

# ADULT QUARTERLY



## CHURCH GROWTH — EXPANSION — ACTS 1-14

SUNDAY SCHOOL  
WINTER QUARTER, 2012-13  
DECEMBER, JANUARY, FEBRUARY

# Adult Quarterly

SUNDAY SCHOOL

WINTER QUARTER, 2012-2013

## Church Growth

### A Study in Acts 1—14

Written by David Robinson

**EDITOR IN CHIEF:**

Larry E. Clements  
larryclements@bogardpress.org

**BUSINESS MANAGER:**

Wayne Sewell  
wsewell@bogardpress.org

**PRODUCTION EDITOR:**

Sally McInvale

**ADULT EDITOR:**

Jim Jones

**CHILDREN'S EDITOR:**

Libby Gill

**ILLUSTRATOR:**

Connie Spears

**GRAPHIC ARTISTS:**

Shawn Blase, Jeff Allen,  
Greg Hiltbrand,  
Blake Tilton

**LAYOUT DESIGNERS:**

Kyle Elkins, Cindy Butler,  
Ashley Elkins

**CONTENT EDITORS:**

Terry McKellar  
Deby Turrentine  
Carolyn Burks  
Joni Curtis

**PRINT PRODUCTION:**

Charles Easley

**Cover Design:**

Jeff Allen

Copyright © 2012  
Vol. 100, No. 1

Bogard Press  
4605 N. State Line Ave.  
Texarkana, TX 75503-2928  
www.bogardpress.org  
1-800-264-2482

**QUARTERLY AIM:** The student will learn biblical principles of church growth by studying the expansion of the first church.

#### DECEMBER

2—The Plan of Christ for His Churches . . . . .	4
9—The Promise of the Holy Spirit . . . . .	11
16—The Proclamation of the Risen Christ . . . . .	18
23—The Persecution of a Hostile World . . . . .	25
30—The Praying of a Persecuted Church . . . . .	32

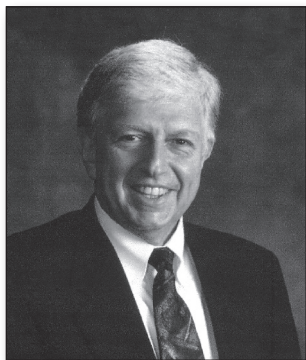
#### JANUARY

6—The Prescription for a Pure Church . . . . .	39
13—The Preaching of a Deacon . . . . .	46
20—The Product of Persecution . . . . .	54
27—The Persecutor Becomes Proclaimer . . . . .	61

#### FEBRUARY

3—The Progress of the Gospel . . . . .	68
10—The Power of a Praying Church . . . . .	75
17—The Pattern of a Sending Church . . . . .	82
24—The Preeminence of the Gospel . . . . .	89

## About the Writer



Dr. David Robinson was born in Greenville, Mississippi and grew up in Hot Springs, Arkansas. He was saved in 1956 and was baptized by Cones Road Missionary Baptist Church. He graduated from Hot Springs High School, attended the University of Mississippi, and graduated from the Missionary Baptist Seminary in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1966 earning the Master in Bible Languages and Doctor in Bible Languages Degrees. He surrendered to preach in 1960 and was ordained to the gospel ministry in December of 1962.

He has pastored churches in central and southern Arkansas. From 1967 to 1999 he served as an instructor in the Missionary Baptist Seminary. He served as Registrar at the school from 1978 to 1988, and as Chancellor and Editor of the Missionary Baptist Searchlight from 1988 to 1999. He served as Chaplain for the Pulaski County Sheriff's Office from 1992 until 2007. He served on the Sunday School Committee of the ABA from 1987 to 1998 and as President of the ABA in 1999 and 2000. He has served as Parliamentarian for the ABA since 2001. Presently he is pastor of Landmark Missionary Baptist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, where he has served since 1971.

He has written Young People's Sunday School literature, the BTC Adult Quarterly, and he currently writes the Sunday School Adult Quarterly used in the churches of the American Baptist Association.

He may be contacted at [dcrobinson@aristotle.net](mailto:dcrobinson@aristotle.net).

# American Baptist Association

## Through-the-Bible Series Sunday School Lessons

	Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall
2013	Acts 1—14	Acts 15—28	1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1—4 1 Chronicles 1—10	Mark 1—8
2014	Mark 9—16	2 Samuel 5—24 1 Chronicles 11—29 1 Kings 1; 2	James 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians	Psalms 1—72
2015	Psalms 73—150	Galatians	1 Kings 3—22 2 Chronicles 1—24 2 Kings 1—13 Joel; Obadiah	1 Corinthians
2016	Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon	Luke 1—13:21	Luke 13:22—24	Hosea; Amos; Micah; Jonah; 2 Kings 14—16 2 Chronicles 25—28
2017	2 Corinthians	Isaiah 1—39 2 Chronicles 29—32 2 Kings 17—20 Nahum	Isaiah 40—66 2 Kings 21—23 2 Chronicles 33—35 Zephaniah	Philemon Philippians Colossians
2018	Ephesians	1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus	Jeremiah Lamentations 2 Kings 24; 25 2 Chronicles 36	John 1—10
2019	John 11—21	Ezra; Nehemiah Habakkuk; Haggai Malachi; Esther	1 Peter 2 Peter	1, 2, 3 John Jude
2020	Daniel Ezekiel Zechariah	Revelation 1—11	Revelation 12—22	Genesis 1—11 Job
2021	Genesis 12—50	Matthew 1—13	Matthew 14—28	Exodus
2022	Romans	Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Hebrews	Joshua Judges Ruth

## 1

# The Plan of Christ for His Churches

**Text:** Acts 1:1-26

**Focus:** Acts 1:1-14

**Key Verse:**

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

Acts 1:8

**Sunday Devotional:** The Church’s Great Mandate, Mark 16:15.

**Application:** Jesus revealed His plans and promised His power for the work His church was to accomplish. His plans and promises are still to motivate His churches today.

## A FIRST LOOK

Today we begin a study of the book of Acts. This book is often labeled the Acts of the Apostles, but, in truth, it is the acts of Jesus Christ as He worked through His churches. Understanding this book is vital to understanding the books of the New Testament that follow. Acts links the gospels, that tell us the story of Jesus, to the rest of the New Testament, that gives us instructions about our behavior as Christians.

In a sense, Acts is the first chapter of the account of the history of the Lord’s churches. This history is still being written and will only be completed when Jesus returns. It is vital to realize that Jesus began and organized His church during His ministry on earth. Acts records the development and growth of churches, but not the origin of the church.

Like many things, the first church had a rather small beginning. A church, by definition, is a called out assembly, a body of scripturally baptized believers who have

### Daily Devotionals

- M. — The Promise of the Spirit, Joel 2:28, 29.
- T. — To the Ends of the Earth, Psalm 98:2, 3.
- W. — Preached Among All Nations, Luke 24:46-49.
- T. — What Jesus Is Doing in Heaven, Hebrews 4:14-16.
- F. — In Like Manner—He Will Return, Zechariah 14:1-5.
- S. — He Is Coming Again, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

covenanted together to carry out the commission of Christ. As Jesus began His ministry on earth, He called out believers to follow Him, and He began the first church.

That church depended on Jesus for everything. However, eventually Jesus would leave the earth, and He would leave behind His church, empowered by His spiritual presence to carry on the job He had given it to do. This book gives us the all-important pattern that every true church must follow to serve Christ acceptably.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### I. The Teaching of the Risen Christ

#### Acts 1:1-5

- 1. The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,**
- 2. Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:**
- 3. To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:**
- 4. And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.**
- 5. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.**

The book of Acts is the second book given by God to Luke. This book begins where the gospel of Luke ends. The first book encompasses all that Jesus began to do and teach until His ascension. This book takes up the account and tells us of the things the resurrected Jesus does through His churches. Jesus is the power behind every good thing that any church ever does. When we discover the will of God and walk in the will of God, we can always count on the provision and blessing of God.

Jesus did not leave His disciples alone and powerless. A child of God can never be alone. Jesus left this earth physically, but His spiritual presence is in the heart of every believer. He is

also with His churches in a special way. These verses give us an introduction to that special presence.

For forty days after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and taught them many things about the kingdom of God. Most importantly, Jesus showed through infallible proof that He had died and been resurrected. The resurrection is the difference between Christianity and man-made religions. Many religious leaders have made great claims, but only Jesus has come back from the dead and proved that He is alive forever more.

Jesus firmly established His role as the Head of His churches by giving the church in Jerusalem specific instructions. While Jesus was meeting with this church, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the promises that had been given to them. This was not a suggestion to be considered but a commandment to be obeyed. This teaches us many lessons. Previously, Jesus had told His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. This directive was to be obeyed, but everything had to be done decently and in order. Before churches can carry out the commission of the Lord, they need power from the Lord. This power is absolutely vital, and this church was commanded to wait for power before going out of Jerusalem.

Spiritual power had been promised by John the Baptist and was also a subject of Old Testament prophecy. Jesus had also taught that the Holy Spirit would come when He went away and that the Holy Spirit would empower men to be witnesses of the truth. John had baptized people in water to prepare them for the coming physical ministry of Jesus on earth. Now the physical ministry of Jesus was coming to an end, and another kind of ministry was beginning. This ministry would also require a filling of the Holy Spirit.

This was to take place in a few days, and Jesus gave the order to wait in Jerusalem.

## **II. Instructions for the Churches**

### **Acts 1:6-8**

**6. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?**

**7. And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.**

**8. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.**

Jesus had been teaching this church about the kingdom of God, and when it met with Him, His members naturally asked a question about the kingdom. The specific question had to do with timing. The question is revealing. The disciples asked if the restoration of the earthly kingdom to Israel was about to take place.

First, this question indicates that those who heard Jesus teach had not been listening carefully. Matthew chapters 24 through 26 are an extensive sermon in which Jesus revealed the pattern of the coming age and specified certain signs that would take place before the world saw Him coming in power and glory. Those who asked this question were not remembering this great message.

Secondly, this question indicates that these disciples had been expecting physical changes all along. Jesus had stressed the spiritual side of life, but these men were thinking about physical blessings. Their hope was that Rome would be overthrown and that the kingdom would be restored to Israel. This will indeed happen, but it was not the next thing on God's schedule at this time.

Jesus' answer is revealing. He plainly said that it was not for men to know the times and seasons that God had put in His own power. These terms are significant. The word translated *times* is *chronos*, which refers to a length of time or a space in time. The word translated *seasons* is *kairos*, which refers to certain epoch events that separate periods of time, or certain features that occur in a certain time period. The point here is that there is knowledge God has reserved for Himself alone and that men are not to question or seek to discover.

