

The Acts of the Apostles

Introduction

The book known by the name "The Acts of the Apostles" (The oldest manuscript, the Sinaiticus, dating from the 4th century, given the title simply as "The Acts," which is no doubt the better name for the book), follows the four Gospel records. This is its proper place. The books of the New Testament have been correctly divided into five sections, corresponding to the first five books, with which the Bible begins, that is the Pentateuch. The four Gospels are the Genesis of the New Testament. Here we have the great beginning, the foundation upon which the subsequently revealed Christian doctrines rest. The Book of Acts is the Exodus; God leads out from bondage a heavenly people and sets them free. It is the great historical book of the New Testament given by inspiration, the beginning of the church on earth. The Pauline Epistles are the Leviticus portion. Holiness unto the Lord, the believer's separation and standing in Christ; what the believer has and is in Christ, by whose blood redemption has been purchased, are the core truths of these Epistles. The Epistles of Peter, James, John and Jude, known by the name of the Catholic Epistles, are for the wilderness journey of God's people, telling us of trials and suffering; these correspond to the Book of Numbers. The Book of Revelation in which God's ways are rehearsed, and, so to speak, a review is given of the entire prophetic Word concerning the Jews, the Gentiles and the Church of God has therefore the same character as Deuteronomy.

By Whom was this Book Written

There is no doubt that the writer of the third Gospel record is the one whom the Holy Spirit selected to write this account of the establishment of the Church on earth and the events connected with it. This becomes clear if we read the beginning of that Gospel and compare it with the beginning of Acts. The writer in the third Gospel says: "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1:3-4). The Acts of the Apostles begin: "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach." The former treatise known to Theophilus is the third Gospel, called the Gospel of Luke. The writer of that Gospel must therefore be the penman of the Book of Acts. Though we do not find Luke's name mentioned in the Gospel, nor in the second Book, he was entrusted to write by inspiration, there is no doubt that he wrote them both. We find his name mentioned a number of times in the Epistles, and these references give us the only reliable information we have. In Colossians 4:14 we read of him as "the beloved physician." In the Epistle of Philemon he is called a fellow laborer of the Apostle Paul, and from the last Epistle the great Apostle wrote, the second Epistle to Timothy, we learn that Luke was in Rome with Paul and was faithful to him, while others had forsaken the prisoner of the Lord. From Colossians 4 we also may gather that he was not a Jew, but a Gentile, for with the eleventh verse Paul had mentioned those of the circumcision. Epaphras was one of the Colossians, a Gentile, and then follow the names of Luke and Demas, both of them undoubtedly Gentiles. The reason that the Holy Spirit selected a Gentile to write the Gospel which pictures our Lord as the Man and the Saviour and the Book of Acts, is as obvious as it is interesting. Israel had rejected God's gift, and the glad news of salvation was now to go to the Gentiles. The Gospel of Luke addressed by a Gentile to a Gentile (Theophilus) is the Gospel for the Gentiles, and Luke the Gentile was chosen to give the history of the Gospel going forth from Jerusalem to the Gentiles.

Internal Evidences

There are numerous internal evidences which show likewise that the writer of the third Gospel is the

instrument through whom the Book of Acts was given. For instance, there are about fifty peculiar phrases and words in both books which are rarely found elsewhere: they prove the same author.

Then we learn from the Book of Acts that Luke was an eyewitness of some of the events recorded by him in that book. He joined the Apostle during his second missionary journey to Troas (chapter 16:10). This evidence is found in the little word "we." The writer was now in company of the Apostle, whose fellow laborer he was. He went with Paul to Macedonia and remained some time in Philippi. He was Paul's fellow traveler to Asia and Jerusalem (chapter 21:17). He likewise was with him in his imprisonment in Caesarea, and then on to Rome. There is no doubt that Luke had completely written and sent forth the Book of the Acts of the Apostles at the end of the two years mentioned in Acts 28:30, though the critics claim a much later period.

The Contents and Scope of the Book

The first verse gives us an important hint. The former treatise, the Gospel of Luke, contains that Jesus began to do and teach. The Book of Acts contains therefore the continuation of the Lord's actions, no longer on earth, but from the Glory. The actions of the risen and glorified Christ can easily be traced through the entire Book. We give a few illustrations. In the first Chapter He acts in the selection of the twelfth Apostle who was to take the place of Judas. In the second chapter He himself poured forth the Holy Spirit, for Peter made the declaration "therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which ye behold and hear." And in the close of the second chapter we behold another action of the risen Lord, "the Lord added to the assembly daily those that were to be saved." In the third chapter He manifested His power in the healing of the lame man. Throughout this Book we behold Him acting from the Glory, guiding, directing, comforting and encouraging His servants. These beautiful and manifold evidences of Himself being with His own and manifesting His power in their behalf can easily be traced in the different chapters.

Then on the very threshold of the Book we have the historical account of the coming of that other Comforter, whom the Lord had promised, the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, came. His coming marks the birthday of the Church. After that event we see Him present with His people as well as in them. In connection with the Lord's servants in filling them, guiding them, fitting them, sustaining them in trials and persecutions, in the affairs of the church, we behold the actions of the Holy Spirit on earth. He is the great administrator in the church. Over fifty times we find Him mentioned, so that some have called this Book; "the Acts of the Holy Spirit." There are no doctrines about the Holy Spirit and His work in the Book of Acts. But we find the practical illustrations of the doctrines of the Holy Spirit found elsewhere in the New Testament.

In the third place another supernatural Being is seen acting in this Book. It is the enemy, Satan, the hinderer and the accuser of the brethren. We behold him coming upon the scene and acting through his different instruments, either as the roaring lion, or as the cunning deceiver with his wiles. Wherever he can, he attempts to hinder the progress of the Gospel. This is a most important aspect of this Book, and indeed very instructive. Aside from the human instruments prominent in this Book of Acts, we behold three supernatural Beings acting. The risen and glorified Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Satan.

Another hint about the contents of this Book and its scope we find at the close of the Gospel of Luke. There the risen Christ said "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name to all the nations beginning at Jerusalem." In the first chapter of Acts the Spirit of God reports the commission of the Lord, about to ascend, in full. "Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The Book of Acts shows us how this mission, beginning in Jerusalem, was carried out. The witness begins in the City where our Lord was crucified. Once more an offer was made to the nation Israel. Then we behold the Gospel going forth from Jerusalem and all Judea to Samaria. and after that to the Gentiles. and through the

Apostle Paul it is heralded in the different countries of the Roman empire. The parable of our Lord in Matthew 22:1-10 gives us prophetically the history of these events. First the guests were called to the wedding and they would not come. This was the invitation given by the Lord to His earthly people when He moved among them. They received Him not. Then came a renewed offer with the assurance that all things are ready. This is exactly what we find in the beginning in the Book of the Acts. Once more to Jerusalem and to the Jewish nation is offered the kingdom, and signs and miracles take place to show that Jesus is the Christ risen from the dead. In the above parable our Lord predicted what the people would do with the servants, who bring the second offer. They would ignore the message and treat the servants spitefully and kill them. This we find fulfilled in the persecution which broke out in Jerusalem, when Apostles were imprisoned and others were killed. The Lord also predicted in His parable the fate of the wicked City. It was to be burned. Thus it happened to Jerusalem. And after the second offer had been rejected the servants were to go to the highways to invite the guests. And this shows that the invitation was to go out to the Gentiles.

Jerusalem is in the foreground in this Book, for the beginning was to be in Jerusalem "to the Jew first." The end of the Book takes us to Rome, and we see the great Apostle a prisoner there, a most significant, prophetic circumstance.

The Division of the Book of Acts

"But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This verse in the beginning of the book is the key to the historical account it contains. The Holy Spirit came on the day of pentecost and the witness to Christ began. We make a threefold division.

I. The Witness to Jerusalem. The Advent of the Spirit and the Formation of the Church. The Offer to Israel and its Rejection. Chapter 1-7.

II. The Witness to Samaria. Saul's Conversion and Peter's Witness in Caesarea. Chapter 8-12.

III. The Witness to the Gentiles. The Apostle to the Gentiles, His Ministry and Captivity. Chapter 13-28.

While undoubtedly all witnessed, the book of Acts reports mostly the acts of Peter and Paul. The Apostle Peter is in the foreground in the first part of the book. After the twelfth chapter he is mentioned but once more. Then Paul comes upon the scene with His great testimony concerning "The Gospel of Christ, the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Jerusalem is prominent in the start. Antioch, the Gentile center of Christian activity, follows, and Rome is seen at the close of the book. The witness of which the risen Lord spoke was therefore given to Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria. Then to the uttermost part of the earth. Africa received a witness in the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch. Then followed the witness to Asia and Europe. The book of Acts ends, so to speak, in an unfinished way.

Analysis and Annotations

Part I

The Witness to Jerusalem. The Advent of the Spirit and the Formation of the Church. The Offer to Israel and its Rejection. Chapters 1-7

CHAPTER 1

1. The Introduction (verses 1-3).
2. The final words of the risen Lord (verses 4- 8).
3. The ascension (verses 9-11).
4. The waiting company (verses 12-14).
5. Matthias chosen in the place of Judas (verses 15-26).

The introductory words prove that Luke is the writer. In the former treatise, Luke had addressed to Theophilus (the Gospel of Luke) the beginning of the teaching, and acts of our Lord were reported. The Book of Acts reveals the same wonderful person witnessed to by the Holy Spirit. Eight things are mentioned concerning our Lord in the beginning of this book. 1. His earthly life of doing and teaching. 2. He gave them commandment. 3. He had suffered. 4. He had showed Himself after His passion by many infallible proofs. 5. He was seen by them for forty days. 6. He spoke of the things which concern the Kingdom of God. 7. He was taken up. 8. He will come again. Once more He gave to them the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit. In verse 5 we read "ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence." John the Baptist had spoken also of a baptism with fire. The Lord omits the word fire, because the baptism with fire is a judgment act linked with His second coming (See Matthew 3:12). The question they asked of Him concerning the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel was perfectly in order. This is the Hope of Israel; the Hope of the church is not an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly glory; not to be subjects in the kingdom on earth, but to reign and rule with the King. The answer they received assured them that the kingdom was to be restored to Israel; the times and seasons for that, however, rested with the Father.

Then they saw Him ascending. What a sight it must have been! Their Lord was "received into Glory." Gradually in majestic silence He must have been lifted out of their midst. Lovingly His eyes must have rested upon them, while their eyes saw only Him. Then a cloud received Him out of their sight. "And then a cloud took Him in (literal rendering) out of their sight." The cloud was not a common cloud of vapor, but the glory-cloud. It was the cloud of glory which had filled Solomon's temple, which so often in Israel's past history had appeared as an outward sign of Jehovah's presence. Then angels announced His coming in like manner. And thus He will come, even back to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4).

However, we must beware of confounding this event given here with that blessed Hope, which is the Hope of the church. The Coming of the Lord here is His visible Coming as described in the prophetic books of the Old Testament; it is His coming to establish His rule upon the earth. it is the event spoken of in Daniel 7:14 and Revelation 1:7. When He comes in like manner as He went up, His Saints come with Him (Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 3:13). The Hope of the church is to meet Him in the air, and not to see Him coming in the clouds of heaven. The coming here "in like manner" is His Coming for Israel and the nations. The Coming of the Lord for His Church, before His visible and glorious manifestation, is revealed in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18. It is well to keep these important truths in mind. Confusion between these is disastrous. He left them to enter into the Holy of Holies, to exercise the priesthood which Aaron exercised on the day of atonement, though our Lord is a priest after the order of Melchisedec. And when this promise of the two men in white garments is fulfilled, He will come forth to be a priest upon His throne.

Then we see them as a waiting company. They are not the church. Their waiting for the Coming of the Holy Spirit ended ten days after, when the Holy Spirit came. Since then He is here. To wait for another outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as so often done by well meaning people, is unscriptural. Among the waiting ones were "Mary the mother of Jesus and His brethren." The one chosen by God's grace to be the mother of our Lord; Mary, who had conceived by the Holy Spirit, is waiting with the other disciples. This proves that she has no place of superiority among God's people.

When the Holy Spirit came she too was baptized by the Spirit into the one body of which, through the Grace of God, she is a member like any other believer in our Lord. After this she is not mentioned again in the Word of God. Mary, the mother of Jesus, has absolutely no relation with the redemption work of the Son of God. His brethren, according to John 7:5, were unbelieving. Since then they had also believed on Him.

The action of Peter in proposing to place another in Judas' place was not a mistake as some claim. Peter acted upon the Scriptures and was guided by the Lord. Some hold that Paul was meant to be the twelfth apostle. This is incorrect. Paul's apostleship was of an entirely different nature than that of the twelve. Not till Israel's complete failure had been demonstrated in the stoning of Stephen was he called, and then not of men, but by revelation of Jesus Christ. There is positive proof that the Holy Spirit sanctioned this action of the disciples. See 1 Corinthians 15:5-8. Furthermore, twelve apostles were needed as a body of witnesses to the entire nation. How strange it would have been if Peter and the ten, eleven men in all, instead of twelve, had stood up on the day of Pentecost to witness to Christ in the presence of the assembled multitude.

