is a fearful thing not to repent and get right with God. Delay produces only more hardness of heart. Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your heart. Come at once. Bow in thorough repentance and find full forgiveness and wonderful fellowship with the Father and with the Son.

III To Show The Jews A Pleasure: Felix finally got into trouble with Rome. His unspeakable cruelty in his domain was reported and he was recalled to Rome. To win the favor of the Jews who were to witness against him, Felix increased the bondage of Paul. Now he was bound and could no longer enjoy the liberty he previously had. Two years had passed since Paul was caught and tried. Felix often had called for him, but only because he hoped to obtain money from Paul. The time of tenderness passed and Felix faced the realities of his own trial and punishment with a hardened and unrepentant heart.

Festus took Felix' place. Three days after taking office he went to Jerusalem where the Jews attempted to obtain a judgment on Paul. They asked that he be sent to Jerusalem for trial. This Festus flatly refused. The Jews were still conspiring to lay wait and kill Paul before he could be tried. Festus may have suspected foul play and

ordered the accusers to come to Caesarea and there present their case again. After ten days Festus returned to his capital and the very next day heard the case of the Jews vs. Paul. Many complaints and accusations were laid to Paul's charge, but none of them were proven. Now Festus, desiring to show the Jews a pleasure like his predecessor, and perhaps desiring to get off on the right foot, asked Paul to appear before the Jews' council at Jerusalem and there be judged with himself as the final judge. Paul knew his rights as a citizen. He had confidence in the Roman system. He also knew the treachery of the Jews. He therefore, refused to go to Jerusalem and instead appealed to Caesar in Rome. Festus, after consultation agreed that Paul go to Rome to be judged.

IV To Caesar Shalt Thou Go: This posed a problem, however, and Festus was perplexed what to do. In sending any prisoner who had appealed to the judgment of the emperor it was, of course, necessary to send along the formal charges against the man and the evidence gathered. What could Festus write? The charges were ridiculous and unproven. Nothing worthy of death or even imprisonment had been done by Paul. While Festus was considering this problem, Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to congratulate Festus on his new office. Festus told Agrippa of the problem. It is interesting to note that Festus was very perceptive. He discerned that the real problem between Paul and the Jews was the fact that Paul witnessed that one, Jesus, who had been crucified, was risen from the dead and alive. Agrippa said he would like to hear Paul for himself. Preparations were made and the next day it was arranged that Agrippa should hear Paul. All the chief men of the city were summoned to the hearing room. Agrippa and Bernice entered with great pomp and ceremony. She was his sister and their relationship was incestuous. After all the dignitaries were settled, Paul was brought in. Festus announced to all that the Jews sought his death and that Paul had appealed to Caesar. Now he hoped for Agrippa to help in writing the charges against Paul. And Paul was always ready to speak for his Lord and witness before kings and governors and rulers. May we be ready to witness for our Lord like Paul.

PAUL BEFORE FESTUS AND AGRIPPA

Read: Acts 26:1-32

Memory Verse: Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. (Acts 26:19)

What we should learn from this Lesson.

1. *The object of our prayers should be the salvation of those around us.*
2. *Our entire manner of life should be directed in the context of the resurrection and judgment.*
3. *We must be absolutely obedient to the heavenly vision given to us and so accomplish the purposes of God for our lives.*
4. *The Gospel of Jesus Christ, particularly His atonement and resurrection, is the ultimate development of the law and the prophets.*
5. *Our response to the claims of the Gospel determines our eternal destiny.*

I Paul Speaks For Himself: Agrippa II was the **great grandson** of Herod the great who ordered the death of the babes of Bethlehem. Herod Agrippa I was the **grandson** of Herod the great, and the one who killed James and attempted to execute Peter. He died when he was eaten of worms in judgment for his arrogance. Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the great, was the one whom Jesus called "that fox." He is the one who killed John the Baptist. The history of the Herods is closely interwoven with the life of Jesus and the early history of the church and its leaders.

Agrippa II was living in despicable immorality. He had his own sister for his wife. He was well versed in the traditions and customs of the Jews. Paul indicated that he was acquainted with the prophets of the Old Testament. He was 17 years old when

his father, Agrippa I was smitten in judgment and "eaten of worms." He was not immediately appointed to take his father's place, but seven years later he did receive an appointment from Rome and gradually enlarged his domain in the succeeding years. He had the title of king. When Festus became the governor of Judea in place of Felix, Agrippa II with Bernice his consort, paid an official visit to the new governor at Caesarea. When told by Festus of Paul and his appeal to Rome, Agrippa asked to hear Paul for himself. Accordingly, the hearing was set for the next day. Hearing Paul was set in the context of an entertainment for the royal visitor. It was an official occasion with much pomp and ceremony. Everyone important in government was in attendance.