Instead of spending our resources trying to discover what God has kept for Himself, we should hear and obey the simple commands of Jesus. In verse 8, Jesus gave us a pivotal teaching and the outline of this book and of the church age that was beginning here.

The coming of the Holy Spirit would bring power and divine authority to this young church. Then, and only then, were they to



engage in their principle task, the job of witnessing or testifying about the saving power of Jesus. This testimony was to take place in an ordered fashion and in specific areas.

First, it was to be done in Jerusalem, then in Judea, then throughout Samaria and eventually to the farthest, or uttermost parts of the earth. The task of every Christian is to be a witness. The gospel is a message that is meant to be shared, and we are commanded to share it. We are all witnesses in one way or another. We may be a bad example of failure, or we can be a living testimony to the power of God to change our lives. The difference is in what we truly believe and in how our beliefs change us. It is not difficult to be a witness if there has been a real change in our hearts.

### III. This Church Continues

#### Acts 1: 9-14

**9. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.**

**10. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;**

**11. Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.**

**12. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.**

**13. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.**

**14. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.**

Having taught these people that the most important thing was not curiosity about the future, but obedience in the present, and having given them this outline and order for the coming age, Jesus had finished His work on earth. After giving the great commandment of verse 8, and while everyone there was looking, Jesus was taken up into the heavens and disappeared into a cloud as they watched.

This must have been a wonderful and awe-inspiring sight. Those who saw it literally could not take their eyes off the place

where Jesus went into the heavens. As they stared intently into the heavens, looking at the last place they had seen Jesus, two men in bright clothing appeared to them. These were, no doubt, angels, or spiritual beings who at this moment became visible to the members of this church. These angels were in the form of human beings, and they were not frightening to those present. Rather, these angels had an important message.

These messengers told those present to stop looking into the heavens. They promised that this same Jesus would come again in this same way. The importance of this message was that this church had not lost anything in the ascension of Jesus. Jesus had gone away physically so that He could come spiritually (John 16:5-15). Jesus would come to this church spiritually a few days later, and He will come back to the earth physically when the times and seasons have been fulfilled according to God's good pleasure.

All this took place on the Mount of Olives which was a short distance from Jerusalem. This was a private place apart from the city, where Jesus often went to pray and where this church was assembled at this time. No one wanted to stay on the mountain. These people realized that they were to follow the command of Jesus and tarry in Jerusalem, not on the mountain.

When they came to Jerusalem, they found an upper room and gathered there. The Bible states that they abode there. This suggests that these men had left their other interests in life and were now living to do the will of God as Jesus revealed it to them. The list given is a list of the men Jesus had chosen as apostles.

These men were not idle. They were in one accord. This means that they were not divided in purpose or action. They all agreed that they should wait in Jerusalem for the power Jesus had prophesied. Then and now, a divided church is not doing God's will. Churches are often divided over many things, but it is not God's will that this happen. God wants us to be of one accord. As we seek to do His will, we will find our own desires slipping away and the will of God becoming first in our lives.

These men continued in prayer and supplication. Prayer should never be taken for granted. Prayer is the prelude to every other blessing we will ever receive. Sadly, many of God's people have not because they ask not. These were praying people, and as they prayed, they were joined by Mary and the earthly brothers of Jesus. This was not an exclusive group that excluded

others. The earthly brethren of Jesus, James, Joses, Simon and Judas (Matt. 13:55) and others were gladly welcomed into their fellowship.

## A FINAL WORD

It is never enough to simply understand that God has a plan for our lives. It is not enough to study and understand the plan. The blessings will come only when we actually put the plan God gives us into effect. We have to act on the things Jesus teaches and commands us to do.

These relatively few people did exactly that. At this time, there were only about one hundred twenty members in this church; yet, they would literally turn the world upside down in a few years. They did not do this by their own power. They did it through the power of Jesus. They waited for the power from on high and that power enabled these few people to do truly remarkable things.

That power is still available to those who follow the Lord, and God is still at work through His churches. This plan will continue until Jesus comes again, and every believer can have a part in this wonderful kingdom work when they follow God's plan.

## FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Why was it important for the disciples to meet, see, hear, touch and learn from the risen Christ?

2. Read Acts 1:6-8. How did the Lord switch the focus of the disciples from the restoration of Israel's kingdom to the task He had for them to do?

3. Why did Jesus say, "Ye" shall be witnesses unto Me? Who is to be a witness for Christ?

4. How can your church be more active in witnessing for Christ? In what ways can you be a better witness for Christ?

# The Promise of the Holy Spirit

**Text:** Acts 2:1-47

**Focus:** Acts 2:1-6, 22-24,  
36-42, 46, 47

**Key Verse:**

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

Acts 2:36

**Sunday Devotional:** The Promised Comforter, John 14:16-18, 26.

**Application:** The Holy Spirit came to empower, fill and guide the church in its work. He still empowers, fills and guides His churches today.

## A FIRST LOOK

One of the basic principles of the ministry of Jesus is power. Jesus gave men some remarkable instructions. He once told a man who had been bedfast for thirty-eight years to get up, take up his bed and carry it away. He told a blind man to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. The blind man did and he could see. The wonderful thing was that when Jesus gave a command, He also gave the power needed to carry out that command.

Jesus had told His church to wait in Jerusalem and that church had obeyed. Jesus had told that small church that they were to be witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth. In the lesson today we see the coming of the power that would enable this church to accomplish the daunting mission.

It is important to note here that these verses do not record the birth of the Lord's church. Jesus began His church during His personal ministry. The church Jesus started was already there. This fact seems self-evident; yet, many still think that the day of Pentecost was the birth of the church. Before

### Daily Devotionals

- M. — The Holy Spirit's Work, John 16:7-11.
- T. — Jesus Builds His Church, Matthew 16:18.
- W. — Baptism of the Holy Spirit, Acts 11:14-18.
- T. — He Is Lord of All, Romans 14:8-12.
- F. — The Flesh Rests in Hope, Psalm 16:8-11.
- S. — Resurrected and Exalted, Philippians 2:9-11.

Jesus left the earth, the church He established baptized people, observed the Lord's Supper and received the Great Commission. This church was fully functional, and it operated through the power of Jesus who was physically present. Now that Jesus had gone away physically, He would send the Holy Spirit or the Comforter to provide His churches power during the church age.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### I. The Power of the Holy Spirit

#### **Acts 2:1-6**

- 1. And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.**
- 2. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.**
- 3. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.**
- 4. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.**
- 5. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.**
- 6. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.**

There were three major feasts in Israel (Deut. 16:16). These were the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or Passover, the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Pentecost took place fifty days after the Passover. Like the other two feasts, this one was well attended by Jews from all over the world. Jerusalem was recognized as the center of the Jewish world, and people from all over the world gathered for this special day.

The church in Jerusalem had been patiently waiting just as Jesus had instructed them before His ascension. There is a wonderful lesson here about waiting for the Lord. We must not lag behind the promises of God, but neither are we to try to run ahead of Him. Jesus told His disciples to wait, and they waited.

They waited in decency, harmony and order. They were all with one accord and in one place when the Holy Spirit came. There is still a great power available to God's churches when they can be in total and complete agreement and when they can simply all show up at the same time. We must remember that no one knew that this miracle would happen. They had to be ready and, to their credit, they were.

Then, something happened suddenly that defies human explanation. First, there was a sound from Heaven. It sounded like a great wind, perhaps like a storm or the roaring of a tornado or a hurricane. Even though the disciples were indoors, the wind penetrated the building and filled the place where they were.

There was also a visual component to the coming of the Holy Ghost. It looked like individual tongues of fire descended and came to rest on each of those present. Tongues of fire symbolize speech, and we should remember that Jesus' command was that they be witnesses of Him. Each one was individually touched by the fire. This shows us that there is no corporate responsibility that does not include individual responsibility as well. If this church carried out the Great Commission, each member had to participate in the work.

This fire had been predicted by John the Baptist (Luke 3:16). John had baptized or immersed people in water. Jesus would immerse them in fire. This fire symbolizes the presence of God with every believer. This experience was not frightening to those who were there. Jesus described the presence of the Holy Spirit as that of a comforter (John 15:26). It must have been a great and wonderful blessing to be able to instantly do through God's power what you could not have done by yourself. That was the blessing of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Then, we see what these men did. When they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak. They were doing exactly what Jesus had told them to do before He left. They were witnessing of Him. They did not speak merely to demonstrate their remarkable linguistic ability; instead, they spoke the things that the Holy Spirit told them to say. In John 16:13, 14, we read that the Holy Spirit was not testifying of Himself. He was showing them things to come and glorifying Jesus. We must always remember that Jesus Christ is the end of all revelation and the meaning behind any spiritual experience. What happened on this wonderful day was not about the Jews, the church or the

disciples, or even about the Holy Spirit, it was about Jesus (Col. 1:19, 2:9).

News of this happening spread quickly, and a great crowd of people representing every nation on earth gathered together to try to understand how every man could understand what was spoken in his own language. For a moment in time, the confusion that began at Babel was lifted and it was a wonder to behold. Peter used this occasion to address the great congregation.

## II. The Sermon of Peter

### **Acts 2:22-24, 36-39**

**22. Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:**

**23. Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:**

**24. Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.**

**36. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.**

**37. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?**

**38. Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.**

**39. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.**

The amazed crowd did not know what to make of what they had seen. Many were simply amazed, and some critics even concluded that those who spoke were drunk. Peter stood up and addressed the crowd. He first dealt with the rumor that those who were speaking in languages they had not learned were drunk. The hour of the day made this unlikely.

Peter then told the crowd that they were witnessing the fulfillment of a prophecy given by Joel in Joel 2:28-32. That prophecy deals with the whole scope of the church age, and it ends with the great invitation also quoted by Paul in Romans 10:13. We can see how Peter, the unlearned Galilean fisherman,

was led by the Holy Spirit to take this miracle of languages and turn it into an invitation for men to be saved.

Peter told this crowd that calling on the Lord meant believing in Jesus. No doubt, many of the leaders in Israel would have gladly forgotten about Jesus, but Peter reminded them of their recent history. Jesus had lived in Israel and had done many wonders among the people. Peter was careful to give God the glory for these wonders, and the miracle of Pentecost was another miracle added to the many Jesus had already performed. None could deny the power of Jesus and Peter was quick to say that on Pentecost these men were witnessing the further work of Jesus Christ.

Peter also reminded them about how they had treated Jesus. Instead of welcoming Jesus as their Savior and accepting Him as their Lord, the people of Israel rejected their Messiah and had actually delivered Him to death. Peter reminded the Jews that, although they had done this thing themselves, they had acted under the overriding authority of God Himself. Even Satan operates through the permissive will of God (Job 1:6-12). This does not mean that these men were not responsible for their unjust actions; it means that God is always in control.