CHAPTER 2

1. The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit (verses 1-4).
2. The Immediate Effect of His Presence (verses 5-13).
3. Peter's Address (verses 14-36).
4. The Result of the Witness (verses 37-41).
5. The Gathered Company in Fellowship (verses 42-47).

This is an important chapter. The Promise of the Father was fulfilled, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity came down to earth, to be the other Comforter. He came on that blessed day.

Two things are at once apparent. He came upon the assembled believers individually, and also did a work in a corporate way. Each believer on that day was filled with the Holy Spirit. He came as the indweller to each. But He also was present as the mighty rushing wind which filled all the house. He did not only come upon each, but all were baptized with the Holy Spirit, and united into a body. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 the more complete revelation is given concerning this fact. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." The One Spirit is the Holy Spirit as He came on the day of Pentecost, the One Body is the church. All believers were on that day united by the Spirit into the one body, and since then, whenever and wherever a sinner believes in the finished work of Christ, he shares in that baptism and is joined by the same Spirit to that one body. A believer may be in dense ignorance about all this, as indeed a great many are; but this does not alter the gracious fact of what God has done. The believing company was then formed on the day of Pentecost into one body. It was the birthday of the church.

There is an interesting correspondence between the second chapter of Luke and the second chapter of Acts which we cannot pass by. In the first chapter of Luke we have the announcement of the birth of the Saviour. In the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke we read of the accomplishment of that Promise given to the Virgin. And so the second chapter of Acts contains the fulfillment of a similar promise. The Holy Spirit came and the church, the mystical body of Christ, began.

But the truth concerning the church was not revealed on the day of Pentecost. The twelve apostles were ignorant of what had taken place, and that the church formed would be composed of believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews; nor did they know anything of the different relationships of the church. Through the Apostle Paul the full truth concerning the church was made known.

The Coming of the Holy Spirit was accompanied with visible signs. A new dispensation was inaugurated with outward signs, just as the giving of the law for that dispensation was accompanied with similar signs. (Hebrews 12:18-19.) The rushing mighty wind filled the house, "and there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire and it sat upon each of them." The filling of the house indicated the fact that His abode would be the house; the church and the parted tongues upon each head testified to the fact that each had received Him. The Person, not a power or influence given by measure, had filled each believer. He came as the gift of God.

Then they spoke in different languages. The speaking in other languages was a miracle produced by the Holy Spirit, who had come upon them in mighty power. These Galileans spoke in different tongues, sixteen at least, if not more. "By a sudden and powerful inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these disciples uttered, not of their own minds, but as mouthpieces of the Holy Spirit, the praises of God in various languages hitherto, and possibly at the time itself, unknown to them" (Dean Alford in Greek Testament).

The significance of this miracle speaking in other tongues is not hard to discover. It was the oral manifestation of the parted tongues of fire, which had come upon each. Besides this it proclaimed the great fact that the Holy Spirit had come to make known the blessed Gospel to all nations under heaven, and though no Gentiles were present when this took place, the languages of the Gentiles were heard, and that from Jewish lips, showing that the Gospel should go forth unto the uttermost part of the earth. But did they utter all an orderly discourse, preaching the truth concerning Christ, or was their speech of an ecstatic nature, in the form of praising God? We believe the latter was the case. We look in vain through this book for the evidences that these believers continued speaking these different languages.

Now, while it is true that there was such a gift as speaking in an unknown tongue in the apostolic age, and no Christian believer would doubt the power of God to impart to a person the gift to preach the Gospel in a foreign tongue, we do not believe that this gift of speaking in an unknown tongue was to abide in the church. Repeatedly claims were made in years gone by that it had been restored (for instance during the Irvingite delusion in England), but in every case it was found to be spurious or emanating from the enemy. The present day "apostolic or pentecostal movement" with its high pretensions and false doctrines, lacking true scriptural knowledge and wisdom, creating new schisms in the body, with its women leaders and teachers, has all the marks of the same great counterfeiter upon it. (For a closer examination of the speaking in tongues see our larger work on Acts.)

Then Peter stood up with the eleven and gave his great testimony. What boldness he manifested! What a change from the Peter before Pentecost! It was the result of the Holy Spirit he had received. His address dealt with the great historical facts of the Gospel, bearing witness to the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus. In its scope and pointedness it is a remarkable production. It has three parts. 1. He repudiate the charge of drunkenness and quotes from Joel, avoiding, however, the statement that Joel's prophecy was fulfilled (verses 14-22). (Joel's Prophecy will be fulfilled in connection with the second Coming of Christ. Then the Holy Spirit, after the predicted judgments are passed, will be poured out upon all flesh. To put the fulfillment in our day is erroneous. See our Exposition of Joel.)

2. Next he gives a brief testimony of the life and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He quotes from the sixteenth Psalm (verses 23-28). 3. The last part of his address shows that the Holy Spirit had come as the result of the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The briefest but deepest Messianic Psalm is quoted in this section (Psalm 110). The address as reported closes with the significant word: "Let the whole house of Israel, therefore, assuredly know that God has made Him, this Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (verses 29-36). Notice how the Holy Spirit uses through Peter the Word of God. The Holy Spirit testifies in and through the written Word. The aim of Peter's address was to prove to the house of Israel that the crucified One is raised from the dead and that God made Him Lord and Christ, witnessed to by the presence of

the Holy Spirit. The Person of Christ and His work is still the great theme. Whenever He is preached the power of God will accompany the message.

Wonderful results followed. The Word had been preached and the power of the Holy Spirit brought the great truths to the hearts and consciences of the hearers. Their guilt in having crucified Jesus had been fully demonstrated, and now they asked, "Now, brethren, what shall we do?" Peter gives the needed answer. Repentance and baptism are the conditions. If these are fulfilled remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit are promised to follow. Peter's words wrongly interpreted have led to much confusion. Upon these words doctrines, especially concerning water baptism, have been built, which are not alone nowhere else taught in the Bible, but which are opposed to the Gospel. The words of Peter to his Jewish brethren have been used to make water baptism a saving ordinance, that only by submission to water baptism, with repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus, can remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit be obtained. We do not enlarge upon these unscriptural conceptions nor answer the utterly false doctrine of "baptismal regeneration", but rather point out briefly what these words of Peter mean. We must bear in mind that Peter addressed those who had openly rejected Jesus. They had, therefore, also openly to acknowledge their wrong and thus openly own Him as Messiah, whom they had disowned by delivering Him into the hands of lawless men. Repentance meant for them to own their guilt in having opposed and rejected Jesus. Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ (in which it differs from the baptism of John) was the outward expression of that repentance. It was for these Jews, therefore, a preliminary necessity. And here we must not forget that Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost had it still to do with the kingdom, as we shall more fully learn from his second address in the third chapter. Another offer of the kingdom was made to the nation. The great fact that the Holy Spirit had begun to form the body of Christ, the church, as stated before, was not revealed then. In this national testimony the word "repent" stands in the foreground, and their baptism in the name of Him whom they had crucified was a witness that they owned Him now and believed on Him.

About three thousand souls were added, who repented and were baptized. Then we behold them in blessed fellowship. Doctrine stands first. It is the prominent thing. They continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine. In the doctrine of the Apostles they were in fellowship together, and that fellowship was expressed in "the breaking of bread." It was not a common meal, but the carrying out of the request the Lord had made in the night He was betrayed, when He instituted what we call "the Lord's supper." Prayer is also mentioned. They had all things in common. They were like a great family, which in reality they were through the Grace of God.

And how happy they were! They had Christ, and that was enough. No system of theology, creeds, set of forms or any such thing, with which historical Christianity abounds--"Nothing but Christ." They received their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. Joy and singleness of heart are two great characteristics of the true believer.

CHAPTER 3

1. The Healing of the lame Man (verses 1-11).
2. Peter's address and appeal (verses 12-26).

The lame man, forty years old, at the gate called Beautiful is the type of the moral condition of the nation, like the impotent man whom the Lord healed (John 5). Israel with all its beautiful religious ceremonies was helpless, laying outside with no strength to enter in. Peter commands the lame man in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth to rise up and to walk. He is instantly healed. He then walked and leaped and entered through the gate as a worshipper into the temple, praising God. This great miracle was wrought as another evidence to the unbelieving nation that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had rejected and crucified, is their Messiah and King. It was a proof that the rejected One, who had died on a cross and had been buried, is living in Glory, and that God's omnipotent power had been revealed in answer to that name. The miracle also denoted that the

promised kingdom was once more offered to the nation. Concerning that kingdom, when it comes, it is written that "the lame man shall leap as an hart." (Isaiah 35:6.) But the lame man, so wonderfully healed, leaping and praising God, is likewise a picture of what the nation will be in a future day, when they will look upon Him whom they have pierced (See Zechariah 12:10; Ezekiel 36:27; Isaiah 12:1-6; 35:10). Peter delivers his second address. Interesting and of much importance are verses 19-21. They can only be understood in the right way if we do not lose sight of the fact to whom they were addressed, that is to Jews, and not to Gentiles. They are the heart of this discourse, and as such a God-given appeal and promise to the nation. If this is lost sight of, the words must lose their right meaning. The repentance which is demanded of them is an acknowledgment of the wrong they had done in denying the Holy and righteous One, a confession of their blood-guiltiness in having slain the author of life. This, of course, would result in their conversion and the blotting out of their sins as a nation. This God had promised before to the nation (Isaiah 44:22-23).

The "times of refreshing" and "restitution of all things" are expressions in which the Holy Spirit gathers together the hundreds of promises He gave through the different prophets of God concerning a time of great blessing for His people, and through them for the nations of the world. It would be impossible to mention all these promises and in what the times of refreshing and restoration of all things consist. These days of a coming age, the kingdom age, or as we call it because its duration will be a thousand years, the Millennium, are fully described on the pages of Old Testament prophecy. Not alone will the nation be blessed, but Jerusalem will be a great city; the land will be restored and become the great center for blessing; the nations of the earth will receive blessings, and groaning creation will be delivered from its groans and the curse which rests upon it. If we interpret the Word of Prophecy literally and cease spiritualizing it, we shall have no difficulty to behold the full meaning of the times of refreshing and the restitution of all things. The latter word does not include a restoration of the wicked dead, a second chance for those who passed out of this life in an unsaved condition. And these glorious times cannot come till the Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

CHAPTER 4

1. Their Arrest (verses 1-3).
2. The Result of the Testimony (verse 4).
3. Peter and John before the Rulers and Elders (verses 5-7).
4. Peter's bold witness (verses 8-12).
5. The astonished Sanhedrin and their Release (verses 13-22).
6. With their own company (verses 23:31).
7. The saved multitude (verses 32-37).

The enemy begins now his acts, and the first indication is given that the offer God's mercy was making to the nation would not be accepted. The Holy Spirit was acting mightily through the spoken Word, but these ecclesiastical leaders were hardening their hearts against the Word and the Spirit of God. The hate against that blessed Name broke out anew under the satanic power to which they had yielded. And the Sadducees came too. Though not much had been said on the resurrection, yet these rationalists, or as we would call them today, "higher critics," were much distressed because they preached Jesus and the resurrection. The next step is the arrest and imprisonment of the two apostles. Rough hands seize them. Of the Apostles we read nothing else. They submitted. The power of the Holy Spirit now manifested itself in a new way with them. They could suffer, and perhaps with great joy; in perfect peace they allowed themselves to be taken away.

We have here also the first fulfillment of the many predictions given by our Lord that His own were

to suffer persecution (Matthew 10:16-17; Mark 13:9; John 20:20). In Peter's witness we see the effect of the filling with the Spirit. What holy boldness he exhibited! He quotes the same Scripture passage to the assembled Sanhedrin, which the Lord had mentioned in their presence (See Matthew 22:23-41).

They knew that the Lord meant them when He quoted that verse, that they were the builders, who were to reject Him. They had done so in fulfillment of that prophecy. Peter's words are directed straight at them, "He is the stone which has been set at naught by you, the builders."

The rejected stone had become the corner stone. The One whom they had delivered up and cast out had been given the prominent place of the corner stone upon whom, as the foundation stone, everything rests, and who unites the building.

Peter closes with the statement that salvation is only in Him whom they had set at naught. There is no other Name given to men by which man can be saved, and that is the Name of Him who had made this lame man whole. Salvation they all needed. They, too, rulers, elders, chief priests must be saved. But only in Him God had procured salvation free and complete for all who will have it by believing on Him. This salvation was offered to these rulers, the builders who had rejected the Lord.