When Paul was brought into the hearing room he was in chains. Agrippa advised Paul that he was permitted to speak for himself. Paul responded that he was happy for the opportunity to speak to the king because he knew him to be expert in the customs and traditions of the Jews' religion. The contemporary Rabbinical writings confirm Paul's statement. Paul appealed for a patient hearing, suggesting that his speeches and defences were often interrupted and cut off. This answer, too, was finally interrupted not by Agrippa, but by Festus.

II To Turn Them: Paul gave his personal testimony before the august assembly. He told of his youth from the time that his Hebrew parents brought him to Jerusalem. He explained that he belonged to the most strict segment of the Pharisees. He lived in sincere obedience to this teaching and accepted its teaching concerning angels and spirits and resurrection. Then Paul explained to Agrippa, that he was now being judged for his belief in the very thing he was taught by the Jews: the hope of Israel, resurrection. The whole purpose of the Jews' law and their service to God was based upon the hope of resurrection. Now, because of this very hope and its connection with Jesus Christ, Paul was being accused and prosecuted. Paul directly asked Agrippa, why he should think it incredible that God should raise the dead.

Paul further explained how zealous he was in his persecution of the followers of "this way" in his younger days. In absolute sincerity he sought to defend the faith of his fathers by obliterating all whom he found who believed in Jesus of Nazareth. His zeal to annihilate these "religious heretics" took him even to foreign cities where he searched out and prosecuted those whom he found.

It was on one of these zealous excursions to a far off city (Damascus) where Paul had the transforming encounter with Jesus Himself. He told Agrippa and those gather-

ed with him the whole story of the bright light and the voice which identified itself as the voice of Jesus. He told how Jesus commissioned him to tell the things he had seen and heard and the things which he would see and hear of the Lord in the future, to the people (Jews) and to the Gentiles to whom he was specially sent. Paul explained that Jesus had specifically commissioned him to open the eyes of the Gentiles, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins and an eternal inheritance. That was what Paul had done for many years. It was what he was doing at that very moment. Paul was not defending himself and seeking his release at this point. He was after the conversion of Agrippa and those who stood by. From the beginning Paul was ordained to bear the name of Jesus before kings (see Acts 9:15). Despite his personal predicament Paul never lost sight of the value of souls around him. He longed for the conversion of Agrippa and Festus and all the rest. May we never lose that vision. We may have our own battles to fight, but in it all may we never forget that souls around us are precious and need Jesus.

III *Not Disobedient To The Heavenly Vision:* Paul testified to Agrippa that from the day he met the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, he was not disobedient to that heavenly vision. Immediately he began to preach Christ and repentance to those of Damascus and then Jerusalem and Judea and finally to the Gentiles throughout the empire. It was because of his effective witness that the unbelieving Jews caught him in the temple, Paul explained, and attempted to kill him. Yet, despite their fanatical zeal to do away with him, Paul had obtained help of God and continued his witnessing to all, small and great, expounding the fulfillment of the prophets in the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. How faithful the apostle was. Nothing could hinder him from testifying of the grace of God and the glory and power of Jesus Christ. He did exactly what the Lord commissioned him to do. May we also be obedient to our heavenly vision. We cannot, of course, force some special visitation of heaven on ourselves, but we can consecrate ourselves to the cause of Christ and wait on Him for His guidance. We must all be obedient to the "heavenly vision" of the commands of Jesus in the New Testament and also, if and when the Lord reveals Himself to us personally, we must be ready to obey fully whatever He reveals to us. If we live our entire lives in the glorious light of resurrection and responsibility, many priorities and values will be changed. Certainly the resurrection was not merely a theological doctrine to Paul, but a living reality. The more real it is to us, the easier it is to "seek first the kingdom of God."