Peter concluded with the resurrection. The events of Pentecost demonstrated that Jesus was still present on earth. He was here spiritually as He had previously been here physically. The resurrection is the difference in Christianity and all other religions on earth. The conclusion was that Jesus is indeed the Lord and Christ of Israel.

The men of Israel were deeply convicted when they heard this truth, and they asked Peter what they should do. His response was brief and to the point. They were told to repent, specifically of their evil thoughts and intentions regarding Jesus, and they were to heed the message of Joel and call on the name of the Lord and be saved. They were to follow the Lord in baptism. Subsequently, they would also receive the Holy Spirit in their hearts. They were to do this individually, not corporately. Every one had to repent and believe for himself.

### III. Salvation and Spiritual Growth

#### **Acts 2:40-42, 46, 47**

**40. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.**



**41. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.**  
**42. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.**  
**46. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,**  
**47. Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.**

This is the end of the record we have of Peter's sermon, but the Bible plainly states that he had much more to say on this day. His testimony and exhortation was to the point that these people should be saved from a dying generation. Peter's message was far more accurate than many may have thought at the time. Jesus had warned those who were weeping as He went to the cross that they should weep for themselves. Jesus had prophesied that the Temple would be destroyed. This all took place in AD 70, and the generation that witnessed the events of Pentecost perished.

When Peter concluded his message, those who gladly received the Word of the Lord were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to the church that was already in existence in Jerusalem.

Here we need to make an important point. It was the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ that changed people in Jerusalem, not the miracle of Pentecost. The miracle gave Peter an opportunity to preach the gospel, but hearts were changed when men gladly received the Word. They followed the Lord in baptism. Merely witnessing a miracle may or may not change us, but the power of the gospel definitely will.

We see the changes that took place demonstrated in the activities that followed this day. Many people now steadfastly sought to know more of the doctrines taught by the apostles. Men, who thought they knew it all, were now eager to learn more about Jesus. They were hungry for fellowship with other Christians, and they ate and prayed together. This is all evidence of the changes that salvation makes in the lives of individuals.

Every day the church met for prayer and fellowship, and every day more and more people were added to their numbers.

## A FINAL WORD

This was a great day, but it does not need to be repeated. As we read further in Acts, we see that the men who were there did not seek to repeat it. They preached Jesus, not the things that had happened to them personally. They used the power that God had given them, and they did the job that Jesus had assigned them.

The commission to serve had been given to churches and the ability to carry out that commission was also given to the churches. The same power and authority are still there.

We still operate under the commission that Jesus gave to His church before He left this earth. We still have the power of the Holy Spirit to help us carry out those divine orders. We do not need another experience like the one on Pentecost. All we need to do is obey our orders to be witnesses in word and in deed of the saving and keeping power of Jesus. When we do the work of God, the power of God will always be there to help us.

## FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. In what ways does the Holy Spirit work among people today? What does He do?
2. How does the Holy Spirit function as a Comforter as He leads churches?
3. Read Acts 2:42 and discuss the four things the first church continued to do.
4. Are churches blessed today as they continue doing these four things? Are you doing them?

## 3

# The Proclamation of the Risen Christ

**Text: Acts 3:1-26**

**Focus: Acts 3:1-8, 11-16, 18-21**

**Key Verse:**

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”

Acts 3:19

**Sunday Devotional:** Christ’s Resurrection and the Gospel, I Corinthians 15:1-4.

**Application:** Peter made the most of an occasion to proclaim the gospel. Churches should seek opportunities to proclaim the message of Christ to a lost world.

## A FIRST LOOK

The lesson today is about what happened after the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. No doubt, the disciples of Jesus rejoiced in the great blessings of that special day, but after it was over, they went about serving the Lord and helping those who were in need. Special days are wonderful, but when they are over, we must resume our everyday service to the Lord. Peter and the others went to the Temple to tell others about Jesus. In their service to God, we learn about a great blessing and see a great opportunity for the gospel to be spread among those who worshiped at the Temple.

God opens doors of service for us, and as He does, we should seize those opportunities and do the things that are set before us. We may overlook an opportunity that is right before us while we are waiting for a greater opportunity to

### Daily Devotionals

- M. — Ignorance—Corrected by Grace, I Timothy 1:12-14.
- T. — Repent and Turn to God, Acts 26:16-20.
- W. — The Blessedness of Forgiveness, Psalm 32:1-5.
- T. — Blotting Out Sins, Isaiah 44:22.
- F. — Living Hope by the Resurrection, I Peter 1:3-5.
- S. — How God Deals with Sins, Micah 7:18, 19.

share the gospel. Peter was not hesitant to preach to thousands on the day of Pentecost, but he was willing to preach to one crippled man as he and John went to the Temple.

There are no coincidences, only opportunities, and our goal should be to serve the Lord wherever, whenever and however we can. When we have this attitude, we can be sure that God will honor our efforts and reward us with many opportunities to witness for Him. We may not win the praise of the world, but we will certainly be rewarded in eternity for our efforts.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### I. A Miracle Was Performed

#### Acts 3:1-8

- 1. Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.**
- 2. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;**
- 3. Whose seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.**
- 4. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.**
- 5. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.**
- 6. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.**
- 7. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.**
- 8. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.**

Peter and John went to the Temple to pray at the ninth hour of the day, or about the time of the evening sacrifice. Prayer is always in order. We can never pray too much, and we can never be prayed for too much. Evidently, Peter and John felt the need, not only to pray, but to pray publicly.

They entered the Temple through the Eastern Gate, that was called Beautiful. There was a man there who had been born lame. Every day someone carried him and laid him down near

the gate called Beautiful so that he could ask alms, or help, from those who passed by.

The man did not know to ask for anything but money. The term *alms* signifies mercy, or pity, and those who had no other means of making a living were reduced to asking for help or handouts from others. No doubt, many people entered this gate every day, and the lame man was merely begging them for help. Prayer and mercy go together. In Acts 10:4, we read that the prayers and alms of Cornelius had come up as a memorial before God. Every child of God has a positive duty to help those who are in need (James 2: 15, 16). This lame man had been there at the beautiful gate all day, asking those who came by for money. When Peter and John came by, he asked them as well. No doubt he was used to people ignoring him or perhaps passing by without speaking. Possibly he had learned to avert his eyes from those who passed by him. But on this day his life would change forever and for the better.

Peter and John asked him to look directly at them. Many avert their eyes when confronting the poor or unfortunate of this world. When Peter and John asked him to look directly at them, his expectations were raised, and he expected to receive something from them.

Notice that his only hope was money. He expected Peter and John to give him money. Money would have been useful to this lame man, but if they had given him enough money to have lived comfortably for the rest of his life, he would still have been unable to walk on his own.

Even if this man had gotten all that he expected and more, it would not compare to what God actually was preparing to give him. We should learn that what God provides is above and beyond what we can imagine. No matter how grand you think Heaven is, you are wrong; it is better than what you think.

Peter plainly told the man that he was not going to give him money. Peter did not have any money, but Peter was not unable to help. A miraculous cure for this lame man would be far superior to any amount of money that Peter might give him. Spiritual blessings are far greater than the physical things that will perish as we use them. These spiritual blessings are what Jesus offers all those who will repent of their sins and place their faith in Him.

Peter took this man by the right hand, and as he lifted him up, immediately his feet and ankles received strength. His lameness

was cured instantly and permanently. This was not physical therapy; it was a miracle. The man did not stand up tentatively; he leaped up and walked. This man had been lame from birth. It was as much a miracle that he could walk as it was that his bones were strong enough to permit it. He did not have to learn to walk. He knew how to walk, how to leap and how to praise God and he did all three.

Whenever God gives us an order to follow, He also gives us the power to follow the command. There was no power on earth that could have done what was done this day for this lame man. God had done it, and it was clearly a miracle. Notice that Peter did not speak in his own power or authority but in the name of Jesus. Jesus, not Peter, was able to offer healing and relief from his terrible burden. This is a wonderful picture of how Jesus can help when and where no one else can.

## II. The Gospel Was Preached

### Acts 3:11-16

**11. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.**

**12. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?**

**13. The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.**

**14. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;**

**15. And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.**

**16. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.**

The man who was healed ran into the Temple, walking and leaping about, and everyone who saw him knew what had happened. A crowd gathered, and this gave Peter an opportunity to carry out the commission of Jesus to be a witness in Jerusalem. Peter used this opportunity to preach the sermon recorded here.

Peter began by asking the crowd why they were so amazed. God had sent the Holy Spirit in an obvious demonstration of His power. Jesus had performed many miracles, but, men were still amazed when God actually did what He said He would do. Peter also quickly denied that this miracle had anything to do with his own power or holiness. This was concerning Jesus and a lame man, not about Peter and John. Peter and John were not trying to promote their ministry or make a name for themselves as great healers.

Peter plainly and rather bluntly told the crowd the truth about how they had treated Jesus. Peter told them that they were responsible for the death of Jesus. Pilate was about to let Jesus go free when the crowd demanded that Barabbas be released and Jesus be crucified. This was simply the truth, but it was convicting truth. At its core, preaching is simply telling the truth about men and God.

Lost humanity brought about the death of Jesus, but God raised Him up, and it was the power of the resurrection that made this lame man whole. Faith in the name or power of Jesus made this lame man whole and the miracle was seen by everyone there.

The clear implication here is that, although not all men are physically impaired, all men are sinners and it is through our faith in Jesus Christ that our souls can be saved. The lame man heard the message of Peter. He acted on what Peter told him, and he was healed. The miracle was a great object lesson about the way God saves our souls.

### III. An Invitation Was Given

#### **Acts 3:18-21**

**18. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.**

**19. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;**

**20. And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:**

**21. Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.**

Peter was not unkind in his preaching. He was not trying to be self-righteous or holier-than-thou in his message. He told the crowd that he knew that they had acted in ignorance when they crucified Jesus, and he gave them the great message that there is hope for all sinners everywhere.

The good news of the gospel is not that men are sinners; it is that Jesus offers salvation freely to everyone everywhere. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus were all a part of Old Testament prophecy, and those prophecies had come to pass. Peter's message was not a message of guilt; it was a message of hope.

The hope is that men can repent and be converted. This is the gospel in simple terms. We must repent; that is, we must abandon the fruitless and hopeless approaches we have made to be righteous, and we must be changed or converted by our faith in Jesus Christ as the lame man was changed. When we do, our sins are blotted out or forgiven. Peter did not mention baptism here because baptism is not needed for men to be saved.