They were then threatened by the astonished rulers and elders and set at liberty. We find them in their own company and after praise and prayer new manifestations of the Holy Spirit follow. In the closing verses we have another glimpse of the assembly in Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 5

1. Ananias and Sapphira (verses 1-10).
2. Signs and wonders by the Apostles (verses 11-16).
3. The second arrest of the Apostles and their Deliverance (verses 17-25).
4. Before the Council (verses 26-33).
5. Gamaliel's Advice (verses 34-39).
6. The Apostles beaten and dismissed (verses 40-42).

With this chapter the scene changes. Beautiful is the ending of the previous chapter, Barnabas having sold his land, laid the money at the feet of the Apostles. He gave by it a striking testimony how he realized as a believing Jew his heavenly portion, by giving up that which is promised to the Jew, earthly possessions.

Our chapter begins with the significant word "But." It is the word of failure and decline. All was evidently perfect; nothing marred the precious scenes of fellowship--"but," and with this little word the story of evil begins. The enemy seeing himself so completely defeated by his attacks from the outside now enters among the flock and begins his work within.

Ananias and Sapphira were lying to the Holy Spirit. Swift judgment followed as to their earthly existence. They were cut off by death. The sin they had done was "a sin unto death" and the sentence, physical death, was immediately carried out. Peter is still in the foreground. We must remember here the words of the Lord which He spake to Peter, after this disciple had confessed Him as Son of God. "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). The same words concerning binding and loosing the Lord addressed to all the disciples (Matthew 18:18). The binding and loosing refers to discipline on earth. It has nothing whatever to do with forgiveness of sins or eternal salvation. Peter here exercises this authority, it was the first discipline. We must likewise remember that these events

happened on Jewish, on kingdom ground. The witness was still to the nation. The sudden judgment which came upon Ananias and Sapphira was a strong witness to the nation that the Holy One of Israel, Jehovah, dwelt in the midst of this remnant, who believed in the One whom the nation had rejected. When the kingdom is established on earth and the Lord Jesus Christ rules in righteousness, then, no doubt, every sin will be swiftly judged by death.

Great things followed. Their habitual place seems to have been in Solomon's porch. No one dared to join them. They held the position of authority. Though they had been forbidden the public ministry they are back in a prominent place. The people magnified them too. Then another result was that more believers were added. Added to what? The First Hebrew Christian Church of Jerusalem? The First Jewish Christian Society? No. They were added to the Lord. The sinner believing is saved, receives the Holy Spirit, is joined to the Lord, becomes one spirit with the Lord, a member of the body of which He is the Head. Signs and wonders were done by the Apostles. The sick were healed, unclean spirits were driven out. Multitudes of people from the surrounding country flocked to Jerusalem, bringing their sick, and they were all healed. They waited even in the streets for the time when Peter walked along so that his shadow might fall on some of them. These were great manifestations of the power of God. The words spoken by the Lord were then fulfilled. They did the works He did. These signs and wonders, however, are nowhere mentioned as to their permanency throughout this age. They were only for the beginning of this age; after the Gospel of Grace and the mystery hidden in former ages had been fully made known they disappeared.

All the Apostles were then arrested and Put into the common prison. During the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison door and led them out. Such a manifestation was perfectly in order at that time, and fully corresponds with the other kingdom characteristics in the beginning of this book. But these supernatural manifestations have ceased. Peter once more with the other Apostles bears witness to the resurrection and exaltation of the rejected Christ. On the advice of Gamaliel they were released after they had been beaten. With rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name, they departed and continued in their great ministry.

CHAPTER 6

1. The Murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews (verses 1-7).

2. Stephen; His Ministry and Arrest (verses 8-15).

Another failure is brought before us. The enemy acts again. From without and from within Satan pressed upon that which was of God. While the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit acted in Grace and power, the enemy came in to disturb. It is still so. Whenever there is a door opened there are also many adversaries (1 Corinthians 16:9).

The flesh manifested itself in murmuring. The assembly took care of the poor; widows being specially helpless, were the objects of daily ministrations. The Jews themselves in connection with the synagogue had special funds for them. They must have also formed a recognized group in the early church (1 Timothy 5:9-10). The ministration is the distribution mentioned in Chapter 4:35, and as the multitude was very great, including, perhaps, hundreds of widows, this work was quite a task. Murmurings arose and these were born of jealousy, the result of unbelief. It is the first indication of weakness and failure. This reminds us of the murmurings of Israel as recorded in the book of Exodus. The same old thing, the changeless flesh, shows itself among the saved and united company of believers, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The murmurings were on the side of the Grecians. Their complaint was against the Hebrews that the Grecian widows were being overlooked. The Grecians were not, as some teach, Gentiles, but they were Greek-speaking Jews, born in countries outside of Palestine, and therefore called Hellenists, or Grecians.

The murmuring is at once arrested. Seven men are chosen under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles declared "we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the

Word." The Holy Spirit thus separated the gifts called to minister in spiritual things from those in temporal matters. Note how prayer is put before the ministry of the Word. There can be no effectual ministry, no successful preaching and teaching of the Word, unless it is preceded by prayer.

The seven chosen ones are then named. While we know little of these men and the service they rendered, with the exception of Stephen and Philip, it is an interesting fact that their names are all Greek. In this the grace of God is beautifully exhibited. The Grecians were the murmurers, and no doubt they were fewer in number than the Hebrews. A modern day church meeting would have proposed to elect a committee composed of equal numbers of the two parties. But not so here.

Grace and wisdom from above are manifested in this action. The entire seven were chosen from those who had complained. This was the blessed rebuke of Grace.

The seven were then set before the Apostles, and when they had prayed they laid their hands on them. As this "laying on of hands" is so much misunderstood, and has been made an act by which authority, power and blessing is claimed to be conferred, we must say a brief word on it. It is always proper in reading and interpreting the Word of God, to see if not elsewhere in the Bible the terms or things to be interpreted are used, so that through them the right meaning can be ascertained. The laying on of hands is first mentioned in the Book of Leviticus. In the opening chapters of that book we read how the offerer was to lay his hand upon the head of the offering. Thus we read of the Peace offering: "He shall lay his hand upon the head of his offering" (Leviticus 3:2). This meant the identification of the Israelite with the offering itself. And this is the meaning of the laying on of hands from the side of the Apostles. They identified themselves and the assembly with them in their work for which they had been chosen. It was a very simple and appropriate act to show their fellowship with them. All else which has been made of the laying on of hands is an invention. There is no Scripture for the present day usage in Christendom, that a man in order to preach the Gospel or teach the Word of God must be "ordained."

miracles among the people. Certain of the synagogue of the Libertines and others disputed with Stephen. (It is wrong to call these "Libertines" free thinkers. Jews had been taken to Rome as slaves. Their descendants who had been liberated were called Libertines, that is freedmen. They were known as such in Jerusalem and hence the name "synagogue of the Libertines.") And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Stephen is accused of blasphemy. The charge is "blasphemy against Moses and against God." They succeeded in their satanic work by stirring up the people, the elders and the scribes. Three things are mentioned by them. He ceaseth not to speak words against this holy place, against the law, and that he should have said: "This Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us." And then they looked upon him, and behold his face was like the face of an angel. All eyes were attracted to this wonderful sight. Steadfastly they looked upon a face of Glory; a face

reflecting heaven's light, heaven's Glory; a face reflecting the Glory of Him into whose presence he soon would be called. And may not that young man named Saul also have been there and seen that face? And that dark countenance of that young Pharisee of Tarsus was soon to behold that same Glory-light, and then tell the world of the Gospel of the Glory and that "we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory unto glory."

CHAPTER 7

1. The Address of Stephen (verses 1-53).
2. The Martyrdom of Stephen (verses 54-60).

This is the largest chapter in this book and concludes the first section. Stephen is the chosen

instrument to deliver the final testimony to the nation. He was not permitted to finish it.

We notice at once a marked difference between the previous preaching by the Apostle Peter and the address of Stephen. The testimony of Peter was marked on the day of Pentecost and at the other occasions by great brevity. Stephen's address is the longest discourse reported in the New Testament. The name of Jesus is prominent in all the addresses of Peter. The fact that He was rejected by the people, crucified and that He rose from the dead, and the call to repentance, were the leading features of Peter's preaching. Stephen does not mention the Name of Jesus at all, though he has the person of Christ and His rejection as the theme of his testimony. (The name "Jesus" appears in the A.V. in verse 45; but it should be "Joshua" instead.) At the close of his address he speaks of the Just One of whom they had become betrayers and murderers.

Stephen had been accused of speaking against Moses and against God, also against the temple and the law. These accusations he is asked to answer. What he declared before the council shows plainly that the accusations are utterly false. His speech is, therefore, partly apologetic; but it is also teaching, in that it shows certain truths from the historic events he cites. And before he finishes his testimony the accused becomes the accuser of the nation; the one to be judged becomes the judge. Indeed his whole testimony as he rapidly speaks of past history in his great and divinely arranged retrospect, is a most powerful testimony to the nation as well as against the nation.

The great address falls into the following sections: 1. Abraham's History (verses 2-8). 2. Joseph and his brethren (verses 9-16). 3. The Rejection of Moses. The rejected one became their Deliverer and Ruler (verses 17-38). 4. The Story of the nation's apostasy and shame (verses 39-50). Then Stephen ceased his historical retrospect, he addressed them directly. The accused witness becomes the mouthpiece of the Judge, who pronounces the sentence upon the nation. This is found in verses 51-53. His martyrdom followed.

Three things are mentioned of this first martyr. He was full of the Holy Spirit; he looked steadfastly into heaven, seeing the glory of God; he saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

This is the first manifestation of the glorified Christ, which we have on record. There are three of them only. He appeared here to Stephen. Then He appeared unto Saul, who consented unto Stephen's death. Saul beheld Him in that Glory, brighter than the noon-day sun, and heard His voice. The last time the glorified Christ manifested Himself was to John in the island of Patmos. These three appearances of the glorified Christ present to our view the three aspects of His Second Coming. First He comes to welcome His own into His presence. He will arise and come into the air to meet His beloved co-heirs there. This is represented by the first appearing to Stephen, standing to receive him. Then Israel will behold Him, they who pierced Him will see Him, as Saul of Tarsus beheld the Lord. Then He will appear as John saw Him, the One who judges the earth in righteousness.

And now after this great and glorious vision, Stephen bears testimony to it. "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." He speaks of the Lord as "Son of Man." This is the only time outside of the Gospel records that we find this title of the Lord (aside from the old Testament reference in Hebrews 2).

They stoned him and Stephen, the mighty witness and mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit, fell asleep.

God's gracious offer and Christ had now been fully rejected by the nation. Stephen, who bore this last witness, is a striking evidence of the transforming power of Christ. How much like the Lord he was!

He was filled with the Spirit, full of faith and power, and like the Lord he did great wonders and miracles among the people. Like Christ, he was falsely accused of speaking against Moses, the law and the temple, and of being a blasphemer. They brought him before the same council and did what they did with the Lord, bringing false witnesses against him. He gave witness to the truth of

the confession the Lord had given before the council, that He was to sit at the right hand of God. He beheld Him there. The Lord Jesus committed His spirit in the Father's hands, and Stephen prayed that the Lord Jesus receive his spirit; and like the Lord he prayed for the forgiveness of his enemies. May the same power transform us all into the same image.

Part II

The Witness to Samaria. Saul's Conversion and Peter's Witness in Caesarea. Chapters 8-12

CHAPTER 8

1. The first great persecution (verses 1-3).
2. The preaching of the scattered believers. Philip in Samaria (verses 4-8).
3. Events in Samaria (verses 9-24).
4. The Gospel in many villages of Samaria (verse 25).
5. Philip and the Eunuch (verses 26-40).

The final testimony to the rulers of the people had been given. It was rejected, and the Spirit filled messenger killed. The last offer had therefore been completely rejected. The Gospel is now to be sent to the Gentiles. The eighth chapter gives the record how Samaria heard the Gospel.

Saul, the young Pharisee, was consenting unto Stephen's death. Later he refers to the scene, which must have been impossible for him to erase from his memory. "When the blood of Stephen was shed, I was standing by and keeping the garments of them that slew him" (Acts 22:20). Concerning Saul the Lord said to Ananias, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (9:16). What was done unto Stephen was done unto Saul. The Jews and Saul with them, as we believe, disputed and resisted Stephen in the synagogue. The Jews disputed with Paul, resisted him, and rejected his testimony. Stephen was accused of blasphemy; so was Paul (Acts 19:37). Stephen was accused of speaking against Moses, the holy place and the customs; so was Paul (Acts 21:28; 24:6; 25:8; 28:17). They rushed upon Stephen with one accord and seized him. The same happened to Paul (Acts 19:29). Stephen was dragged out of the city. So was Paul (Acts 14:19). Stephen was tried before the Sanhedrin; so did Paul appear before the Sanhedrin. Stephen was stoned and Paul was stoned at Lystra. Stephen suffered martyrdom; so did Paul in Rome. And yet, with all the sufferings that Paul had to undergo, he rejoiced. His eyes rested constantly upon that glorious One, whom Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, beheld in Glory. Later we hear him crying out from the prison in Rome, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death" (Philippians 3:10).