IV Almost Persuaded: At this point Festus interrupted Paul. With a loud voice he said, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." Visions and voices and angels and resurrection were foolishness to Festus, and he could not follow the logic of Paul as Agrippa could. Paul responded at once that he was not insane, but speaking "words of truth and soberness" (ch. 26:25). He then appealed to Agrippa and declared that he was sure that Agrippa was aware of the things of which he had spoken. The death and resurrection of Jesus did not take place in total obscurity. Paul also expressed his confidence that Agrippa believed the prophets of the Old Testament. Poor Agrippa was on the horns of a dilemma. He did not know what to do. His response was to say to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (vs. 28). The old manuscripts of this passage are unclear. Some experts think that Agrippa cynically said "With such a little persuasion you expect me to become a Christian?"

It was an exceedingly interesting and important scene. Agrippa, on a royal seat, dressed, no doubt, in royal purple; Bernice in all her finery at his side; Festus, probably dressed in Roman scarlet and also seated in a place of power, the officials of city and province all in attendance, listening attentively to a man in chains. Their response to his words determines their eternal destiny. In reality, Paul is the royal personage, reigning in life by Christ, and these others are all on trial. Felix, two years before, had deferred his decision concerning Paul and his message. Now Festus mocks and calls Paul a mad man, and Agrippa is **almost** persuaded. If only they knew the hour of their opportunity. Felix' heart hardened till he looked only for a bribe from Paul. Festus' mocking of Paul only mocked his own salvation. And Agrippa probably never again came so close to accepting and receiving Jesus as his Lord.

Paul expressed his wish that all who heard him that day could be almost and altogether such as he in faith and truth without the bonds of his imprisonment. Our response to Jesus is the most important reaction of this life. What will you do with Christ? Crown Him Lord of all in your personal life! He will take His power and reign and make every enemy His footstool.

When Paul finished, Agrippa and Festus discussed the case and agreed that were it not for Paul's appeal to Caesar, he could have been set at liberty for he had certainly done nothing worthy of bonds or death. Nevertheless, preparations went forward to send him to Rome where the Lord had ordained that Paul should bear witness also (see Ch. 23:11).

CALM IN THE MIDST OF THE STORM

Read: Acts 27:1-44

Memory Verse: For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. (Acts 27:23-24)

What we should learn from this Lesson.

1. *The promises of God do not guarantee that their fulfillment will be accomplished without opposition and difficulty.*
2. *Despite all hindrances and opposition we must hold fast to the confidence that "it shall be even as it was told me."*
3. *Even while pressing on toward a great goal, we have the opportunity to serve the Lord in faithful witness along the way.*
4. *Our confidence and peace in the midst of trial speaks louder than sermons to those about us.*

I Setting Sail For Italy: Had Paul not appealed to Caesar he might have been freed after his appearance before Agrippa. But it was God's appointment for him to testify at Rome. "Thou must bear witness also at Rome" the Lord had assured Paul in the night (Acts 23:11). Even before that Paul had declared, "I must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21). No doubt, this was spoken by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Paul, of course, was not interested particularly in seeing the sights of Rome, but in establishing a strong witness for Christ in that great center of the empire. So it was determined that Paul should sail for Italy and Rome. Two dear companions accompanied Paul. One was Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, who became a helper of the apostle on his last missionary journey. He had suffered for Christ's sake, also (see Acts 19:29). The other companion was Luke, the author of the account as recorded in "The Acts." He

so accurately describes the voyage in the technical nautical terms of the day that some scholars conclude that he must have been a naval physician earlier in his life. That is uncertain, but we certainly owe Luke a debt of gratitude for his fascinating account of the perils by the way.

Paul was put under the charge of a Roman centurion of "Augustus' band" named Julius. There were other prisoners beside Paul who were committed to Julius also. They set sail from Caesarea in a ship of Adramyttium intending to sail along the coasts of Asia. The ship stopped after only one day at Sidon, where Paul was graciously permitted by Julius to visit some friends, and to refresh himself. The centurion certainly trusted Paul and must have known him quite well before this. When they sailed from Sidon the winds were contrary and they were forced to alter their course and sail south of Cyprus. It was only the first of many contrary happenings. It seems as though Satan and all his hosts attempted to hinder and prevent Paul from reaching his destination. Finally, the ship crossed the sea of Cilicia and came to the city of Myra in the province of Lycia. There Julius found another ship sailing for Italy and transferred the prisoners. This leg of the voyage also met with difficulty. The ship sailed ever so slowly, this time for lack of wind. They were becalmed, and the voyage dragged on for many days. They covered scarcely one hundred miles in these days and came only to Cnidus, a city at the southwestern extremity of Asia minor. From there they changed course and sailed south toward the eastern end of Crete and then to the south of that island. The ship stopped at a place on the southern coast of Crete called "The fair havens," probably to replenish supplies of food and water. So long had the journey been that the season of dangerous storms was approaching. The Jewish holy day of atonement had already past. That would be late September or early October. Probably, Paul had set sail from Caesarea in August. Paul admonished both Julius, the centurion, and the master and owner of the ship not to attempt to sail on, for there would be loss and damage to the ship and its cargo as well as peril to the lives of all on board. The place where they were harbored was not commodious for the winter and so they disregarded Paul's warning and determined to proceed at least to Phenice, a more commodious port of Crete.