Peter did mention eventual judgment. Jesus is coming again, not as a baby in a manger, but as Lord of all nations in a cloud of glory. In this age, Jesus is preached to men and wise men will repent and believe in Him. Jesus is in Heaven until the time of restitution of all things. At that time, He will once more come to the earth, and truth and justice will finally be done in this world.

Jesus was here physically in the past, and He is here spiritually right now. One day He will once again step out of eternity and into time to come with His saints in glory.

## A FINAL WORD

We do not know the full effect of this great message. As we will learn later, Peter was interrupted before he could finish preaching, but there is no doubt that this was a powerful and pointed message that was driven home by the miracle that preceded it.

The lame man is in many ways representative of humanity. He was lying before the beautiful gate of the Temple. There is a great contrast in his position. The gate was a priceless bronze artwork, the best that men could make, yet in its shadow lay an example of the abject failure of humanity. No one on earth could



heal this crippled man and give him the power to walk. Only God could help this man, and God did.

Men can do many wonderful things and we properly marvel at them, but only Jesus Christ can save a soul and change a life so that those who have been crippled by sin from their birth can walk in forgiveness before God and mankind.

## FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What can you learn about being prepared to share the gospel from Peter's example in Acts 3:6?

2. Read Acts 3:12 and discuss how Peter is an example of humility and deflecting praise from himself to God. Why was Peter so concerned that he not receive credit for the miracle?

3. Discuss the boldness of Peter (Acts 3:14-19) compared to the night of Christ's betrayal (Matt. 26:69-75). What do you think made the difference?

4. What was the real purpose of the miracle? Was it to heal the lame man or for a greater purpose? What was the greater purpose?

## 4

# The Persecution of a Hostile World

**Text: Acts 4:1-14**
**Focus: Acts 4:1-14**
**Key Verses:**

“This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

Acts 4:11, 12

**Sunday Devotional:** Jesus Was Born To Redeem, Galatians 4:4-7.

**Application:** The apostles proclaimed the gospel despite intense pressure, opposition and ridicule. Churches should boldly preach Christ regardless of the critics.

## A FIRST LOOK

Jesus plainly taught that His servants would be treated the same way He was treated (Matt. 10:16-25). In this lesson, we see the beginning of the persecution of the churches of our Lord.

As we read this account, it is remarkable that Peter and the others, like Jesus before them, had done no harm. A man who was lame from birth had been healed. We might think that this would bring rejoicing, especially to those who were crippled or had a loved one who had a physical impairment. Instead, this notable miracle brought hostility and resentment from the officials of that day.

Any demonstration of the power of God makes a lost world uneasy, and the result is usually an attempt to silence the messenger. The same thing happened to Jesus. It was obvious that Jesus could do what He claimed. He healed the sick, made the lame walk, made the blind to see and even brought the dead back to life. His enemies could not deny His power (John

**Daily Devotionals**

M. — The Power of the Word, Philippians 1:12-14.

T. — Head Stone of the Corner, Psalm 118:22-24.

W. — Salvation in No Other, John 14:6.

T. — Rejected Stone or Corner Stone? 1 Peter 2:7, 8.

F. — One God—One Mediator, 1 Timothy 2:5, 6.

S. — Eternal Life Only in the Son, 1 John 5:11, 12.

11:47, 48). Even though Jesus could do what He claimed, those worldly men who accused Him wanted to see Him killed. We can only wonder whether there were no priests or Pharisees with sick or crippled loved ones. Were there no Sadducees or scribes who had crippled children or blind friends? Why did these people not see the hope and love that was behind everything Jesus did?

Sin blinds the minds of men, even to their own needs. Satan uses our own stubbornness and selfishness to keep us from realizing the great blessings God wants to give us. So, it was when Peter and John began to prove their message with the working of miracles.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### I. The Anger that Led to Arrest

#### Acts 4:1-4

- 1. And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,**
- 2. Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.**
- 3. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.**
- 4. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.**

While Peter and John were still preaching to the crowd gathered in Solomon's Porch, news of the healing of the lame man reached the priests and the Sadducees. Perhaps these men came, along with the captain of the Temple, to see what all the excitement was about. They did not question the miracle, but when they heard what Peter and John were preaching, they were grieved. The word *grieved* suggests that they were severely troubled that Peter and John were preaching that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead. The reasons are obvious.

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection and the chief priests had paid a great deal of money to get the soldiers who guarded Jesus' tomb to lie and say that the disciples had stolen his body (Matt. 28:11-15). Having gone to such lengths to discredit the resurrection, these men were now distressed to hear that the resurrected Jesus was given credit for this miracle.

Ironically, these enemies of the gospel were correct in one point. The resurrection makes all the difference. If Jesus has risen from the grave, everything has changed about life, death and eternity. If Jesus has risen, He is who He said He is and He did what He said He did, and all men everywhere must be accountable to Him. If the resurrection can be denied, everything else about Jesus can be denied, but if Jesus has risen from the dead, we must believe Him and our whole lives will change.

The response of these men was to physically restrain Peter and John and confine them over night. It was late in the evening and they could not have a trial that day. Thus, Peter and John were arrested. Once again, the answer of Jerusalem to the message of God was to silence the messenger. However, it is the message, not the messenger, who has the power. As we read in Romans 1:16, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

In spite of the arrest of Peter and John, many of those who were there listening to this sermon were saved. About five thousand men were saved that day because of the preaching of the gospel and the testimony of Peter and John. The messenger can be arrested, and the sermon can be interrupted, but the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men can never be stopped. The seed of truth had been sown, and the Lord would see to it that the work was not stopped. No matter what else happened or did not happen here, a great victory had been won because souls had been saved. We must never lose sight of our function as witnesses. No matter what happens to us, we must spread the wonderful news of the saving power of Jesus Christ.

## II. The Accusation Against Peter and John

### **Acts 4:5-7**

**5. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,**

**6. And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.**

**7. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?**

The next day, Peter and John were brought before a quickly organized and irregular tribunal. This was not a regular court or

a part of the normal legal process. It consisted of various rulers, who may have represented the Sanhedrin, or council, elders and scribes, the high priest, the former high priest and all the relatives of the high priest in Jerusalem at the time.

Later, we read that this was a meeting of the council, verse 15, the same council that earlier had condemned Jesus to die. These officials recognized that Peter and John had been with Jesus. The Jewish authorities were charged with the responsibility of protecting the Jewish faith, and this meant that they had to examine every new teacher and teaching that appeared in the land (Deut. 13). They may have had a right to investigate what this church was doing, but they did not have the right to arrest innocent men and refuse to honestly consider the evidence.

In truth, this group of men had little legal authority under Jewish law and none under Roman law, but they had seized the authority and were now demanding answers to their questions. It is paradoxical that the court was demanding to know why Peter and John had been arrested for preaching on the day before. Peter was preaching Jesus. He plainly told the lame man that He was acting in the name of Jesus. In fact, they had arrested him for preaching Jesus.

They set Peter and John in the middle of the assembly and asked Peter by what name or power he had done this miracle. We can only wonder if they thought they would get a different answer after Peter and John spent a night in jail. Perhaps some of them remembered Peter from the trial of Jesus. They may have even heard him deny Jesus three times on that night. Perhaps they thought that, after a night in prison, Peter would again deny Jesus before them. We do not know what they were thinking, but they did not demand an explanation of the miracle, only the name or power that had made it possible.

Once again, these wicked men had put their finger on the real issue, perhaps without even knowing it. Peter and John were arrested for preaching the resurrection. Now, they are called into question about the power and name of Jesus. Obviously, Peter and John did not do this by themselves. They had to have access to some power that was beyond the understanding of this court. Once again that power was the power of God. Jesus was doing what He had said He would do. Jesus had given the apostles the power to do these things to confirm the message that they preached. If this miracle was done by the power of Jesus, all

men should believe Him. On the other hand, the devil can work deceiving miracles, so finding out the power and name involved was central to the issues at hand.

### III. The Answer of Peter

#### Acts 4:8-14

**8. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,**

**9. If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;**

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

**11. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.**

**12. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.**

**13. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.**

**14. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.**

Keep in mind that Peter and John were not educated and trained lawyers. An ordinary fisherman was addressing a gathering of the rulers of Israel. No doubt, these rulers thought that they were in control. They may have expected Peter to crumble at their authority and once again deny that he even knew Jesus. However, by now Peter was a different man. He was not afraid or uncertain; instead, he was filled with the Holy Spirit. *To be filled with the Holy Ghost* means “to be totally controlled and motivated by Him.” A child of God always has the power of the Holy Spirit available in any situation, and Peter was using the power Jesus had promised to send (John 16:13).

Peter focused this assembly on the one thing they could not deny. A crippled man had been made whole. This council wanted to make it about the abilities of Peter and John, but Peter wanted to use this opportunity to preach Jesus. He began by setting forth an example of salvation that could not be denied. These people

might question the power behind the miracle, but they could not question the miracle itself.

In a marvelous use of concise and precise language, Peter addressed their question in Acts 4:10. This man had been made whole by the power of Jesus, the same Jesus that this crowd had crucified, and the same Jesus God had raised from the dead. This was a message the council did not want to hear, but it was the exact truth.

Peter quoted from the Old Testament to further make his point. Peter quoted from Psalm 118:22 and made it clear that these leaders were the “builders” who had rejected the “stone” who was Jesus. Jesus had now become the head of the corner. These men thought that they were rid of Jesus. They expected his followers to scatter and his ministry to be forgotten, but Jesus was gaining more power than ever.

Peter made his message personal. Many Jews believed that they were saved because they were children of Abraham or descendants of Moses. These people placed a great deal of importance on their names and heritage. Remember that they had asked Peter in what name he had performed the miracle. Now, Peter declared that there was no other name under heaven or known among men that would bring salvation. It is interesting to note that the same word used for *salvation* in Acts 4:10 is used for *whole* in verse 9. To be saved is to be made whole, to be a complete human being, alive in mind and spirit as well as in body.

The council listened to the response of Peter. They noted his boldness and his lack of education, and they also noted that Peter and John had been with Jesus. The reply of Peter was ample evidence of the power of Jesus to change lives. Only by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit could a fisherman deliver a message that confounded the best legal minds of the day.

## A FINAL WORD

The council was not seeking the truth; they were seeking a way to avoid the truth. If these men had honestly considered the evidence and simply opened their hearts to this great message, they might have been saved, but their pride and hard hearts stood in the way. No matter what God does, some people simply

will not learn. Their response is ample evidence that miracles alone cannot convict or convert the lost; only the Word of God can bring real change in our lives.

These men seemed to believe that, if left alone, Christianity would soon pass from the scene. This is why they threatened the apostles and forbade them to teach and preach in the name of Jesus. Their sentence shows how much our enemy is afraid of our testimony. Satan has been trying to silence God's people from the beginning. Sad to say, he has succeeded in many instances. Like Peter in this message, Christians should speak out in such a way that no one who hears could have the slightest doubt that we believe in Jesus and that we act in His name.

## FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 4:3, 4 and discuss the unique connection between persecution and church growth.
2. Why do you think the early churches grew despite intense persecution against them?
3. What do you think would happen if churches faced similar persecution today?
4. What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts 4:8) as Peter was?



## 5

# The Praying of a Persecuted Church

**Text: Acts 4:15-37**
**Focus: Acts 4:15-20, 23-33**
**Key Verse:**

“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”

Acts 4:31

**Sunday Devotional:** In Tribulation Trust the Overcomer, John 16:33.

**Application:** The enemies of God’s kingdom are numerous, but God’s power, in response to the prayers of His people, is victorious.

## A FIRST LOOK

The children of God should not be surprised or confused because evil men attack their faith. These attacks are precisely and accurately predicted in the Bible. Jesus plainly stated this in John 16:33. Paul echoed this same teaching in 2 Timothy 3:12. Whenever the gospel is preached, Satan will see to it that evil men come forth to oppose the truth.

Although such attacks will take place, we should never imagine that we are powerless to face them. When Jesus told His followers that they would have tribulation in the world, He quickly added that they were to be of good cheer because He had overcome the world. We should always remember the simple truth of 1 John 4:4, “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”

The lesson today shows us how this church overcame the

**Daily Devotionals**

- M. — Call His Name Jesus, Matthew 1:18-25.
- T. — Thy Salvation, Luke 2:25-33.
- W. — The Messiah’s Opposition, Psalm 2:1-12.
- T. — Godly Living Brings Suffering, 2 Timothy 3:10-12.
- F. — Spread the Good News! 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10.
- S. — Positive Effects of Persecution, 2 Corinthians 1:8-10.

opposition of the Jewish leaders. Centuries later, churches still face this kind of opposition. In several nations around the world today, it is a violation of law, punishable by death, to preach the gospel or to publicly admit that you are a Christian. Many others take a less violent, but equally hostile view of Christianity. Sadly, even those nations where there is freedom of worship tend to marginalize and compartmentalize the preaching of the resurrection. All these are attempts to do what the council desired—to stop men from preaching the simple truth that Jesus Christ is alive and powerful now.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### I. The Threats of the Jewish Council

#### Acts 4:15-18

**15. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,**

**16. Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.**

**17. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.**

**18. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.**

The first thing the council did was to command Peter and John to go aside so that they could consider a decision. This was a council made up of Annas, the high priest, Caiaphas, a former high priest, John and Alexander and as many relatives of Annas and Caiaphas as were in Jerusalem at this time (Acts 4:6). After meeting, the group decided that they had to issue some kind of decision. There are civil authorities that are ordained of God (Rom. 13:1, 2), and we should rightly obey them, but every self-appointed group is not such a body. In Israel at this time, the high priest had assumed civil authority not taught in the Old Testament, and in this case, that authority was being abused.

The council had a dilemma. They could not deny that a notable miracle had been performed because the lame man was standing

there before them. The way they framed their question suggests that their first line of defense would have been to simply deny that any miracle had taken place and rule that Peter and John were imposters and frauds. That argument was overcome by the presence of the lame man.

The simple presence of the man who had once been lame was a powerful testimony to the truth. This man had come back to the Temple the next day to stand as a witness to what had happened to him. If he had not been there, the outcome might have been different. We can witness for the Lord by being present and showing what God has done for us.

Realizing that they could not deny the miracle, the council determined to try to contain it; they shifted from denial to containment. They did not want news of this miracle or the message of Jesus to spread to other people. We can only wonder at this line of reasoning. A man who was lame from birth had been healed, and he was walking normally. It would seem that this was the kind of news that should be spread to every crippled person everywhere. Here was a message of hope and relief; yet, this council wanted the message stopped.

Their solution was to immediately threaten Peter and John not to speak anymore in what they called “this name” (Acts 4:17). These evil men would not speak the name of Jesus aloud. They may have thought they were being disrespectful, but they actually were revealing their fear.

They called Peter and John back in and commanded them not to speak or teach anything in the name of Jesus. These men were not thinking of the name *Jesus* as some kind of magic word. The name *Jesus* refers to the power and authority that Jesus had given Peter and John.

The problem for the council was Jesus. They wanted all reference to Jesus stopped. These people were guilty of crucifying the Lord, and they wanted this whole thing to die and go away. Many evil people still have this attitude. They imagine that, if they never listen to the gospel, never go to church or do not associate with Christian people, somehow their sins will not be noticed. This is folly. The men on the council were lost, and they needed the spiritual healing that only Jesus could give them. Sadly, they rejected the only one who could have helped them.

## II. The Response of the Preachers

### Acts 4:19, 20

**19. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.**

**20. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.**

Peter and John did not have to go into executive session to give their answer to the threats of the council. Their answer reveals that they had taken the teaching of Jesus to heart and were ready for this kind of trouble.

They replied that they had a rather simple choice. They could listen to the advice of the council or they could listen to God. The council had commanded them not to teach in the name of Jesus, but Jesus had commanded them to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Here is a situation where God was fulfilling His promise to give His men the words they needed to say (Matt. 10:19, 20).

The reply of Peter and John was a masterful legal argument that could not be refuted, then or now. Does any human court, authorized or not, have the authority to set aside a direct commandment from God? The men who gave this judgment knew the answer to that question, and they knew that they had given Peter and John a command that was wrong. Peter invited each man there to look into his own heart and judge what was right. Any honest man on the council would have concluded that he had made a grave error in telling Peter and John to stop their teaching.

Peter simply said that he could only speak about things that he had seen and heard. There is no way to refute the testimony of an actual witness. We have a similar instance recorded in John chapter 9. There, we read of a man who was born blind. Jesus miraculously restored his sight. Later, the Pharisees called the man before them and wanted him to declare that the man who had healed him was a sinner. The man who had been blind accurately declared that he did not know whether Jesus was a sinner or not, but he knew that he was blind and that he now could see. No one there could deny the testimony.

Peter and John were eyewitnesses to the power of Jesus. If they told the truth, they would have to speak in the name of Jesus.

The council was not able to refute this simple argument. After more blustering and threatening, they let Peter and John go free. Of course, Peter and John had not done anything wrong, and many people had seen this miracle. The council was powerless to act further.

We may not have the words to deal with the mighty arguments of learned men, but we can always tell the simple truth about what we have seen and heard. Every child of God is an eyewitness to his own salvation. How do you know you are saved? Well, you were there when it happened. No one can deny that kind of testimony.

### III. The Prayer of the Church

#### **Acts 4:23-33**

**23. And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.**

**24. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:**

**25. Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?**

**26. The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.**

**27. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,**

**28. For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.**

**29. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,**

**30. By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.**

**31. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.**

**32. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.**

**33. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.**

When they were released, Peter and John went to the church and reported all that had happened to them. When they did, the church responded with a great prayer. This was a prayer offered by people who were in one accord. These people were praying together. There is a great power in united prayer in any situation.

This prayer began by glorifying God and acknowledging His dominion over Heaven and earth. It all begins or ends there. Did God make the world, or did men invent the idea of God? If we get the answer to that question wrong, every other answer we get will be wrong as well.

This church acknowledged the great history of Israel and the persecution that was a part of that history. Every ruler in the life of Jesus, from Herod the Great to Pilate had sought to destroy Him, and all had failed. This was a part of the great plan of God and so were the trials of faith that Peter and John faced. Jesus had told these people that they would have tribulation and the tribulation had actually come.

The prayer ended with a request for boldness to speak and teach the Word of the Lord. It was the power of the Word, not the power of men, that would make the difference. This church was praying that the preaching of the Word would not stop because an order had been given by a council of evil men.

We must not overly emphasize the result of this prayer although it was remarkable. We must focus on the object of this prayer. This church was praying that the Word of God would be preached and taught.

The prayer was answered by a demonstration of the power that is behind the gospel. The place was shaken and those who were there were filled with the Holy Spirit. They ignored the order of the council and boldly preached and taught the Word of God.

## A FINAL WORD

These believers were so united in their spiritual purpose that they were also united in their physical possessions. No one regarded anything he or she possessed as his own, but they made their physical possessions available for the use of anyone who had a need.

This was not communism in any shape or form. Nothing was taken away from anyone and given to the less fortunate. This

was a voluntary sharing to meet a common goal—the preaching of the gospel. What happened there should happen in every true church. Those who have been materially blessed should give so that the gospel can be preached. God has ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:14). This is only possible when God’s people give willingly to support the ministry. In this case, the members of this church were willing to give all that they had so that the gospel could be preached.

The result is that the apostles were able to greatly witness about the resurrected Lord and great grace came on this church. This is still the result of effective prayer, dedicated giving and the preaching of the Word of God.

## FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What caused these young churches to be so bold and vigorous in the face of such persecution?
2. Is the same force that empowered them available to harassed churches today?
3. Are Christians filled with the Holy Spirit today? How can one know?
4. Does God desire His people to be filled with the Holy Spirit today? (Read Ephesians 5:18.)

**Have you placed  
your literature order?**



For more information, visit us on the web at:  
**[www.bogardpress.org](http://www.bogardpress.org)**

# The Prescription for a Pure Church

**Text:** Acts 5:1-42

**Focus:** Acts 5:1-15, 41, 42

**Key Verses:**

“And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”

Acts 5:41, 42

**Sunday Devotional:** God Desires a Clean Church, Ephesians 5:24-27.

**Application:** God wants His people to be holy in worship, purpose and practice. The godly effect of a pure church greatly impacts a Christless community.

## A FIRST LOOK

Jesus not only warned His disciples about hypocrites, He pronounced severe judgment on those who pretended to be what they were not. By definition a *hypocrite* is a “mask wearer,” or a “pretender.” If we properly understand the terms, no one should ever pretend to be a Christian. An actor is pretending to be someone he is not. An actor is playing a role while his real life and talents may be far removed from the role he is acting out.

One of the many problems with this kind of behavior is that, when we are acting, we can forget who we truly are. We may fool others and we may even fool ourselves, but we will never fool God.

It is not hypocrisy to set goals for ourselves, even if we do not reach them. Failure to reach a spiritual goal does not make us hypocrites. Hypocrisy is deliberate deception. In the lesson today, we meet two hypocrites. This couple wanted the trappings and acclaim of

### Daily Devotionals

- M. — Learn from Biblical Examples, I Corinthians 10:6-11.
- T. — Make Your Days Count! Psalm 90:10-12.
- W. — The Sin unto Death, I John 5:16, 17.
- T. — Do Not Tempt God! Matthew 4:6, 7.
- F. — Suffering as a Christian, I Peter 4:12-16.
- S. — The Mind of Christ in You, Philippians 2:5-8.



dedication to the Lord and His causes, but they were not willing to pay the price for such acclaim.