The first great persecution then broke out against the church in Jerusalem. Saul was evidently the leader (Acts 26:10-11; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13). But "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." God permitted this persecution that His Word might now be scattered abroad by the suffering saints. Philip, the Grecian Jew, one of the chosen seven, not an Apostle, is mightily used in preaching the Gospel in Samaria. The first missionary move to extend the Gospel was, therefore, not brought about under apostolic leadership, nor by the decree of an apostolic council, but by the Lord Himself. He led Philip to Samaria, where He Himself had been, yea to the very city of Samaria, Sychar (John 4). Great results followed the preaching of the Gospel. Miracles took place. Unclean spirits were driven out, many taken with palsies, and those who were lame were healed, so that there was great joy in that city. Simon Magus was a sinister instrument of Satan. He bewitched the

people of Samaria, claiming to be some great one.

The hour of deliverance came for the Samaritans when Philip preached the Word, concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. Signs and great miracles followed, and the Samaritans believed and were baptized. The miracles were done to show the power of God, to attest the preaching of the Gospel by Philip, and to expose the counterfeit powers of Simon. And he, like the sorcerers of Egypt, had to own that this was the power of God. He was amazed when he beheld the great miracles. But more than that, he also believed, was baptized, and then continued with Philip. But his faith was not through the Word of God. God's Word alone can produce faith in man, for faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Simon was captivated by the miracles he had seen. Philip was deceived by him, but not Peter, who uncovered his Wickedness.

That the Holy Spirit had not been given to the Samaritans and that He was received by them after Peter and John had come from Jerusalem and laid hands on them, has puzzled many earnest students of the Word. It has also led to erroneous teachings, as if the Holy Spirit must be received in a special manner after conversion.

The Samaritan believers had to be identified with those in Jerusalem, so much the more because there was a schism between Samaria and Jerusalem. Samaria had denied both the city of Jerusalem and the temple. This had to be ended and could no longer be tolerated. It was therefore divinely ordered that the gift of the Spirit in their case should be withheld till the two apostles came from Jerusalem. This meant an acknowledgment of Jerusalem; if the Holy Spirit had been imparted unto them at once it might have resulted in a continuance of the existing rivalry. And Peter is in the foreground and uses the keys of the kingdom of heaven here with the Samaritans as he did on the day of Pentecost with the Jews, and later with the Gentiles. Nowhere in the church epistles, in which the great salvation truths and blessings in Christ Jesus are revealed, is there a word said about receiving the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, or that one who has trusted in Christ and is born again should seek the gift of the Holy Spirit afterward.

The conversion of the Eunuch is full of blessed lessons. Philip was obedient to the call of the Lord and the Eunuch, the prominent Ethiopian, Queen Candace's treasurer, who had returned from Jerusalem, an unsatisfied seeker, believed on the Lord Jesus and went on his way rejoicing. Verse 37 is an interpolation and should be omitted. Philip was caught away and was found some twenty miles north of Gaza, at Azotus. From there he started out anew preaching the Gospel. In many cities his voice was heard. These coast cities were inhabited by many Gentiles and included larger places like Jamnia, Lydda, Joppa and Antipatris. The day of Christ will make known the labors and also the reward of this great Evangelist. Then he came to Caesarea. But did he stop with that? We do not know. Twenty years later we find him there and Paul was then his guest.

CHAPTER 9

1. The vision of Glory on the road to Damascus (verses 1-9).
2. Instructions given to Ananias (verses 10-16).
3. Saul filled with the Spirit, is baptized and preaches that Jesus is the Son of God (verses 17-22).
4. Saul persecuted and back in Jerusalem (verses 23-31).
5. Further Acts of Peter (verses 32-43).

The previous chapter must be looked upon in its main part as a parenthesis. The record now leads us back to the close of the seventh, and the person who was connected with the great tragedy enacted there is prominently brought now before us. The witnesses of the wicked deed had laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. This is the first time this

remarkable man is mentioned. We also learned that he was consenting unto Stephen's death; he made havoc of the church and committed men and women to prison. While the scattered believers had carried the Gospel throughout Judea, Philip had gone down to Samaria and with great results preached the Gospel, and during the same time Peter and John preached in the Samaritan villages, Saul carried on his work of persecution. This we learn from the opening verse of the present chapter. "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest." The conversion of this great persecutor and his call by the risen and glorified lord to be the Apostle to the Gentiles is the event which is next described. It is the greatest event recorded in Acts next to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Saul was from Tarsus in Cilicia, where he had become acquainted with Greek life, literature, art and philosophy. The chief industry of Tarsus was tent making. This trade the young Saul learned. He had a married sister living in Jerusalem (Acts 23:16). He also was a Roman citizen.

Saul received his religious education in Jerusalem. We find this from his own words, "I am verily a man, a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city (Jerusalem) at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye are all this day" (Acts 22:3).

That Saul was highly respected in Jerusalem and close to the leaders of the people, is seen by the letters entrusted to him and the commission to Damascus. He may have been even a member of the council, for "he voted." "When they (Christians) were put to death, I gave my voice (literally, my vote) against them" (Acts 26:10).

And now God's marvelous Grace and Power in salvation is to be manifested. Israel as a nation had rejected the offer and Stephen's death marked the end of that gracious offer. But God can manifest even greater riches of His Grace and display His great Love. Saul not alone belonged to the nation, which had rejected Christ, but shared in that rejection, but he was, so to speak, the heading up of all the hatred and malignity against the Christ of God. He personified the blindness, unbelief and hatred of the whole nation. He was indeed an enemy, the greatest enemy, the chief of sinners. Surely only Grace could save such a one, and Grace it is, which is now to be manifested in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the Grace which he was to know first by the vision of the glorified Christ, and which he, ever after, was to proclaim and make known to others.

The vision itself which burst upon Saul on the road to Damascus is one of the greatest in the whole Bible. It has baffled unbelief. Infidels of all descriptions, French rationalists like Renan, reformed rationalistic Jews, and the worst of all, the advocates of the destructive Bible Criticism, have tried to explain the occurrence in some natural way.

Renan said that it was an uneasy conscience with unstrung nerves, fatigue of the journey, eyes inflamed by the hot sun, a sudden stroke of fever, which produced the hallucination. And this nonsense is repeated to this day. Others of the critics have stated that it was a thunderstorm which overtook him, and that a flash of lightning blinded him. In that lightning flash he imagined that he saw Christ. Again, others have tried to explain his vision by some physical disease. Jews and others have declared that he suffered from Epilepsy, which the Greeks called "the holy disease." This disease, they say, put him into a state of ecstasy, which may have greatly impressed his Gentile hearers. In such an attack he imagined to have seen a vision and heard a voice. All these and other opinions are puerile inventions. The fact is, the conversion of Saul is one of the great miracles and evidences of Christianity.

The ninth chapter does not contain the full record of what happened on the road to Damascus. The Apostle Paul himself relates twice his own experience in chapter 22:5-16 and in chapter 26:12-18. He also mentions his conversion briefly in 1 Corinthians 15:8; Galatians 1:15-16 and 1 Timothy 1:12-13. The three accounts of Saul's conversion are not without meaning. The one before us in the ninth chapter is the briefest, and is simply the historical account of the event as it had to be embodied in the Book of the Acts, as history. The account in the twenty-second chapter was given

by Paul in the Hebrew tongue; it is the longest statement and was addressed to the Jews. The account in the twenty-sixth chapter was given in presence of the Roman governor Festus and the Jewish king Agrippa, therefore addressed to both Jews and Gentiles. But are there not discrepancies and disagreements in these three accounts? Such has been the claim from the side of men who reject the inspiration of the Bible. There are differences, but no disagreements. These differences in themselves are the evidences of inspiration. The differences, however, are simply in the manner in which the facts of the event are presented.

He saw then the glorified One and heard His voice. This great vision became the great turning point of his life. He received perfect knowledge and assurance, that the rejected Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. The great event is prophetic. It will be repeated on a larger scale when the Lord Jesus comes again and the remnant of Israel sees Him coming in the clouds of heaven.

The words which the Lord addressed to Saul:--"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" contain the blessed Gospel he was soon to proclaim. He did not persecute Christ, but those who had believed on Him.

Every believing sinner is a member of the body of Christ. Christ in Glory, the Lord, who spoke to Saul in the way, is the Head of that body, the church. Christ is in each member of His body, His life is there; and every believer is in Christ. "Ye in Me and I in you." And this great hidden mystery flashes forth in this wonderful event for the first time "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me." "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." The poor, hated, despised Nazarenes, whom the mad, Jewish zealot Saul of Tarsus had driven out of Jerusalem, put into prison and delivered unto death, were one with the Lord in Glory. They were identified with Him and He with them. Their persecution meant His persecution, in their affliction He was afflicted. They were members of His body and that body was in existence.

Soon after we see the erstwhile persecutor preaching Jesus, that He is the Son of God. Persecution soon followed. He also spent a time in Arabia and then paid a visit to Jerusalem for fifteen days (Galatians 1:17-24). Further Acts of Peter by divine power conclude this chapter.

CHAPTER 10

1. Cornelius of Caesarea and his Preparation (verses 1-8).
2. The Trance-vision of Peter (verses 9-16).
3. Peter with Cornelius at Caesarea (verses 17-33).
4. Peter Preaching to the Gentiles (verses 34-43).
5. The Interrupted Message (verses 44-48).

The ending of the preceding chapter tells us that Peter tarried in Joppa in the house of Simon the tanner. Was he breaking with his Jewish law and customs? Tanning as a trade was considered unclean by the Jews.

In Ephesians 2:11-18 we read of the Grace of God to the Gentiles. Up to this time in the Book of Acts we have seen nothing of this gracious purpose, the blessed result of the finished work of Christ on the cross. Jerusalem heard the Gospel first. Once more the good news of the Kingdom was preached with a full offer of forgiveness to the Jews. God was willing to blot out their transgressions and to make good all He had promised to the nation. Many signs and miracles had been done in Jerusalem in demonstration of the resurrection from the dead of the Prince of Life, whom they had crucified. We have seen how the seventh chapter in this book marks the close of that special offer to Jerusalem. Immediately after the death of Stephen, the Gospel was carried into Judea and Samaria. In Samaria a people heard and accepted the glad tidings. They were a mixed race and practiced circumcision and obeyed parts of the law. In the ninth chapter the conversion of

Paul is recorded and the Lord makes known that the persecutor of the church is to be the chosen vessel to bear His name before the Gentiles. Paul, however, was not chosen to open first the door to the Gentiles as such, but Peter, the Apostle of the circumcision. A new work is given him to do, which was indeed a strange work for a Jew. He was to go to the Gentiles, whom the Jews considered unclean. It was unlawful for a Jew to join himself to any Gentile; an insurmountable barrier divided them. For this reason the Jews considered the Gentiles as unclean, common, spoke of them as dogs, and had no intercourse with them. It is of interest to notice that Peter tarried in Joppa; from this old city he is to be sent forth to preach the Gospel to Cornelius and his household. Centuries ago another Jew had come to Joppa with a solemn message from his God, which he was commissioned to bear far hence to the Gentiles. Jonah, the prophet, took a ship from Joppa and refused obedience to the divine call.

But here is one who is obedient to the heavenly vision and who is to bring a higher message to the Gentiles, the good news of a free and full salvation. That Peter, the Apostle of the circumcision, was chosen for this great errand, was all important hint that the middle wall of partition had been broken down and that believing Jews and Gentiles were to form one new man.

Cornelius belonged to that class of Gentiles who, illumined by the Holy Spirit, had turned to God from idols, to serve the true and the living God. He was therefore a converted man, for God acknowledged him as such. Of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ and the blessed assurance of that salvation he knew nothing. His prayers had been heard. The angel who appeared gave Cornelius the full directions where Peter was to be found. While the messengers were hastening to Joppa, Peter had his vision.

And what is the meaning of the vision? The vessel is the type of the church. The four corners represent the four corners of the earth. The clean animals it contained, the Jews; the unclean, the Gentiles. But all in that vessel are cleansed. The Grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ has cleansed those who are in Christ. "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but Ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). Jew and Gentile believing, redeemed by blood, saved by Grace, washed and sanctified, are to be put into one body.

Then Peter reached Caesarea and preached to Cornelius and those who were gathered together. How different this message from those he delivered in Jerusalem. There are a few introductory remarks followed by a declaration of the facts concerning Jesus of Nazareth. Then he pressed the message home to their hearts. "To Him give all the Prophets witness that through His Name whosoever believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins." This was his last word to the assembled company. It is the first time we find the word "whosoever" in this book. He had nothing to say to this Gentile company about repentance and baptism. His message was interrupted. They believed and the Holy Spirit fell on them.