II Euroclydon: When the ship was replenished with stores and the day dawned clear and with a soft southerly breeze, the captain thought conditions ideal and set sail. They sailed westward along the southern coast of Crete. Then, quite suddenly a tempestuous wind arose. Such storms were called by the name "Euroclydon", and are similar to hurricanes and typhoons. The strong northeastern wind drove the ship to the south-

west. They passed south of the island of Claudia and out into the open Mediterranean. Now all the fury of the storm broke upon them. They managed, only with considerable difficulty to secure the ship's small boat on deck. They lowered the sails and ropes for fear that they would be driven into the shallows off the coast of northern Africa. They also wrapped great ropes completely around the ship to hold it together. The second day the crew lightened the ship by throwing overboard the heavy freight they carried. The third day, the storm continued unabated and they threw as much of the ship's cargo overboard as they dared to get rid of. There seemed no end or abatement to this storm. After many days the sailors gave up all hope of survival. They had no time nor inclination to eat during these days.

III *Paul's Confidence:* Finally, after many days Paul stood forth and encouraged them. He first reminded them that if they had only listened to him they would have been spared this harrowing experience and disastrous loss. Then he told how an angel of the Lord had appeared to him that night and assured him that there would be no loss of life, but all would survive. That was good news. He told them that the ship would be lost but they would all safely reach a certain island. He admonished them to be of good cheer. Paul had complete confidence in the message of the angel of his Lord. He testified to all that he belonged to this Lord and served Him. He believed perfectly that it should turn out exactly as it was told him.

On the fourteenth night of the storm, the sailors perceived that they were approaching some coast. They sounded and found the sea twenty fathoms and few minutes later only fifteen fathoms. They brought the ship to a stop by casting out four anchors from the stern. Then they had to wait for day. While waiting for the dawn some of the seamen attempted to escape alone by using the small boat. Paul alertly told Julius and the soldiers that they could not survive unless these sailors stayed with them. So the soldiers prevented the seamen from escaping. Notice, that even though Paul had the assurance from the angel that all would survive, he used good common sense to keep the shipmen on board to navigate the ship. We, too, must use good judgment to see the promises of God fully wrought out to perfection.

Then Paul called them all together. He urged them to take some nourishment, for they had not eaten in fourteen days. He dramatically assured them that not a hair of any of them would perish. Then he took bread and in the presence of them all gave thanks to God and broke the bread and began to eat. Then all the men were encouraged. Their mood changed and they, too, took some food. There were 276 on

board the ship. After they had eaten they lightened the ship further. The wheat from the hold was cast out into the sea.

At dawn they could see the shore. No one recognized the place, but they saw a small river which emptied into the sea and they purposed to attempt to bring the ship in there. They loosed the rudder bands and hoisted up the mainsail and moved toward shore. Then they came into a place where two contrary tides met. There they ran the ship aground. With the bow of the ship stuck fast, the violent action of the waves began to break up the ship. Normal procedure for the soldiers toward their prisoners in such conditions was to execute them. Julius, however, determined to save Paul. The centurion took charge and commanded those who could swim to go first. Then the others on the broken pieces of the ship all safely reached the shore. Indeed it was exactly as the angel told Paul. All came to pass.

Every believer has a destiny in Christ in this life as well as in heaven. For Paul, he knew, and God promised that he must bear witness also at Rome. We must wait on the Lord until we know what God's call is for us. Nothing can prevent us from fulfilling that calling if we believe and perfectly follow our Lord. All hell may unite to hinder and discourage us, but we can keep on in faith. It shall be as it was told you!