God dealt with this sin severely because this kind of conduct was a direct threat to the stability and fellowship of this church. A hypocritical church is never a serving church, and God had a great job for the church in Jerusalem to perform.

Hypocrisy has not gone away. This spirit lives on in the hearts and actions of many, but God always sees us as we really are, and He takes our sins seriously. We should learn that we must never put a beautiful spin on sinful actions and pretend to a level of dedication that we do not truly possess.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### I. The Deceptive Sin of Ananias and Sapphira

#### Acts 5:1-4

- 1. But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,**
- 2. And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.**
- 3. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?**
- 4. While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.**

At this time, many in this young church at Jerusalem were selling their property and putting their money into a common treasury. The apostles were then distributing to the needs of the church members (Acts 4:34-37). This was not communism. These gifts were made voluntarily, as Peter pointed out in Acts 5:4. This money was not taken from those who had much and given to those who had little. This was a plan made in expectation of the immediate return of Jesus, not a way to redistribute wealth among this congregation. The members of this church were free to give or not to give as God directed their hearts.

The problem was that some men had given sacrificially and others envied them and wanted to imitate their dedication. Josés, a native of Cyprus, had sold his lands and given his money to the apostles. His dedication earned him the name *Barnabas* which means son of

consolation. Many others did the same thing, and the ugly serpent of jealousy reared its head in the hearts of two people in this church, a man named *Ananias* and his wife named *Sapphira*.

These two devised a scheme that would enable them to look pious and dedicated but would actually cost them little. This couple sold a possession and while claiming to give all of the money to the Lord, they held back a part of it for themselves. We do not know the proportions, and they are not important. Anything less than one hundred percent was dishonest. While others were giving the entire selling price of their lands to the church, Ananias and Sapphira brought only a part of their money and gave it to the apostles.

It is obvious that they did not think that anyone would ever know what they did. They acted with a false expectation of privacy. Nothing that a child of God does is completely private. Our Father in Heaven sees and knows all that we do, and He can reveal our conduct to whom He chooses. In this case, God revealed what Ananias and Sapphira had done to Peter.

Peter was direct and accurate in his assessment of this situation. First, he told Ananias that Satan was behind this activity. Satan, not the Holy Spirit, had filled the hearts of these people before they ever took this deceptive action. They were lying to the Holy Spirit and then to Peter and the other members of this church. Sin begins in our hearts and shows up in our physical actions. Peter knew exactly what they thought they had done in secret. Real faith is living without scheming; it is being open and honest in all our dealings.

Peter reminded Ananias that he and his wife had a choice in this matter. They did not have to sell their property, and when they sold it, they did not have to give the money to their church. They did not have to devise the scheme to appear dedicated and generous while they were actually selfish. They did not have to sin, but they did. They had lied to God, and this is always serious business.

## II. The Direct Punishment of God

### Acts 5:5-10

**5. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.**

**6. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.**

**7. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.**

**8. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whetherye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.**

**9. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.**

**10. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.**

What is described here is not a case of church discipline. This is the direct discipline of the hand of God. Ananias found out that God is not only gracious, but He also is just and holy. When Ananias learned that his scheme was known, he simply fell dead. David told his friend Jonathan that there was but a step between him and death, and this is always true for everyone (1 Sam. 20:3). The breath in our lungs at this moment may be our last. We can breathe out, but it is up to God whether we breathe in again. Literally, we live and move and have our being in God.

In God's will, the useful life of Ananias was over, so God called him home. To us, this judgment may seem sudden and severe, but it was truly only a matter of timing. Ananias was a believer. He and Sapphira had the Holy Spirit in their hearts, or they could not have lied to Him. They were saved people. They had become a problem for this young church, but God simply ended their lives.

There is a great lesson here for every child of God. God has a plan for each of us, and He is vitally interested in our carrying out that plan. As long as we will dedicate ourselves to Him and serve Him in Spirit and truth, God can leave us here. However, if we become deceitful and dishonest, and we do more harm than good, God can and will simply call us home to eternity. As John said in 1 John 5:16, "There is a sin unto death." Paul taught that many of the Corinthian brethren had died because of their abuse of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:29, 30).

The young men who were observing all this prepared the body of Ananias for burial, carried him out and buried him immediately. About three hours later, Sapphira, who did not know what had happened to her husband, came to Peter to ask about him. Peter asked her if she had sold the land for the amount that Ananias

had previously contributed to the church. She lied and told Peter that this was the correct amount, knowing that she and Ananias had conspired to hold back part of the money.

In this way, Peter determined that Sapphira was complicit in this deception. She was as guilty as her husband. Peter told Sapphira what had happened to Ananias. He also told her that her sentence would be no less severe. Hearing this, she fell down and died. The same young men took her and buried her beside her husband.

Peter did not kill Ananias and Sapphira. God took the lives of these two treacherous people. Life and death are always in the hands of the Lord, and in this case, God chose to end the lives of these two people because they had lied to themselves, to the Holy Spirit, to the church and to the apostles.

### III. The Fruits of God's Discipline

#### **Acts 5:11-15, 41, 42**

**11. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.**

**12. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.**

**13. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.**

**14. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)**

**15. Inasmuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.**

**41. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.**

**42. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.**

God takes hypocrisy seriously, and He can deal with it severely. These two deaths produced a dramatic change in this young church. As many as heard these things became afraid. Fear is not necessarily a bad thing. There are things we should fear, and one of them is the working of Satan. Jesus said as much in Matthew

10:28. If Ananias and Sapphira had been afraid of Satan and his deceptive ways, their lives might have ended differently.

The result of this was the establishment of the authority of the apostles in the eyes of all the people. The apostles gathered with this unified church in Solomon's porch, a part of the Temple. The authorities allowed them to gather there because God had softened their hearts for the moment. Peter and the other apostles once again proved that their message concerning Jesus was true by performing many and various signs and wonders. People were helped and healed, and there was not one single failure recorded. Peter and the other apostles were able to do exactly what they claimed, and these miracles authenticated their message.

The power of the apostles was so evident and well defined that no one else would dare try to join the apostles or try to usurp their authority. People came from all over, carried on beds and couches and filling the streets to be healed. In addition to this, multitudes of men and women believed in Jesus and were added to the numbers of this church.

Soon the council, this time at the urging of the Sadducees, once again arrested the apostles and tried to stop them from preaching Jesus. The council did not deny the power that Peter and the others had to work miracles. Their quarrel with Peter was that he was preaching Jesus and that he was preaching about the resurrection.

God miraculously delivered the apostles from prison and they went right back to preaching. They were arrested again, and after delivering a wonderful and instructive message to the council, the apostles were beaten and released.

None of this stopped these dedicated men. They left the council rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ. This gives us a great example of how we should bear our burdens. Peter and the others did not whine and complain, rather they rejoiced, glad that they were following in the steps of Jesus. Peter continued in his ministry of being a witness in Jerusalem.

Every day, in the Temple and from house to house, these men spread the word concerning the living Jesus who had died to free men from sin and had come forth from the grave in victory.

## A FINAL WORD

Pride is a kind of gateway sin that will open our hearts to many other kinds of error. Ananias and Sapphira were proud people. They wanted the rewards of faithful service, but they did not want to make the sacrifices necessary to honestly deserve them.

Their pride led them to conspire to lie, to the Holy Spirit, Peter, the apostles and the entire church. Their pride and lying cost them their physical lives.

Today, many would compartmentalize or trivialize the preaching of the gospel and the service of the Lord. The world treats such matters as pleasant accessories to life, but hardly as necessities. This attitude ignores the truth of God's Word that spiritual matters are matters of life and death, not only of physical life and death as we see here, but of spiritual life and death in eternity to come. Be careful to be honest with yourself and with God in all things.

## FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Which was Ananias and Sapphira's worse sin—to be hypocritical or to lie to God? Why?
2. How could many have been afraid to join that church (Acts 5:13); yet, the church grew (verse 14)?
3. What made the apostles rejoice for the privilege of suffering for Christ's sake?
4. In what specific ways have you suffered for Christ's sake? Were you able to rejoice because of it?

## 7

## The Preaching of a Deacon

**Text: Acts 6; 7****Focus: Acts 6:1-15; 7:54-59****Key Verses:**

“And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

Acts 7:59, 60

**Sunday Devotional:** Scriptural Qualifications of Deacons, I Timothy 3:8-15.

**Application:** The first deacon ministry resulted in church growth. Today, deacons enable pastors to devote time to the ministry of the Word and prayer, resulting in growth.

## A FIRST LOOK

If Satan cannot stop the preaching of the Word from outside, he will try to do it from the inside. The young church in Jerusalem had withstood attacks from the Jewish council and threats and beatings of its leaders. In spite of all this, the apostles were still preaching the gospel in Jerusalem.

Satan attacked from within, and this attack could well have been the end of the witness of this church, but for the wise council and actions of the apostles. God turned this attack into a wonderful lesson for every church in how to deal with problems in the service of God.

Also some remarkable men emerged from this time of trouble and their ministries added greatly to the preaching and teaching of this church.

The church in Jerusalem was having a wonderful season of growth. The apostles were preaching every day in the

**Daily Devotionals**

- M. — Need: The Word and Prayer, John 15:7.
- T. — The Word Is Not Bound, 2 Timothy 2:8-10.
- W. — Saints, Bishops and Deacons, Philippians 1:1.
- T. — The Son of Man, Daniel 7:13, 14.
- F. — Paul's Confession, Acts 22:20.
- S. — Asleep in Jesus, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15.

Temple and were going from house to house teaching and preaching about Jesus. The result was that many people were added to the church. The numbers grew at a rapid rate. As often happens when churches grow, problems arise.

When Satan mounts an attack, God always shows us a way through it. What might look to some like an impossible problem gave rise to a wonderful way to serve the Lord. The result was not division and disaster, but a stronger and more effective church than ever before.

Trouble can weaken and divide us if we allow it to do so. If we will follow the simple steps that are given in our Text verses, we will not only defeat and solve our problems, we will grow stronger in the process. Remember that God has a way through every trial that may come our way.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### I. A Problem and a Solution

#### Acts 6:1-4

- 1. And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.**
- 2. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.**
- 3. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.**
- 4. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.**

There are few troubles that threaten the well being of a church more than the presence of an offended minority. That is exactly what happened here. This church was growing rapidly. Note that members are now multiplied, not added. This church was literally growing by leaps and bounds. The apostles were preaching in Jerusalem and Judea, as Jesus had instructed them, and God was giving the increase as He had promised.