Something new had taken place. On Pentecost it meant water baptism as a condition of receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) and the remission of sins; in Samaria the Apostles Peter and John, according to the wisdom of God, had to lay on hands, but here without water baptism and laying on of hands the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles. Nor was there any process of seeking, surrendering, examining themselves, giving up, praying for it, but by hearing of faith, in believing the message of the Gospel the Holy Spirit fell on them. And to show that every barrier between Jew and Gentile had been removed, that nothing inferior had been bestowed upon Gentiles, than that which came upon the believing Jews on the day of Pentecost, Cornelius, his kinsmen and friends spoke with tongues and magnified God. It was the conclusive evidence that Gentiles, uncircumcised and unbaptized, received the Holy Spirit like the Jews.

Water baptism follows. Up to this chapter water baptism preceded the gift of the Holy Spirit. This shows the place water baptism holds on the ground of grace. Water baptism has no place in the proclamation of the Gospel of Grace. It is not a means of grace, nor a sacrament. Peter, however, does not slight nor ignore baptism. "Can any man forbid water?" Then he commanded them to be

baptized in the name of the Lord.

CHAPTER 11

1. Peter's Defense in Jerusalem (verses 1-18).
2. The Beginning of the Church in Antioch (verses 19-21).
3. Barnabas sent to Antioch (verses 22-26).
4. The Prophecy of Agabus (verses 27-30).

Peter silenced the objections of his brethren in Jerusalem by a rehearsal of his experience. Verse 19 connects with Chapter 8:4. Antioch comes now into prominence as the great Gentile center of Christianity. A great number believed and turned unto the Lord. Then Barnabas was sent to Antioch to inspect the great work. They wanted to know in Jerusalem if the reports were true, and if true the assembly had to be recognized as such. This shows that the Oneness of the church, though not yet fully made known by revelation, was nevertheless realized through the Holy Spirit. And that a blessed relationship existed between the assembly in Jerusalem and the one in Antioch, is seen by Peter's visit in that city, when in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, he ate with these believing Gentiles and enjoyed fellowship with them (Galatians 2:11-12).

The movement also attracted the attention of the outsiders. They called them "Christians." The Jews, it is certain, did not give this name, but the Gentiles invented it. Antioch was famous for its readiness to jeer and call names; it was known by its witty epigrams. So they coined a new word, "Christianoi"--Christians. It is used exclusively by outsiders, as seen in the case of Agrippa, also see 1 Peter 4:16. Jews and Gentiles alike were called by this name, "Christians," so that it bears testimony to the oneness of Jew and Gentile in Christ.

CHAPTER 12

1. The great Persecution by Herod Agrippa I (verses 1-5).
2. The miraculous deliverance of Peter (verses 6-17).
3. The Presumption and Judgment of Herod (verses 18-23).
4. Barnabas and Saul returning to Jerusalem (verses 24-25).

With this chapter we reach the conclusion of the second part of this book. Jerusalem had heard the second offer concerning the Kingdom, and mercy was ready even for the murderers of the Prince of Life. But that offer was rejected. Stephen's testimony followed by his martyrdom marked the close of that second offer to the city where our Lord had been crucified. Then broke out a great persecution, and they were scattered abroad except the Apostles. From our last chapter we learned that others who were driven out of Jerusalem preached the Word in Phenice, Cyprus and Antioch. The twelfth chapter, with which this part of Acts closes, is an interesting one. It is not only interesting on account of the historical information it contains, but also because of its dispensational foreshadowing. Once more we are introduced to Jerusalem and see another great persecution. The wicked King is reigning over the city. James is killed with the sword, while Peter is imprisoned but wonderfully delivered; the evil King, who claimed divine power and worship, is suddenly smitten by the judgment of the Lord. Then the Word grew and multiplied, Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem to Antioch, from where the great missionary operations were soon to be conducted. The events in Jerusalem, James' martyrdom under King Herod, Peter's imprisonment and deliverance, as well as the fate of the persecuting King, foreshadow the events with which this present age will close. After the true church is taken from the earth, that is when 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 is fulfilled, the great tribulation will take place. While great tribulation and judgment will come upon the whole

world, the great tribulation will come upon the Jewish people who have returned in part to their own land. In the midst of the masses of unbelieving Jews, there will be found a remnant of God-fearing Jews, who are converted and bear testimony to the truth. A wicked King, the man of sin, the false Messiah, will then be in power in Jerusalem. Part of that Jewish remnant will suffer martyrdom; these are represented by James, whom Herod, the type of the Antichrist, slew. Another part will be delivered as Peter was delivered. Herod's presumption and fate clearly points to that of the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3-8). All this may well be kept in mind in the study of this chapter in detail.

Interesting is the account of the prayer meeting held in behalf of Peter. When God had answered their prayers they were reluctant to believe it. Not one of the company believed that Peter had been released. Rhoda was the one who believed that it was Peter. And this is undoubtedly the reason why her name is mentioned in this book. The poor maid, perhaps a slave girl, pleased God because she had faith. While there was great earnestness in that prayer meeting, when the prayer was answered, unbelief manifested itself.

Part III

The Witness to the Gentiles. The Apostle to the Gentiles; his Ministry and Captivity. Chapters 13-28

CHAPTER 13

1. The Divine Choice. Barnabas and Saul separated unto the work (verses 1-3).
2. The Beginning of the Journey and the events in Cyprus (verses 4-12).
3. The Gospel in Galatia. Paul's Address (verses 13-41).
4. The Gospel rejected by the Jews (verses 42-52).

The thirteenth chapter is the beginning of the third part of this book. The second great center of Christianity comes to the front. It is no longer Jerusalem, but the city of Antioch. The gospel which had been preached in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, which Cornelius and his house had heard and accepted, is now in a special manner to go far hence to the Gentiles. The city in which the first great Gentile church had been established is the starting point. Peter, so prominent in the first twelve chapters of our book, is no longer the leading actor. He is mentioned only once in this second part of the Book of Acts. In the fifteenth chapter, in connection with the council in Jerusalem, his voice is heard once more. The special work in connection with the kingdom of heaven, in opening the door to the Jews and Gentiles (Acts 2 and chapter 10) had been accomplished by him. Now he disappears from our view, though he continued to exercise his apostleship in connection with the circumcision (Galatians 2:7). Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, instead appears upon the scene, and his wonderful activity is described in the remaining part of the book. The opposition and blindness of the Jews in a continued rejection of the gospel becomes fully evident throughout this section, and the book itself closes with the testimony against them: "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 28:28). Besides this we shall find in these chapters the acts of the Holy Spirit in the call and sending forth of the chosen instruments in the way He guided them, how He filled them, opened doors, and manifested His gracious power in the salvation of sinners.

The beginning of the great movement to send now the Gospel far hence to the Gentiles was inaugurated by the Holy Spirit. The assembled prophets and teachers ministered to the Lord in praise and prayer, when the Holy Spirit's voice was heard demanding the separation of Barnabas and Saul unto a work He had called them. The personality of the Holy Spirit is here fully

demonstrated. They were thus sent forth not by the church, nor by a missionary society or committee, but by the Holy Spirit.

Accompanied by John Mark as a helper they sailed to Cyprus. Here at Paphos they found a Jew, a sorcerer and false prophet by name of Bar-Jesus (Son Jesus). Such evil persons, special instruments of Satan, appear repeatedly in this book, and generally when the Gospel was carried into some new regions. In Samaria it was Simon Magus; in Macedonia the damsel with the familiar spirit, and here this demon-possessed Jew. He was an enemy of all righteousness. He tried to keep the Word from the Roman Sergius Paulus. Thus the Jews tried to keep the Gospel from reaching the Gentiles. The judgment which fell upon this wicked Jew is typical of the judicial blindness which has come upon the Jews. But as this sorcerer who opposed the Gospel was not to see the sun for a season, even so, the blindness of the Jews is not permanent.

For the first time, and that in connection with this incident, the name of Paul is mentioned. Some have suggested that he took the name in honor of Sergius Paulus, but that is incorrect. Paul is a Roman name, and means "little." Later he writes of himself as "less than the least of all saints." He took the lowest place, and the name which signifies this comes now into prominence. Barnabas is taking the second place; not Barnabas and Saul, but Paul and Barnabas is now the order.

John Mark left them when they had come to Perga in Pamphylia. It was on account of the work (chapter 15:38). It was a failure and for a time he was unprofitable. See 2 Timothy 4:11 where we read of his restoration. He is the one who wrote the Gospel of the obedient servant, the Gospel of Mark.

In verses 16-41 Paul's great address in Antioch of Pisidia is reported. Then the Jews rejected the Gospel, and when they preached to the Gentiles they contradicted and blasphemed.

CHAPTER 14

1. The work in Iconium and the persecution of the Apostles (verses 1-6).
2. In Derbe and Lystra; the Impotent Man healed (verses 7-18).
3. The Stoning of Paul and further ministries (verses 19-24).
4. The Return to Antioch (verses 25-28).

Iconium was a Phrygian town, bordering on Lycaonia. Here again the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles. They abode there a long time, and in spite of opposition and persecution they spoke with much boldness the Word of God. Signs and wonders were also done by their hands. When their lives were threatened by the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, they fled to Lystra and Derbe.

Derbe was the home of a pious Jewess by name of Eunice. She had married a Greek, who had died. Her son was Timotheus and she lived with her mother Lois (Acts 16:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:5). In Lystra another lame man is healed by the power of God. The ignorant heathen, seeing the miracle, thought the two apostles were gods and attempted to worship them. They abhorred their proceedings and refused the honor of men.

The enemy lurked behind this, no doubt, but the grace of God gave to the apostles the power to act as they did. How much of such idolizing is going on in modern days; how men, professedly the servants of the Lord, seek and love the honor and praise of men, is too evident to be mentioned. Seeking honor from men and having delight in the applause of the "religious world" is a deadly thing, for it dishonors Christ, to whom all honor and glory is due. And how much of all this there is in the present day! It is but the result of not giving the Lord Jesus Christ the preeminence.

Jews then appeared coming from Iconium and Antioch and stirred up the people against them. The mass of people who were ready to worship Barnabas and Paul changed quickly and stoned Paul.

Most likely the fury turned against him because he had been instrumental in healing the crippled man. As the stones fell upon him, must he not have remembered Stephen? And may he not have prayed as Stephen did? And after they thought him dead, they dragged his body out of the city. But the Lord, who had announced such suffering for him, had watched over his servant. He was in His own hands, as every child of God is in His care. The enemy who stood behind the furious mob, as he stood behind the attempt to sacrifice unto them, would have killed Paul. But he could not touch Paul's life, as he was not Permitted to touch the life of another servant of God, Job (Job 2:6). His sudden recovery was supernatural. He refers in 2 Corinthians 11:25 to this stoning, "Once I was stoned." Another reference to Lystra we find in his second Epistle to Timothy: "Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra, what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me" (2 Timothy 3:11). Blessed be His name, He is the same Lord still and Will deliver them that trust in Him.

Then after additional testimony in Lystra and a visit to Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia, to build up the disciples and to strengthen them, they terminate this first great journey by returning to the place from which they had started.

CHAPTER 15

1. The false teachers from Judea. Paul and Barnabas sent to Jerusalem (verses 1-5).
2. The Council in Jerusalem (verses 6-21).
3. The Result made known (verses 22-29).
4. The Consolation brought to Antioch (verses 30-35).
5. Paul and Barnabas separate (verses 36-41).

A very critical time had now arrived for the church. An important question had to be settled. That Gentiles can be saved and salvation must be extended to the Gentiles had been fully demonstrated. The Apostle of the circumcision, Peter, had been used to preach the Gospel to a company of God-fearing Gentiles. Evangelists had gone to Antioch and the great Gentile center had there been founded. Paul and Barnabas had completed their great missionary journey and numerous assemblies of Gentiles, saved by Grace, were formed. The question of the salvation of Gentiles could no longer be raised. But we remember from the eleventh chapter of this book, that when Peter returned to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him. They objected to Peter going to men uncircumcised and eating with them. But those of the circumcision had not been fully satisfied with the status of the believing Gentiles. What about circumcision in their case? Should they not also keep the Law? In other words, the question of the relation of the believing Gentile to the Law and to circumcision had to be determined.

These teachers which taught that Gentiles, in order to be saved, had to be circumcised after the manner of Moses, disturbed greatly the church in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas with others were therefore delegated to go with this question to Jerusalem. Galatians 2:1-10 must be carefully read for interesting and additional information. The question was settled in favor of the Gospel Paul had preached. James declared: "Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God." They were to abstain from pollution of idols, from fornication, from things strangled and from blood. Of great importance are the words which James uttered by inspiration at this occasion. It was the first church-council, and here the Holy Spirit revealed God's gracious purposes concerning the age that is and the age to come.