But while pressing on toward that ultimate destiny, many opportunities for service presented themselves by the way. The great burden of Paul at this time was to reach Rome and testify there, but he did not miss his opportunities to witness to Julius, his guard, and to the seamen and master of the vessel. Nor did he neglect to minister to the "barbarians" of the island of Malta where he and his shipmates were stranded for three months. Let us be alert to serve the Lord all along the way.

The peace of God in Paul, and the complete confidence he showed in the promise of God that he must witness also in Rome, should inspire us to perfect trust in our loving Lord. Our peace and confidence in the midst of peril or affliction is often the most eloquent witness we can give of the reality of our Lord and His power to keep and deliver. Let despair and agitation and hysteria be banished from our emotions and displaced by the peace of God and confidence in His love and power.

PAUL REACHES ROME

Read: Acts 28:1-3

Memory Verse: And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him. (Acts 28:30-31)

What we should learn from this Lesson.

- 1. The faithful disciple of the Lord can remain calm and assured in the midst of storms and trials, for the Lord works all for good to those who love Him.*
- 2. Even when we are called to some specific work for the Lord we must be alert to serve the Lord in the opportunities which come to us along the way.*
- 3. If God has called us to some specific work, the vision will not lie. Though there be delay and opposition, we may confidently wait for it.*
- 4. The Word of God is a living and powerful word. It cannot be bound by chains or restraints of laws. Our testimony should be full of the Word which cannot return void.*

I Ministry On Melita: All 276 persons aboard the ill-fated ship of Alexandria made it safely to shore. They soon ascertained that they were on the island of Melita (Malta). The inhabitants were kind and helpful. They are referred to as "barbarous people" because they spoke neither Greek nor Latin nor Hebrew. They showed great kindness to the shipwrecked survivors. They kindled a fire and welcomed every one including the prisoners. The terrible storm which had been raging for fourteen days continued. The rain was still falling and the weather was cold. To keep the fire burning, dry wood had to be found. This was quite an assignment because of the persistent rain. Paul was one who gathered sticks for the fire. It must have been an unforgettable scene when the poisonous viper, stung by the sudden heat as Paul put his bundle of sticks on the

fire, emerged from its hiding place and fastened his venomous fangs on the apostle's hand. The natives who witnessed the scene concluded that vengeance was dogging this prisoner. Though he had escaped the fury of the storm and wreck, they assumed, justice was prevailing and the offender would perish. However, when Paul shook off the dreaded beast back into the fire and felt no harm, they changed their minds and now esteemed Paul to be an immortal God. They had expected him to swell and fall dead. They were, no doubt, familiar with the effects of such snake bites. The wonderful protection of the Lord over Paul opened the door for him to minister to these people. The story is certainly the best commentary on Mark 16:18, "they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them." Note that the apostle did not deliberately pick up the poisonous creature. Those who deliberately handle snakes as a demonstration of their faith are tempting God and may be called fanatics. It is in accidental circumstances, or unknowing conditions that we may claim the Divine protection of Jesus' promise in Mark.

The chief man of the island, Publius, was impressed by these events and invited Paul and his companions to his house and entertained them courteously for three days. While there, Paul learned of the grave illness of the father of Publius. He visited the man, laid his hands on him and ministered healing to him. Then others who were sick came and were healed. The door had opened for Paul to minister and he faithfully served the Lord there on Malta. The text does not speak of his preaching and teaching there, but we may safely assume that he preached Christ, for faith for healing or salvation comes from hearing the Word of God. Although the vision of a ministry in Rome was always before the apostle, he did not miss his opportunities to serve the Lord along the way. Certainly, the 276 could never forget the calm assurance of Paul the prisoner and the fulfillment of his predictions both of the storm and the escape. When finally, after three months on the island of Melita, Paul sailed again in another ship of Alexandria, he left behind a group of disciples "barbarians" who knew and loved the Lord Jesus. They bestowed Paul and his companions with many gifts and honors and provided for the necessities of the voyage. The Lord turned the wrath of the enemy, as manifested in the great storm, to the glory of God; for because of the storm and shipwreck the people of the island of Melita heard the word of the Gospel and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. We may expect the Lord to get glory to His name, even in the accidents and circumstances in which we find ourselves. Let us not miss our opportunities to faithfully witness to those about us.