Not everyone in this church was happy. Some in the church were murmuring. *Murmuring* refers to the indistinct noise that people make when they are dissatisfied. It is seldom possible to get a real handle on murmuring, and often when we hear it clearly, it does not make much sense. It is a real thing and we must deal with it when it occurs. The apostles did not ignore this murmuring. Like all sins, murmuring must be exposed and resolved.

Sin never just goes away. It has to be brought into the sunshine of reason and love and dealt with. There is a great lesson here in the way the apostles handled this situation.

The complaint was that some of the Greek widows were being neglected while the Hebrew widows were being helped. The apostles did not question whether or not the accusation had merit. They did not get into an argument about the charge. They sought a solution that was fair for everyone involved. We can spend a lot of time trying to figure out who is to blame but assessing blame is never a solution.

The apostles did not make a pronouncement of what would happen. They called the disciples together for a meeting to deal with this matter. Here is a wonderful example of the right kind of church government.

There was no discussion about the validity of the charge, but the apostles stated plainly that it did not make any sense for them to leave the spreading of the Word of God and serve the tables of the neglected widows. They were not saying that they were too good to do such work; they were simply stating that God had given them other work to do. The good can become the enemy of the best. We can easily get sidetracked into areas that take up all of our time and energy so that we are not able to do the things that are really important in life.

Since it was not reasonable that the apostles do this job, obviously others would have to do it. Thus, the church was asked to pick out seven men who could be put in charge of this duty. This was not a popularity contest. The men were to be chosen on the basis of particular qualifications and not everyone would qualify. They were to be men of honest report. They had to have a good reputation to be able to calm this troubling situation. They had to be men who were full of the Holy Ghost. There is never a time when physical qualifications will allow us to set aside spiritual qualifications. No matter what else these men might have or be, they had to be close to the Lord and led by the Holy

Spirit. These men had to be wise men. Wisdom would be required in handling this delicate circumstance and making sure that no one felt neglected.

Then, the apostles would appoint these chosen men over the matter of serving the tables of the widows of the church. This was not a unilateral decision on the part of the apostles, and it was not a unilateral decision on the part of the church. The church and its leaders were working together to solve this problem. Here is the biblical ideal. Churches do not tell preachers what to do and preachers do not tell churches what to do. They both work together to find God's will for everyone and put it into practice in the best way possible.

The apostles did not dismiss the matter. The statement in verse 4 is very important. The apostles were not going to serve the widows; instead, they were going to be busy doing the things that Jesus had asked them to do. They would give themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. These two activities still define the work of a God-called preacher. He may do many other things and all of them may be good, but this is his primary duty. He is to be a man of prayer, and he is to minister the Word of God to others.

In the Lord's churches, everyone has a job to do and no one is excluded from the work. These seven men would be ministering to the physical needs of the widows, but the apostles would be ministering to the spiritual needs of the widows and of the whole congregation.

## II. A Notable Man Among the Chosen Servants

### Acts 6:5-8

**5. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:**

**6. Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid *their* hands on them.**

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

**8. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.**

The troubled church was now a united church. The multitude chose the seven men who are named in verse 5 to serve the widows of the church. Note that many of the names are Greek. If the Greek widows were neglected, it made sense to get people of Greek heritage to help them. Not all of the men were Greek, but some of them were. This shows the wisdom of the decision of the multitude.

The term *deacon* is not used in this passage, but the work that is described here is the work that will later be attributed to this office. The word *deacon* means “servant,” and these men were servants. They were taking care of the physical demands and needs of the church so that the apostles could give themselves to spiritual matters. This is the design of the office of deacon.

The church had approved the men and now the apostles approved them as well. The laying on of hands symbolized approval. These seven men would act in the authority of the church and this was shown by this ceremony. This church chose these men from among its own membership. This is a picture of church authority, not apostolic authority.

This solution worked so well that there is not another mention of the neglected widows. In fact, the opposite is true. The focus of the church shifts from the physical to the spiritual side of life.

The apostles’ prayer and ministry of the Word had a great effect. The Word of God increased. If the apostles had forsaken the ministry of the Word, they would have inadvertently obeyed the command of the council and stopped preaching in the name of Jesus. They did not do so and the Word grew.

As a result, the number of disciples continued to grow in Jerusalem. People were saved and added to the church on a regular and continuing basis. The main job of this church was now the main activity of this church. The physical part of life will pass away, but the spirit is eternal. When we minister the Word to the souls of lost people, we are doing an eternal work.

This witness was so powerful that even a great company of the priests believed. Perhaps this door was opened because of the obvious love and charity of this congregation. Also, one of these men, Stephen, was used of God in a great way to work wonders and miracles among the people. This and the increased preaching of the Word of God brought about a wonderful season of growth.

### III. The Preaching of Stephen

#### Acts 6:9-15

**9. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.**

**10. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.**

**11. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.**

**12. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,**

**13. And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:**

**14. For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.**

**15. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.**

Stephen was called into question by members of a particular synagogue in Jerusalem, made up of Jews from far away parts of the Roman empire. These Jews argued with Stephen but were not able to resist his wisdom and spirit. Stephen was taught by the apostles, and once again we see how vital it is that these men were able to give themselves to prayer and the Word of God to teach others the truth of God's Word.

Unable to resist Stephen directly, these evil men stirred up other Jews and the council that forbade the apostles to preach. They set up false witnesses who said that Stephen was blaspheming the Law and the Temple by preaching that Jesus would destroy the Temple and had done away with the Law.

Stephen was not there when Jesus gave the message recorded in Matthew 24-26. He had learned this truth from the apostles, and he had faithfully taught it to others. The result was that Stephen was called before the council and asked to explain himself. This was the occasion for one of the most powerful sermons recorded in the Bible in Acts 7:2-53. It would be well to stop now and read through this great message. This sermon is a concise commentary on the Old Testament, and it concluded with

an application and invitation to the rebellious Jews to admit the truth and place their faith in Jesus.

#### IV. The Death of Stephen

##### **Acts 7:54-59**

**54. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.**

**55. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,**

**56. And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.**

**57. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,**

**58. And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.**

**59. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**

When the council heard the application made by Stephen, they were cut to the heart. They knew that what he said was true and they sought to stop the message by killing the messenger. They were so angry that they ground their teeth together, literally snarling at Stephen like wild animals.

Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he looked away from this audience into Heaven. There he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. This only added to the anger of the crowd and, like angry children, they stopped up their ears so they would hear no more. With one accord they ran and seized Stephen, cast him out of the city and stoned him to death. This was not the action of a rational court; it was the action of a mad mob of violently sinful men.

Even in death, Stephen followed Jesus. Like Jesus, Stephen prayed that God would not lay this sin to the charge of these murderers. We also note that there was a young man there named Saul, who was holding the coats of those who threw the stones. This may have been the first exposure of Saul to the message of the church.

## A FINAL WORD

When the gospel is preached, powerful forces are unleashed. Paul was serious when he declared in Romans 1:16 that the gospel was the power of God unto salvation. The gospel has the power to convict and change the hearts of sinful people, but when it is rejected, it can also reveal terrible sin in human hearts.

Satan is active. He was present in the complaint of the widows in the church. He was in the synagogue and in the hearts of the men of the council. However, we should always remember that the Holy Spirit in a child of God is greater than Satan in the world. Stephen was killed, but his message was not silenced. The council in Jerusalem is long forgotten. The city was destroyed in AD 70, but the message of Stephen is still as revealing and true as it was when this first, Christian martyr delivered it so long ago.

## FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Why were deacons first called and set aside for service?
2. Is there still a ministry deacons are to perform in the work of churches today? What is it?
3. What was the positive result of the first deacons' ministry? Are your deacons making a difference?
4. Why is it important for churches to choose godly men to serve as deacons?

**It's later than you  
think. Order now!**



For more information, visit us on the web at:  
**[www.bogardpress.org](http://www.bogardpress.org)**

## 8

## The Product of Persecution

**Text: Acts 8:1-40****Focus: Acts 8:1-8, 26-31, 35-38****Key Verse:**

"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word."  
Acts 8:4

**Sunday Devotional:** Jesus Warns of Persecution, John 15:18-21.

**Application:** When pressured by persecution, the first church went everywhere proclaiming Christ. God may take what the devil means for evil and bless it for good.

## A FIRST LOOK

Preaching has power. The preaching of Stephen demonstrates the awesome consequences of a sermon. With the death of Stephen, a cycle of persecution was begun that would follow Christianity for many years. Every member of the church at Jerusalem would suffer because of this persecution, and it is clear that the rulers of Jerusalem wanted to totally eliminate Christianity.

However, when Satan attacks, God always overrides his efforts. Instead of destroying Christianity, this persecution forced this church to obey the command of Jesus to go into all the world. Unwittingly, the council had started a great mission effort and through this effort the gospel spread quickly.

There is a great comfort in understanding that God has not asked us for advice and consent. He only asks that we faithfully follow the orders He has given us. Stephen did not have to worry about what would happen if he told the truth, he only had to tell the truth. God will always take care of the consequences when we are doing right. No

**Daily Devotionals**

- M. — God Can Use Adversity, Philippians 1:15-18.
- T. — All Things Work Together, Romans 8:28.
- W. — Suffering but Bold, 1 Thessalonians 2:2.
- T. — Be Not Moved by Afflictions, 1 Thessalonians 3:1-4.
- F. — They Who Sow in Tears, Psalm 126:5, 6.
- S. — Text for Preaching Jesus, Isaiah 53:3-12.

matter how things may appear to us, they are never out of God's control. God can use the evil actions of unreasonable, lost men to carry out His purposes.

Our job is to trust and obey, to tell the truth in every situation and circumstance and to uplift Jesus Christ. When we do this, our efforts will never be in vain. Here is another example of the truth of Romans 8:28. The Sanhedrin thought they were hurting the cause of Christ, but God turned their evil into a blessing.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### I. Persecution and Preaching

#### **Acts 8:1-4**

- 1. And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.**
- 2. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.**
- 3. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them* to prison.**
- 4. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.**

Saul, later known as Paul, was in agreement that Stephen should die. This is difficult to understand because Stephen, like Jesus before him, had done nothing worthy of death. As Saul would later learn on the road to Damascus, Stephen had told the truth about who Jesus was and about what Jesus did. In fact, no one on the council had said which capital offense Stephen had committed, but they killed him. Saul agreed to it.

The council knew that there were many others like Stephen, and they set out to persecute and eliminate the church at Jerusalem. The efforts of the council were so successful that literally thousands of Christians were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Verse 1 declares that only the apostles were left in Jerusalem. This church had gone from about one hundred twenty to thousands to only the apostles. Their rapid and dramatic growth in numbers was followed by an equally dramatic decline.