Note in verses 14-18 the four important steps: 1. God visits the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His Name. This is the purpose of the present age. The called people constitute the church, the body of Christ. 2. After this I will return. This means the second Coming of Christ. When the Church is completed and all the members added to that body, Christ comes again, first, as

subsequently revealed, for His saints and then with them. 3. The Restoration of Israel follows after His Return. The Tabernacle of David will be built again and will be set up. 4. Then all the Gentiles will seek after the Lord. This is the world-conversion. How strange that this divinely revealed program should be entirely ignored by all church-councils at the present time.

Then after the results of the council and the decision concerning the Gentiles had been made known by a letter, Antioch received consolation.

The beginning of the second missionary journey of Paul is described in the closing paragraph of this chapter. We read nothing of prayer or waiting on God for guidance. Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go again." He wanted to go over the same territory. This was not the plan of the Spirit. Failure follows on account of self-will and self-choosing. Paul and Barnabas separate on account of John Mark. Barnabas took Mark and Paul chose Silas.

CHAPTER 16

1. In Derbe and Lystra again. Timotheus (verses 1-5).
2. The Preaching forbidden in Asia (verses 6-8).
3. The Vision of the Man from Macedonia (verses 9-12).
4. The Gospel in Europe (verses 13-40).

Read in connection with the first verses of this chapter 1 Timothy 1:18, 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:5-6, 3:15. The circumcision of Timothy, the offspring of a mixed marriage, was not demanded by the law. Paul in circumcising Timothy manifested his liberty; he acted graciously, not wishing to put a stumbling block in the way of the Jews (see 1 Corinthians 9:20).

They travel on through Phrygia and Galatia but were forbidden to preach in Asia. This was at that time a large province in Asia Minor with many flourishing cities. It was not God's purpose to have work done at that time. They followed divine guidance obediently. Later Paul spent three years in Ephesus, the capital of that province, and all Asia heard the Word. They also wanted to visit Bithynia, but were not allowed to do so. Bithynia heard the Word at another time perhaps through Peter (1 Peter 1:1-2). All this shows clearly how the Holy Spirit is an infallible guide in Christian service. He must point out the way and the places as well as the time when and where the Word is to be spoken. Then follows the vision of the Man from Macedonia. This Macedonian cry is answered at once. From the tenth verse we learn that Luke, the author of this record, joined the party. This is seen by the changed pronoun from "they" to "we." Then they reached Philippi. On the small river Gangites the first opportunity to minister is given. We wonder if Paul looked for the man he had seen in his vision. There was no man present. A company of women had gathered in the place "where prayer was wont to be made." Lydia of Thyatira is the first convert of Europe. She was a true worshipper of God like Cornelius. And it was the Lord who opened her heart. Satan's opposition is seen once more in the demon-possessed damsel. Satan is a cunning being full of wisdom. He tried through this damsel to establish a friendly relation with the servants of the Lord. But the Gospel does not need such support. After her conversion Satan changed his tactics. They were beaten with many stripes and cast into prison, their feet held in the stocks. What followed is familiar to all. God had worked in mighty power delivering His servants and saving the jailer and his household.

CHAPTER 17

1. The Gospel in Thessalonica (verses 1-9).
2. The Gospel in Beroea (verses 10-14).

3. Paul in Athens (verses 15-34).

Three cities in which the Gospel is next preached are before us in this chapter. But there is a marked difference between these three places. In Thessalonica there was much hostility, the result of the success of the Gospel. In Beroea a more noble class of Jews were found. Their nobility consisted in submission to the Scriptures, the oracles of God, and in a ready mind. There was a still greater blessing among the Jews and the Gentiles. In Athens the Apostle Paul met idolatry, indifference and ridicule.

An interesting fact is learned concerning the activity of the apostle in Thessalonica from the two Epistles, which he addressed some time after to the Thessalonians. These were the first Epistles Paul wrote. From these we learn that the Apostle not only preached the Gospel, but also taught the Thessalonian believers prophetic Truths and emphasized the Second Coming of Christ and the events connected with it. In the Second Epistle he reminds them of his oral teaching (2 Thessalonians 2:5).

The address Paul gave in Athens has three sections: 1. The Introduction (verses 22-23) in which he refers to the altar with the strange inscription "to the unknown God." Then he uttered the words, "Him I declare unto you." 2. Who the unknown God is (verses 24-29). He is a personal God who made the world and all that is in it. He answered the Epicurean and Stoic schools of philosophy. Materialism and Pantheism were thus swept aside. 3. He closes with the message from God (verses 30-31).

He aims at their conscience to awaken them to the sense of need to turn away from idols to the true God. God sends to all One message, be they Jew or Gentiles, Greeks or Barbarians, to repent. And then he states the reason. A day is appointed in which He will judge the world in righteousness. The one through whom God will judge is a Man ordained by Him; then follows the declaration of the resurrection of this Man. The day of judgment here does not mean a universal judgment (a term not known in Scripture) nor the great white throne judgment. The judgment here does not concern the dead at all, but it is the judgment of the habitable world. It is the judgment which will take place when the Man whom God raised from the dead, our Lord Jesus Christ, comes the second time. His resurrection is the assurance of it.

CHAPTER 18

1. In Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla. His Testimony and Separation from the Jews (verses 1-8).
2. Encouragement from the Lord in a vision (verses 9-11).
3. Paul and Gallio (verses 12-17).
4. From Corinth to Ephesus and Antioch. The second journey ended (verses 18-22).
5. Establishing disciples in Galatia and Phrygia (verse 23).
6. Apollos, the Alexandrian (verses 24-28).

Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned here for the first time. This interesting couple had established themselves in Corinth, and what a joy it must have been to the Apostle when he was led to their home. How sweet their fellowship must have been as they toiled together in their trade as tent makers and spoke one to another about the Lord. From the same chapter we learn that after Paul's ministry had terminated they went to Ephesus (verse 19). From 1 Corinthians 16:19 we learn that they were still there when that epistle was written. But in writing to the Romans Paul says, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus" (Romans 16:3), so that they had wandered back to Rome and were in happy fellowship with the Roman assembly. 2 Timothy 4:19 tells us that once more they were back in Ephesus where Timothy had his abode. "Salute Prisca (an abbreviation of

Priscilla) and Aquila." They were indeed strangers and pilgrims, but blessed to know that their wanderings were by the Lord. Priscilla is mostly mentioned before Aquila, from which we may learn that she, like other notable women of apostolic days, "labored for the Gospel."

It seems that Paul followed the same method of work as he did in Thessalonica. First, he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks (verse 4). This must have been altogether on Old Testament ground, showing the divine predictions concerning Christ. When Silas and Timotheus arrived, then he was greatly pressed in spirit and testified to the Jews more fully that Jesus is the Christ. That there was blessed fruit we learn from his epistles to the Corinthians. He himself baptized Crispus and Gaius and the household of Stephanas (1 Corinthians 1:14-16). And he was with them in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. His speech was far different from the one he had used in addressing the philosophers of Athens. "My speech was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:3-4). His presence was base unto them "Who in presence am base among you" (2 Corinthians 10:1). His bodily presence, these Corinthians said, is weak, and his speech contemptible (2. Corinthians 10:10).

The Lord encouraged His servant in a vision. The Jews' attempt to harm Paul through Gallio failed. Sosthenes the chief ruler received a beating instead of the apostle.

If the Sosthenes who is mentioned in the opening verse of the first Epistle of the Corinthians is the same, then he profited immensely by his experience. Paul addresses him as a brother. We believe he is the same person, for the Grace of God delights to take up such characters and show in them what Grace can do.

From Corinth he went to Ephesus, then to Jerusalem and back to Antioch. Thus ended the second missionary journey. After this he established the disciples in Galatia and Phrygia. An extremely beautiful incident closes this chapter. A new preacher appeared among the Jews in Ephesus, Apollos the Alexandrian. He is described as an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures. In Alexandria, Philo, the great Hellenistic Jewish Philosopher, had flourished. He was born about 20 B.C. and died after the year 40 A.D. He introduced Platonism into Judaism. In all probability Apollos was one of his disciples, but he accepted that which Philo did not believe. He had come most likely in touch with disciples of John the Baptist, and had been baptized with John's baptism unto repentance. He knew that Jesus is the Messiah, knew the facts of His earthly life and the miracles He did. Of the meaning of His death and resurrection Apollos knew nothing, nor had he any knowledge of the Holy Spirit. The entire truth of the Gospel of Grace was unknown to Him. The text in the authorized version that he "taught diligently the things of the Lord" is incorrect. The correct translation is "he taught diligently the things concerning Jesus."

Aquila and Priscilla were then used to expound unto him the way of God more perfectly.

CHAPTER 19

1. The second visit of Paul to Ephesus. The twelve disciples of John (verses 1-7).
2. The Apostle's continued labors. The separation of the disciples. The Province Asia evangelized (verses 8-10).
3. The Power of God and the Power of Satan (verses 11-20).
4. Paul plans to go to Jerusalem and to visit Rome (verses 21-22).
5. The opposition and riot at Ephesus (verses 23-41).

The disciples whom Paul found at Ephesus were disciples of John. The question the Apostle asked them has often been made the foundation of wrong teaching concerning the Holy Spirit. It is claimed that the Holy Spirit must be received in a special manner after conversion. The little word

"since" in Paul's question must be changed into "when," for it is mistranslated. "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?"

Paul makes the gift of the Spirit a test of true discipleship. If they were true believers they received the Holy Spirit when they believed, that is when they accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. If they did not receive the Holy Spirit then it is an evidence that they did not believe. "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Romans 8:9).

They heard next the full truth of the Gospel and believed, therefore they received the gift of the Spirit. Ephesus was the stronghold of Satan. When the power of God was manifested in the special miracles of Paul and the demons were driven out, then Satan also began to work. A great victory over the power of darkness followed.

Then Paul purposed in the spirit (verse 21) to go to Jerusalem. This verse marks an important change, which introduces us to the last stage of the recorded acts of Paul in this historical account. Rome is the goal which looms up before him. "I must also see Rome." And he saw Rome, but not in the way as he purposed in his spirit, but as the prisoner of the Lord. His journey begins now towards that great city, and at the close of the book we find him there a prisoner. The story of his journey to Jerusalem, a journey in which he perseveres though repeatedly warned by the Spirit of God, his arrest in Jerusalem, his trials and addresses before the Jews, before Felix, Festus and King Agrippa, his voyage to Rome and shipwreck and arrival in Rome, are the contents of the remaining part of our book.

The question has often been raised how the purposing of Paul in the spirit to go again to Jerusalem is to be understood. Is the word "spirit" to be written with a capital "S" or not? In other words, did he purpose in the Spirit of God, after prolonged prayer, to go up to Jerusalem? Did the Holy Spirit guide him to take up to the city of his fathers the contributions from Achaia and Macedonia for the poor saints? (Romans 15:25-26). It could not have been the Spirit of God who prompted him to go once more to Jerusalem, for we find that during the journey the Holy Spirit warned him a number of times not to go to Jerusalem.

He was called to evangelize; to continue to preach the glorious Gospel, and it was a turning aside from the great ministry committed unto him. But behind his burning desire to go up to Jerusalem stood the mighty constraint of love for his own beloved brethren. How he did love them and how his heart, filled with the love of God, yearned over them! This love is so fully expressed in his epistle to the Romans. "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed (or separated) from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Romans 9:1-2). "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Romans 10:1). This holy love and courage prompted him to say, when once more his brethren had besought him by the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem, "What mean ye to weep and break my 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).

In the close of this chapter we read of the great opposition and riot in Ephesus and the Apostle's persecution.

CHAPTER 20

1. Paul in Macedonia (verses 1-2).
2. His abode in Greece, the visit to Troas and what transpired there (verses 3-12).
3. The journey from Troas to Miletus (verses 13-16).
4. The farewell to the Ephesian Elders (verses 17-38).

The record before us is very brief. Some have thought the reason is the fact that the Apostle had turned aside from His given ministry, and therefore the Holy Spirit had nothing to report. We believe that this is correct. The object of the Spirit of God is now to lead us rapidly forward to the last visit of the Apostle to Jerusalem, therefore much is passed over in the untiring service and labors of the great Man of God. After the uproar was over in Ephesus Paul embraced the disciples and departed to go into Macedonia. It is the first farewell scene on this memorable journey. He must have visited Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea and perhaps other cities. Besides giving them much exhortation. he received their fellowship for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

Then there is the record of the blessed scene on the first day of the week in Troas. They remembered the Lord in the breaking of bread (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

The company then took ship to sail to Assos, but Paul made the journey of over twenty miles on foot. He wanted to be alone like Elijah as well as others. What thoughts must have passed through his mind! What burdens must have been upon his heart! what anxieties in connection with that coming visit to Jerusalem!

From Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church. The remaining part of this chapter contains his great farewell address to the Ephesian elders and through them to the church located there. Two great speeches by the Apostle have so far been reported in this book. The first was addressed to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:16-41). The second was addressed to the Gentiles in Athens (chapter 17). The address here in our chapter is to the church. It is of very great and unusual interest and importance. He speaks of himself, his own integrity and recalls to them his ministry. He declares his own coming sufferings and his determination not to count his life dear, but to finish his course with joy. He warns the church concerning the future apostasy and the appearance in their midst of false teachers.

CHAPTER 21

1. The journey from Miletus to Tyre and Ptolemais (verses 1-7).
2. In Caesarea (verses 8-14).
3. The Apostle's Arrival in Jerusalem and his visit to the Temple (verses 15-26).
4. The Uproar in the Temple. Paul taken prisoner (verses 27-40).

Coos, Rhodes and Patara are mentioned. Then they sailed over to Phenicia and landed in Tyre. Here they found disciples.

And the Holy Spirit through these disciples warned the Apostle at once that he should not go to Jerusalem. This, indeed, was very solemn. If these disciples had spoken of themselves, if it said that they were in anxiety over Paul's journey to that city, one might say that they were simply speaking as men; but the record makes it clear that the Holy Spirit spoke through them. Could then the Apostle Paul have been under the guidance of that same Spirit in going to Jerusalem? As stated before, the great love for his brethren, his kinsmen, burned in his heart, and so great was his desire to be in Jerusalem that he ignored the voice of the Spirit.

In Caesarea they were the guests of Philip the evangelist. Here Agabus, who had given a prediction of a great dearth years ago (11:28) comes once more upon the scene. When he had come he took Paul's girdle and with it bound his own hands and feet, and then he said: "Thus saith the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." Here then another warning was given. It was the last and by far the strongest. Did Agabus really speak by the Spirit? The literal fulfillment of his predictive action furnishes the answer. The whole company, both his fellow travelers and the believers in Caesarea, began to beseech him not to go up to Jerusalem.

Then they reached Jerusalem. On the next day the company paid a visit to James, in whose house all the elders had assembled for the purpose of meeting with Paul and his friends. And now once more the Apostle relates what no doubt was dearest to the hearts of James and the elders, what God had wrought through His God-given ministry among the Gentiles. It must have been a very lengthy account; for he rehearsed particularly, "or one by one," the things which had happened in His great activity. After Paul had spoken, "they glorified God."

All had progressed nicely up to this point. But now the great crisis is rapidly reached. The meeting had been called in the house of James, and only the elders had been invited for a very good reason. Reports had reached Jerusalem that Paul had taught the Jews among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and even to deny children the covenant sign, circumcision. Most likely the Judaizing element in the assembly of Jerusalem, the men who were so successfully overcome by the bold arguments of the Apostle at the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15. Galatians 2), the men who so strenuously taught, that unless the Gentiles became circumcised, they could not be saved--these men were responsible for the rumors. What could be done to convince the multitude that all this was incorrect, that Paul after all was a good Jew?

The elders suggest to him that there were four men who had a vow on them. These he should take and purify himself with them as well as pay the charges. This action, they reasoned, would not only demonstrate that the reports were untrue, but that he, the Apostle of Gentiles, "walketh orderly and keepeth the law." To make this temptation stronger, they restated that which had been agreed concerning the status of the believing Gentiles, according to the decision of the church council years ago. All was a most subtle snare. He was by that action to show that, with all his preaching to the Gentiles, he was still a good Jew, faithful to all the traditions of the fathers, and attached to the temple.

And a strange sight it is to see the Apostle Paul back in the temple, going through these dead ceremonies, which had been ended by the death of the cross. A strange sight to see him, who disclaimed all earthly authority and taught deliverance from the Law and a union with an unseen Christ, submitting once more to the elementary things, as he calls them in his Epistle to the Galatians, "the beggarly elements!" And has not the whole professing church fallen into the same snare?

His arrest followed and he is taken prisoner. A great tumult followed. They would have killed him if the chief captain had not rescued him. He then was bound with two chains. Agabus' prophecy is fulfilled.

Paul gives the Roman officer his pedigree. "I am a man, a Jew of Tarsus," and then requests the privilege of addressing the furious mob. This was permitted, and taking a prominent place on the stairs, where he could be seen by all below, and when after beckoning to the people, silence had been secured, he addressed them in Hebrew. The break of the chapter at this point is unfortunate. The next chapter contains the first address of defense of the prisoner Paul.

CHAPTER 22

1. The Address of the Apostle (verses 1-21).

2. The Answer from the Mob, and Paul's Appeal to His Roman citizenship (verses 22-30).

What a scene it was! On the stairs, midway between the temple-court and the fortress, stood the Apostle in chains, his person showing the effects of the beating he had received. Around him were the well-armed Roman soldiers, and below the multitude, with up-turned faces, still wildly gesticulating and only becoming more silent when they heard the first words from Paul's lips in the Hebrew tongue.

He relates his great experience. They were impatient listeners; the storm broke with the word

"Gentiles." Another great tumult resulted and the many voices demanded that such a fellow should not live. It was a scene of utmost confusion.

The chief captain seems to have been ignorant of the Aramaic dialect. He gave orders that Paul be now removed into the castle itself, and be examined by scourging so that he might find out why they cried so against him. He was led away, and everything made ready for the cruel treatment, when the prisoner spoke: "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" The centurion reported this to the chiliarch, the chief officer, who at once appeared on the scene. When he discovered that Paul was indeed a Roman by birth, they left their hands off of his person, and even the chiliarch was afraid. It was a highly illegal act to bind a Roman.

Not a few had pointed to this as a prominent failure in the career of the Apostle. According to these critics he made a grave mistake when he pleaded his Roman citizenship; he should have been silent and taken the unjust and cruel treatment without a murmur. If some of these harsh critics of the beloved Apostle were placed in the same condition, what would they do? As one has truly said: "It is easy to be a martyr in theory, and such are seldom martyrs in practice." He had a perfect right to tell the ignorant officers of the law who he was, and thus prevent a flagrant and cruel transgression of the law. And yet his conduct in Philippi was far different. Why did he not announce his Roman citizenship there? The power of the Spirit rested then upon him; it is different here.

CHAPTER 23

1. Paul before the Sanhedrin (verses 1-10).
2. The vision of the Lord (verse 11).
3. The Conspiracy against Paul (verses 12-22).
4. Paul taken to Caesarea (verses 23-35).

And now we find him addressing the Sanhedrin. For the last time the Jewish council is mentioned in this book. Three times before the Sanhedrin had been called together in connection with those who believed in the Lord Jesus (4:5, 5:21 and 6:12-15). Looking straight at the council, Paul did not wait for the formalities connected with the proceedings, but addressed the gathered Sanhedrin as men and brethren. And strange are the words with which he opened his defense: "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." In this he made a public declaration of his righteousness, which reminds us of his confession as a Pharisee (Philippians 3:4-6). This self-justification shows that he was not acting under the leading of the Holy Spirit. This bold language resulted in stirring up the anger of the high priest Ananias, who commanded that the bystanders should smite the Apostle on the mouth. And Paul was not slow to reply with a harsh word, calling the high priest "a whited wall" and demanding of God to smite him. No doubt the high priest was indeed a "whited wall" and fully deserved the judgment from God. But did Paul in speaking thus show the meekness of Him, whose servant he was?

In a clever way he tries to bring in dissension by his statement of being a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee. A big commotion followed. Some of the scribes belonging to the Pharisees cried loudly in defense of the prisoner--"We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God." The latter sentence was a faint echo of the advice given by Gamaliel. The scene which followed beggars description. The shouting must have been terrific and Paul was in danger of being pulled to pieces by the council mob. Lysias, the chief captain, was obliged to interfere. The soldiers, at his command, came down and rescued Paul and brought him into the castle. The cleverness of Paul had been the means of liberating him from the hands of the Sanhedrin.

The night following the Lord appeared unto him and comforted him. No doubt he had sought before His face in confession and self-judgment. He is in the Lord's hands. Forty men had made a

conspiracy not to eat and to drink till they had killed him.

The prisoner of the Lord is now delivered into the hands of the Gentiles. A large force of soldiers accompanied Paul for his protection. The danger was great, hence the great precaution the chief officer, whose name is now mentioned, Claudius Lysias, had taken. Could we have read in Paul's own heart we would have seen there the peace of Christ; the words of His Lord still resounded in that faithful and devoted heart--"Be of good cheer."

The letter of Claudius Lysias to the governor Felix is interesting. It shows how Lysias claims the full credit of having rescued Paul, because he was a Roman. He declares him innocent, yet delivers him into the hands of the governor.

One would also like to know what had become of the forty conspirators. If they were true to their vow not to eat nor to drink till Paul had been killed, they must have starved to death, which, we are sure, did not happen. Caesarea is reached in safety and Paul is delivered into the hands of the governor, who promised him a hearing as soon as the accusers would arrive. Jerusalem now laid forever behind him. Rome was before him.

CHAPTER 24

1. The indictment of Paul (verses 1-9).
2. The defense of the Apostle (verses 10-21).
3. How Felix disposed of the case (verses 22-23).
4. Paul addresses Felix (verses 24-27).

If the Jews, after Paul's removal from Jerusalem, had not pressed the case against him, he would have been liberated. As he had gone years ago to Damascus to persecute the Christians there, so now the Jews follow him to Caesarea to accuse him before the Roman governor. They evidently did not lose any time. Only a few days had elapsed when a strong deputation from Jerusalem appeared in Caesarea. The high priest filled with much hatred against Paul had taken it upon himself to come in person. This must have been an unusual occurrence for a person of Ananias' standing to leave Jerusalem.

They brought along a certain orator named Tertullus, who accused Paul in the presence of Felix. The words Tertullus used against the great man of God are extremely vile and manifest the hiss of the serpent. He calls him a pestilent fellow, "a person whom Society may well be rid of. The indictment contains three counts. First stands a Political accusation. This, in presence of the high Roman officer, was of the greatest importance. Any conspiracy against the Roman government was a capital offense. The charge of sedition or treason was thus at once laid at the door of the Apostle. The second offense Tertullus brought against Paul was of a religious nature. As ringleader of the Nazarenes, presented by him as a sect of the Jews, he had abetted that which was against the peace of Judaism and introduced not alone a disturbing element, but had transgressed another Roman law, which forbade the introduction of an unrecognized religion. The third charge was the profanation of the temple. Paul answers the indictment in a masterly way. His address contains a denial of the first charge; a confession and admission concerning the second, and a complete vindication of the accusation of the temple profanation.

Felix knew the accusations were not true, but he refused decision. Paul should have been set at liberty. Felix defers it till Lysias the chief-captain came to Caesarea. But he never came, and Paul was kept a prisoner. Felix and his wife, Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I, a wicked woman, heard Paul and Felix trembled. Later Felix left Paul behind a prisoner, when Porcius Festus became governor.

CHAPTER 25

1. Festus and the Jews. Paul appeals to Caesar (verses 1-12).
2. King Agrippa visits Festus (verses 13-29).
3. Paul brought before the King (verses 23-27).

The new governor, Festus, had arrived at Caesarea, and then went up to Jerusalem, the capital of the province. The Jews had not forgotten Paul, though they had not attempted another accusation before Felix, knowing that the case was hopeless. But they made at once an effort with the new governor. No sooner had this official made his appearance in Jerusalem than the high priest and the chief of the Jews made a report about Paul. Most likely Festus had not even heard of Paul up to that time. What really took place in Jerusalem, Festus later relates to Agrippa. When Paul was presented to Agrippa, Festus introduced him by saying, "Ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me both at Jerusalem and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer" (verse 24). A scene of tumult must have been enacted in Jerusalem when Festus showed himself. The mob clamored for the life of Paul. When they noticed the reluctance of the governor, they concocted another plan. They requested that Paul should be brought to Jerusalem. On the way there they intended to murder him.

But Festus was divinely guided in it all, and when he asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem, Paul appealed to Caesar. This settled his journey to Rome.

King Agrippa and Bernice paid a visit to the new governor. The father of this king was known as Herod Agrippa, and died under awful circumstances (chapter 12) in the year 44. When his father died Agrippa was in Rome. He was too young to receive the kingdom of his father Herod. Eight years later, Herod, King of Chalcis, the uncle of Agrippa, died. He had married Agrippa's sister Bernice, and Caesar gave Chalcis to Agrippa. Later Agrippa received the title as king. Agrippa I had left three daughters besides this son--Bernice, Marianne and Drusilla, the wife of Felix. Bernice, who was the wife of her uncle, after his death joined her brother Agrippa in Rome. She married a Celician ruler, but deserted him and joined again her brother, in whose company she paid this visit to Caesarea. And Paul appeared before the King. A great audience had gathered and much pomp was displayed. Then the prisoner was brought in. What a contrast! Perhaps they looked upon him with pity as they saw the chain. But more pity must have filled the heart of the great servant of Christ as he saw the poor lost souls bedecked with the miserable tinsel of earth. Festus addressed the King and the whole company. He frankly states what troubled him and that he expects the King to furnish the material for the statements he had, as governor, to send to Rome.