II So We Went Toward Rome: Certainly, from a natural viewpoint, the odds were strong that Paul would never reach Rome. Twice he was nearly killed by the mob of the Jews. Then forty fanatics conspired to ambush him. Next the fierce storm, followed by a shipwreck, and then the poisonous viper. All hell was out to get Paul before he could reach Rome. Paul remained calm in the midst of it all. The secret of the Lord was with him. He was always of good cheer for he believed God that it would be exactly as it was told him: that he must witness also at Rome (Acts 23:11). He abode at all times in the Presence of the Lord. The enemy could not stop the progress of the purpose of God. "So we went toward Rome," Luke records (Luke 28:14).

The third ship of the journey was of Alexandria, like the second. The sign of Castor and Pollux was probably that of a heathen deity. In Rome there was a temple of Castor and Pollux. At any rate, this ship sailed uneventfully toward Rome. They stopped for three days at Syracuse and then for seven at Puteoli where Paul found and had fellowship with some believers. Some believers hearing of Paul's arrival came from Rome and met him at Appii forum and a place called Three Taverns. Paul rejoiced to find believers and was encouraged. Finally, he arrived in Rome. Julius, his guard, delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard, but Paul was allowed to live in a private dwelling with a guard.

III Unhindered: Paul lost no time in beginning his ministry in Rome. He began his work after only three days in Rome. Even though he was a prisoner, he made the best of his circumstances. He could not go to the synagogue, but he called for the Jews to come to him. When they did come he explained why he came as a prisoner to Rome. He showed these Jews that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was not a break with their law and prophets nor a new and rival religion, but the fulfillment and development of all that they believed and taught. The hope of Israel, he expounded, was the eternal kingdom of God both here and in the resurrection. The Jews responded by telling Paul that they were not informed regarding his case, but that they knew the sect of Christians was spoken against everywhere. They promised to come on an appointed day and listen to Paul's teaching.

Accordingly, many Jews came to Paul's lodging on the appointed day. He first proclaimed the kingdom of God to them. This was the foundation of God's dealing with the Jews. The Lord God was supreme and over all. It is also the foundation of the New Covenant. This was common ground. Then Paul showed from Moses and the prophets that Jesus was the King in the Kingdom of God. He taught the Jews all day,

from morning to evening. When all was said and done, some Jews were inclined to believe and some would not believe. When they could not agree, Paul quoted the prophecy of Isaiah, "hearing ye shall hear and not understand; and seeing ye shall see and not perceive, For the heart of this people is waxed gross..." etc., (vss. 26-27). He pronounced the rejection of the Jews (vs. 28) and the opportunity for the Gentiles. Then the Jews left and had great discussions over the matter, but to no value for they remained in unbelief.

After this, Paul rented his own house. The soldier guard was with him at all times, but he was able to receive all visitors and he ministered to them. Luke and Aris-tarchus were with him and remained with him. Tychicus visited Paul there and was sent with a letter to Ephesus. Timothy was there for a while. Ephaphroditus brought an offering from Philippi. Onesimus, the runaway slave of Philemon, found his way to Paul and to the Lord there at Paul's lodging. Mark, now a faithful minister, came by invitation. Justus, and the remarkable intercessor, Epaphras, also visited Paul in Rome. Demas was there for a while before backsliding.

Not only did Paul minister to these who came to him, but he also served the Lord by his epistles written during this time. The letters to the Philippian Ephesian and Colossian churches were written during this time as was the letter to Philemon.

The last word of the book of Acts is translated, "no man forbidding him." That is a poor translation of the Greek text. That last word should be, **unhindered**. "Paul dwelt...preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence UNHINDERED." The Word of God is not bound. Is Paul a prisoner? The Word of God cannot be imprisoned. Is the guard keeping Paul in custody? The Word of God is not bound. Is the despicable tyrant Nero on the throne? The Word of God reigns anyway. Is there an iron curtain? The Word of God cannot be kept out. The Word of God is powerful, full of life. Let us believe to see another chapter added to the heavenly record of the Word of God growing and multiplying and souls being added to the kingdom of God.

The book of Acts has no closing benediction. That lack is intentional. The story of Paul's last days and his witness before Nero is not recorded, nor is his release and subsequent ministry and second arrest. For 2000 years, Acts of the Holy Spirit through the disciples of Jesus have occurred. Though not recorded in the sacred writ as we know it, there is beyond any doubt a heavenly record. As we are filled with the Spirit and obey the leadings of the Lord, we may add yet another chapter to the Acts of the Spirit. Still there's more to follow!