CHAPTER 26

1. The Address of the Apostle Paul (verses 2-23).
2. The Interruption by Festus and the Appeal to the King (verses 24-29).
3. The Verdict (verses 30-32).

The opening words of the Apostle are indeed gracious. Even as he stands in chains the great Apostle counts himself happy. His happiness consisted in the knowledge that he was now privileged to bear witness of His Lord and the Gospel committed to him before such an audience. What an opportunity it was to him, and how he rejoiced that he could speak of Him, whom he served. He also honored the King by a brief remark in which he expressed his delight in speaking before one who was so well acquainted with Jewish customs and questions. Then he restates his life as a Pharisee.

At once he touches upon the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why should it be thought a thing

incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? The whole history of Israel bears witness to the fact that God can bring life from the dead. The very origin of the nation demonstrates this, for Sarah's womb was a grave, and God brought life out of that grave. Many promises of the past vouched for God's power to raise the dead. The nation had this promise that spiritual and national death is to give way to spiritual and national life (Ezekiel 37:1-15; Hosea 6:1-3). The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ proved Him to be the Holy One and the Hope of Israel. In this sense Peter speaks of His resurrection. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). The grave of the Lord Jesus was for the disciples the grave of their national hope, but His resurrection from the dead the revival of that hope. Once more he also relates the sad story of how he persecuted the saints. Upon that dark background he can now flash forth again the story of his conversion.

Then the proper moment had arrived to state the Gospel message before this company. It is a terse statement of the message which the Lord had committed unto him. All the elements of the Gospel are contained in the eighteenth verse. There is first the condition of man by nature. Eyes, which are blind, in darkness, under the power of Satan. The eyes are to be opened and through the Gospel man is turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God. In Colossians 1:12 the same is stated. Then the blessings of conversion. Forgiveness of sins and an inheritance. Faith is the means of all this; sanctification, that is separation, in conversion "by faith that is in me." One wonders if the Holy Spirit even then did not bless the message to some heart, and the Grace of God bestowed these blessings upon some believing sinners. It may have been so. The day will make it known.

Festus interrupted him, and when Paul addressed the King directly, he answered him by saying: "Almost persuadest thou me to become a Christian." The meaning is rather "by a little more persuasion you might make me a Christian." No doubt conviction had taken hold on him. In this half mocking way he answers the Apostle. How many after him have acted in the same way and rejected the Grace, which stood ready to save.

The verdict of a private consultation is "This Man doeth nothing worthy of death." Herod Agrippa said unto Festus "This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar." If Paul had not made his appeal to Caesar he might have then been freed. We have seen before that his appeal to Rome was according to the will of the Lord. To Rome then he goes. All is ordered by a gracious Lord.

CHAPTER 27

1. From Caesarea to Fair Havens (verses 1-8).
2. The Unheeded Warning. The Storm. Paul's Vision and Assurance of Safety (verses 9-26).
3. The Shipwreck (verses 27-44).

Much has been written on this Chapter. The voyage of the Apostle Paul to Rome and the shipwreck is often explained as being typical of the stormy voyage of the professing church, her adversities and shipwreck.

However, such an application needs caution. it is easy to make fanciful and far-fetched allegorical applications. Besides church history other lessons have been drawn from this narrative. A recent commentator claims that the keynote to the interpretation is given in verse 34 in the word salvation. "This and cognate words occur seven times in the chapter: Hope to be saved; ye cannot be saved; to be completely saved. While the contrary fate is no less richly depicted--injury, loss, throwing away, perish, kill and to be cast away. The history, then, is a parable of the great salvation, by which man is brought through death to life." We shall not attempt to seek for an outline of church history in the events of this chapter. The central figure, the prisoner of the Lord, must occupy us

more than anything else. It is said that in all the classical literature there is nothing found which gives so much information of the working of an ancient ship as this chapter does. Even the critics have acknowledged that this chapter "bears the most indisputable marks of authenticity." "Historical research and inscriptions have confirmed the facts given in this chapter, while the accuracy of Luke's nautical observations is shown by the great help he has given to our understanding of ancient seamanship. None have impugned the correctness of his phrases; on the contrary, from his description contained in a few sentences, the scene of the wreck has been identified."

The Apostle is courteously treated by the Centurion Julius. Paul may have been in a physically weakened condition. The Lord's gracious and loving care for His faithful servant shines out in this. How clearly the whole narrative shows that all is in His hands: Officers, winds and waves, all circumstances, are under His control. So far all seemed to go well; but contrary winds now trouble the voyagers. The ship is tossed to and fro. If we look upon the ship as a type of the professing church and the little company, headed by Paul, as the true church, then there is no difficulty in seeing the issue. Winds which drive hither and thither trouble those who hold the truth and live in fellowship with the Lord, while the professing church is cast about. Then Myra was reached. Here they took a ship of Alexandria. Danger then threatened. Most likely a consultation of the commander of the ship and the owner, who was on board, and the centurion, was held, and Paul was present. He gives them a solemn warning and cautions them to beware. This shows his close fellowship with the Lord. In prayer, no doubt, he had laid the whole matter before the Lord and received the answer, which he communicates to the persons in authority. They looked upon it as a mere guess, and the centurion rather trusted in the judgment of the captain and the owner.

And here we can think of other warnings given through the great Apostle. Warnings concerning the spiritual dangers, the apostasy of the last days, the perilous times, warnings against the seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. The professing church has forgotten these divinely-given predictions. The world does not heed them. Like these mariners, who believed in their own wisdom and disregarded the warning given, Christendom has paid no attention to these warnings. For this reason the ship is drifting, cast about by every wind of doctrine and rapidly nearing the long predicted shipwreck. Then there came the terrific tempest. Sun and stars were hidden for many days.

When despair had reached its heights, Paul appears once more upon the scene. When all was hopeless the prisoner of the Lord spoke the words of hope and cheer. He reminds them first of their refusal and disobedience. What had come upon them was the result of having not heeded the warning. He then assures them that an angel of God had assured him once more that he would have to stand before Caesar; but God had given to him all that sail with him. Only the ship is to go down, the lives of all who sail with him will be preserved. "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me." And now they were willing to listen to him. They had to acknowledge their disobedience and believe the message of cheer as it came from the divinely instructed messenger, assuring them of their ultimate salvation.

And so, at least in part, drifting Christendom can listen to the Apostle Paul, and if the mistake, the wrong course, is acknowledged, the heavenly-sent message is accepted, salvation is assured.

How calm the Apostle and his companions must have been after this assurance of their safety. The dreadful winds might continue and the ship drift still further. They knew they were safe, for God had spoken. Different it was with the crew of the ship. In great distress they feared the coming disaster and cast out four anchors. The shipmen attempted flight by a clever scheme. Paul discovered their plan and said to the centurion and soldiers, "Except these abide in the ship, ye (not we) cannot be saved." God had given him all who were in the ship. The work of the sailors was needed when the daybreak came. And the soldiers believed the word of Paul, for they cut the ropes, which set the boat adrift the sailors tried to use. Then Paul exhorted them to eat. Once more he assured them that not a hair should fall from the head of any one. Before the whole company, two hundred and seventy-six persons, Paul took bread and gave thanks to God. The Lord had exalted the prisoner,

and he really stands out as the leader of the distressed company. They all became encouraged by the words and action. All has its lessons. However the meal has nothing to do with the Lord's Supper. It tells us typically how necessary it is that we must feed on the bread of life in the days of danger, the times when everything breaks up. "And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land."

CHAPTER 28

1. In the Island of Melita (verses 1-10).
2. The arrival in Rome (verses 11-16).
3. Paul calling the chief of the Jews and his message (verses 17-29).

Melita, which means "honey," is the island of Malta. It was even then a prominent place for navigation where many vessels wintered. Luke calls the inhabitants Barbarians, a term used by the Greeks for all peoples who did not use their language. The wrecked company was not plundered by the people of the island, but instead received much kindness and were made comfortable in the cold rain which fell.

It was God who moved the hearts of these islanders to show such hospitality to the shipwrecked company for the sake of His servants. Paul is active even then. The shipwreck and privations must have told on the great man of God physically, yet we see him going about gathering a bundle of sticks for the fire. This labor must have been difficult, since as a prisoner he wore a chain on his hands. A viper, which had been benumbed by the cold and revived by the heat of the fire, fastened on his hand. We doubt not it was a poisonous viper. This is denied by some critics on the plea that poisonous snakes are not found in the island of Malta. However, that is no proof that such did not exist at that time. The inhabitants of the island expected Paul to fall dead. If it had been a harmless snake, why such an expectation? God's power was manifested in his behalf. It was a fulfillment of the promise in Mark 16:18: "they shall take up serpents and it shall not hurt them." The viper also reminds us of Satan and his fate. As Paul cast the viper into the fire, so Satan will be cast into the lake of fire. Then there was a manifestation of the gracious power of the Lord towards the inhabitants of the island.

And then they reached Rome at last. What joy must have filled his heart and the hearts of the believers in Rome! How often they must have read his words, in the beginning of his letter: "I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now, I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I proposed to come unto you (but was hindered hitherto), that I might have some fruit among you also, even as the rest of the Gentiles" (Romans 1:11-13). He had never been in Rome. The Roman assembly was not founded by Paul and certainly not by Peter. The origin of that church is obscure, and the Holy Spirit has not given us a history of the beginning of the church of Rome. And now he whom they all loved, whose face they longed to see, was actually on the way to visit Rome. But in a far different way did he come than he expected when he wrote his Epistle. He came as the prisoner of the Lord. What a meeting it must have been!

And now it is for the very last time in this book, "to the Jew first." The first service the great Apostle rendered in Rome was not in the assembly, but he called the chief of the Jews together. He knew no bitterness in his heart against the Jews. In writing the letter to the Romans he had written, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also testifying with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Romans 9:1-2). "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is, that they might be saved" (10:1). And now, after all the sad experience he had made, the treatment he had received from his kinsmen, after he had found out their malice and deep hatred, the same love burns in his heart and the same yearning for their

salvation possesses him. In Rome he manifests first of all his loving interest in his Jewish brethren. To these leading Jews he testified once more that he was innocent of any wrong doing. Briefly, he rehearsed his whole case and why he had been compelled to appeal to Caesar. For this purpose--to talk to them about this matter--he had called them. Then most likely he must have lifted his hands, from which the prisoner's chain dangled, and said, "because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." The Jews, however, wanted to hear more from his lips of--"what thou thinkest; for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against." They knew he believed in Christ.

A great meeting took place a short time later. Many Jews assembled in Paul's lodging. The meeting lasted from morning till evening. Once more he testified the Kingdom of God to a large company of Jews. He also persuaded them concerning Jesus both out of the laws of Moses and out of the Prophets. What a wonderful message must have come from his lips as he unfolded the prophetic testimony concerning the Messiah in the power of the Spirit of God! But what was the result? Some believed and some believed not. They did not agree amongst themselves. The end of God's gracious way with the Jews is reached. We repeat, for the last time, it was to the Jew first. The final crisis is reached. Judgment must now be executed upon the nation and the blindness is now to come, which has lasted so long and will continue till the fullness of the Gentiles is come in (Romans 11:25). Stephen, whose death young Saul had witnessed and approved (8:1), had pronounced judgment upon the nation, in Jerusalem. God's mercy had still waited. Marvelous Grace, which took up the young Pharisee, Saul, and made him the Apostle to the Gentiles! Through him, the chosen instrument, the Lord still sought his beloved Israel, even after Jerusalem had so completely rejected the offered mercy. We have seen how the Apostle's intense love for his brethren had led him back to Jerusalem, though warned repeatedly by the Holy Spirit. And now he is used to give the very last message to the Jews and speak the final word of condemnation.

The salvation of God is now to go far hence to the Gentiles. A prisoner in Rome and yet active. He preached the Kingdom of God (not of heaven, the Jewish, earthly aspect of it), and ever speaking of that worthy name, that blessed and adorable Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. The ending of the book is sad and it is joyous. Sad to see the great Apostle a prisoner, shut up in Rome with his God-given Gospel. Joyous because the last verse mentions the Lord Jesus Christ and an unhindered ministry of the Gospel. The Book begins with Jerusalem and ends with Rome. It is a prophecy of the course of the professing church. The book closes in an unfinished way, because the acts of Christ, the Spirit of God, and Satan, recorded in this book, are not finished. We hear nothing more of Paul, though we know that from the prison the Holy Spirit of God sent forth through him the blessed Epistles, in which He has been pleased to give us the highest revelation. And how much more might be written on all this!