God had a purpose, even in this trouble. These Christians left Jerusalem, but they did not abandon their faith. As they went into Judea and Samaria, they took the gospel with them. Jesus' command was to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. These people may have been reluctant missionaries, but they did go. The gospel was spread.

Saul, or Paul, would write in Philippians 1:12, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." This had happened in Jerusalem, and the gospel was preached throughout Judea and Samaria. All the hordes of hell cannot override the plans and promises of God.

Good men buried good men, and Saul began a systematic destruction of the church in Jerusalem. He confessed to this in 1 Corinthians 15:9. He entered into the houses of Christians and literally dragged them out of their homes. The word *haling* means "to drag or to haul." He put men and women in prison, for no reason other than they were disciples of Jesus Christ. There was no legal authority behind what Saul and the council did; yet, they arrested and persecuted people on a grand scale. Evidently, the Roman authorities did nothing to stop these abuses.

No doubt, many of the church members saw the persecution coming and fled before they could be arrested and put in prison. Imagine the trauma of leaving your job, your home and maybe some in your family to flee for your life because you were a church member. Yet, these people did exactly that, and they were not ashamed of the gospel. Everywhere these brethren went, they preached the Word.

Here is another result of the wisdom of the decision of the apostles when the widows were offended. The apostles had successfully ministered the Word of God to the people so that when the persecution came, there were many people who were able to preach it. This is the reason we need to insure that every child of God is rooted and grounded in the truth. Thank God for great preachers, but the work of God and the Word of God may be left in the hands of any one of us. This is why every child of God needs to study the Scriptures and hide them in his heart. We never know what will happen before the Lord comes for us, and we need to be constantly ready to give an answer to all men of what, who and why we believe.

## II. Philip in Samaria

### Acts 8:5-8

**5. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.**

**6. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.**

**7. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.**

**8. And there was great joy in that city.**

One of those who went out preaching the Word of God was Philip. Like Stephen, Philip was one of those chosen to be a deacon. The need for his service to the widows had disappeared with the persecution of the church. Note that a thorny and divisive problem had evaporated in the face of even greater trouble, but God was not through with Philip. Now he was a preacher, and he went to the city of Samaria. Samaria was not generally friendly to the Jews. Jews did not speak to Samaritans. In fact, Jews did not travel through Samaria if they could avoid it. Philip went there and took his faith with him.

In Samaria he preached Christ to the Samaritans. The persecution in Jerusalem did not silence this bold voice for the Lord. We can always serve the Lord if we want. Philip could no longer serve the widow's tables, but he could be a powerful witness for Jesus. He had learned the Word of God from the apostles, and he could share it with others.

Often, we seem to have trouble grasping the simple principle that we need to get the gospel where the people are. Spiritually, we can spend our time trying to cram another morsel into the mouths of those who are already stuffed while those who are starving sit outside our door.

The people in Samaria were hungry for the Word of God. They gave heed or listened to the things Philip said. In contrast, the members of the council had stopped up their ears at the preaching of Stephen. See the difference? These people in Samaria were open and receptive to the gospel. When hearts are like that, a wonderful work for the Lord can be done. In Matthew 13, Jesus taught that it was the condition of the soil that determined the harvest. We should sow the seed everywhere, but only the good ground will produce an abundant harvest.

When God sent Jonah to Nineveh, He sent him with only a brief message; yet, the whole city repented when Jonah preached (Jonah 3:5). People in Samaria were hungry for the Word and they listened to Philip. With one accord, they received his message. People in Samaria were like people everywhere and here was a message of hope so grand that they set aside other differences and gladly received it.

Philip did not have the New Testament to read to these people. He did have the power of the Holy Spirit to accompany the words he spoke, and the Holy Spirit gave evidence that Philip was telling the truth by the miracles that were performed while he preached in Samaria. It is obvious that miracles were done there to confirm the message of Philip.

The need for such miracles ceased when the Bible was completed. In fact, we learn from 1 Corinthians 13, that these were childish things that were lacking. Not every sick person was healed. Not every lame person was able to walk. Not every person with palsy was cured. Many were but not all, however, everyone who hears the Word of God is touched by the Holy Spirit and convicted of their sin. Everyone who reads the Bible will be contacted by the Holy Spirit and led to satisfy their spiritual needs. We have a much better thing now than Philip had, and that is the completed Word of God and the accompanying power of the Holy Spirit of God.

The result of all this was great joy in Samaria. Here was a city that was transformed from misery to joy at the same time Jerusalem was changed from joy to misery. When the gospel is preached and believed, there is joy. When God's Word is rejected and God's people are persecuted, there is misery.

### **III. Philip and the Ethiopian Treasurer**

#### **Acts 8:26-31, 35-38**

**26. And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.**

**27. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had**

the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

28. Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

29. Then the Spirits said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

30. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

31. And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

35. Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

36. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37. And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Philip was specifically directed to the treasurer of Ethiopia. This was a powerful and important man who was looking for answers to spiritual questions. This man was riding in a chariot and reading from Isaiah 53. He had been to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple, and he was returning home with a question in his heart about the things he read.

God directed Philip to begin at the same verse the man was reading and preach Jesus to him. Philip did not work any miracles in this incident because the Word of God was already present and accepted. Philip, like Stephen before him, preached Jesus.

The Ethiopian realized that he could not understand the Scriptures unless someone gave him guidance, and Philip was able to do this because of the ministry of the Word by the apostles back in Jerusalem. Philip and the Ethiopian rode along for some time with Philip explaining to this man the doctrines of the New Testament church. Eventually, they came to a body of water, and the Ethiopian, no doubt, having heard about baptism in his conversation with Philip, asked if he could be baptized.

The answer of Philip is important. Philip replied that the man could indeed be baptized, but only if he believed in Jesus with all his heart. If baptism had been needed for salvation, this question

would have been irrelevant. We are saved by grace through faith, and then and only then are we candidates for baptism. This man made a wonderful confession of his faith. Then, he commanded that his chariot stop. He and Philip went down into the water and this man was baptized or immersed.

We note that the Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing and the Holy Spirit took Philip to Azotus, and he preached in the cities in the north of Israel.

## A FINAL WORD

Stephen's sermon set in motion a chain of events that led to the spreading of the gospel far beyond Jerusalem. The gospel had now gone into Judea and Samaria and was headed for the uttermost parts of the earth. The Ethiopian took the gospel home to Ethiopia and later, the church in Antioch would send Paul into the Roman empire.

God uses many ways to accomplish His will, and these methods are not always apparent to us. It is easy to look back and see that the persecution of the church in Jerusalem was used to spread the gospel, but the people who had to leave their homes and families and run for their lives might not have known what was happening. The important thing is to trust the Lord and keep on preaching the truth no matter what our circumstances may be.

## FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Are people still being persecuted for the cause of Christ? Discuss places in the world where people are being persecuted for being Christians or proclaiming Christ.

2. Is God still blessing the gospel in spite of persecution? Discuss how that can happen.

3. Do you think Christians are or could be persecuted in America? What conditions would precipitate persecution in America?

4. If serious persecution began on members of your church, what do you think the response would be?

# The Persecutor Becomes Proclaimer

**Text: Acts 9:1-43**

**Focus: Acts 9:1-8, 17-25**

## Key Verses:

“But the Lord said unto him,  
Go thy way: for he is a chosen  
vessel unto me, to bear my name  
before the Gentiles, and kings,  
and the children of Israel: for I  
will shew him how great things  
he must suffer for my name’s  
sake.”

Acts 9:15, 16

**Sunday Devotional:** Paul’s Testimony of Salvation, Acts 26:9-20.

**Application:** Saul the persecutor became Paul the proclaimer. The gospel is for every person because if the chief of sinners can be saved, anyone can be saved.

## A FIRST LOOK

The events that took place on the road to Damascus were defining moments in the life of the apostle Paul, and an important step in the work of the Lord’s churches. As we study these Scriptures, we should keep in mind two important truths.

First, we must realize that the Bible is its own best commentary. There is no better way to know what the Bible says than to read and study the Bible. As you read Acts 26, you will understand Acts 9 much better. Second, we must realize that the Bible is not merely a message of history. This account is history, and, as such, it is precise and accurate. This account is given for our spiritual benefit as well as for its historical value.

We learn much about the man named Saul, who later came to be called Paul, but we also learn a great deal about ourselves. We learn about conversion, and what it really is. We learn something about the change that faith in Jesus makes, first in our hearts and then throughout our

## Daily Devotionals

- M. — The Chief of Sinners—Saved! I Timothy 1:15, 16.
- T. — The Living Lord Jesus, I Corinthians 15:5-8.
- W. — The Gospel—Not of Man, Galatians 1:11-17.
- T. — Minister to the Gentiles, Romans 15:15, 16.
- F. — Gospel Messenger to the Heathen, Galatians 2:6-9.
- S. — Suffering for His Name’s Sake, 2 Corinthians 11:23-33.

entire lives. We learn that what we believe shapes what we do, and we learn how our relationship with Jesus Christ is the most important relationship in our entire lives.

Unless we are right with God through our faith in Jesus, we will never be right in other ways, even in our own souls, much less with other human beings. It is only when we see life as God sees it that we get an accurate picture of life, of living and of eternity to come. This was the change in thinking that took place for Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### I. Saul Meets Jesus

#### **Acts 9:1-8**

- 1. And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,**
- 2. And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.**
- 3. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:**
- 4. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?**
- 5. And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.**
- 6. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.**
- 7. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.**
- 8. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.**

The persecution of the church in Jerusalem had been an apparent success. Thousands of disciples were scattered and only the apostles remained in Jerusalem. Saul was not through. He was literally breathing out threats and slaughter against any disciple anywhere, so he sought written authority from the high

priest to go to Damascus and arrest any disciples of Jesus he found in the synagogues there and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. The church in Jerusalem had been scattered and, no doubt, some of these believers had migrated to Damascus.

Saul and his company were traveling to Damascus, when at high noon a light from Heaven, brighter than the sun, suddenly appeared. Saul fell to the ground and then heard the voice of Jesus for the first time. Jesus asked Saul why he was engaged in this senseless persecution. Saul intended to arrest believers, but in truth he was persecuting Jesus.

Saul asked an interesting question, "Who art thou, Lord?" He did not merely ask, "Who art thou?" but added what he suspected, that this was the Lord who was speaking to him. Saul was right and Jesus quickly identified Himself for Saul. This was a definitive moment in the life of Saul as it is for every Christian. Stephen had preached that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel, and that He had risen from the grave. Saul and the council in Jerusalem denied this and insisted that Jesus was dead and gone. Now, here was Jesus, literally speaking to Saul from Heaven. Saul could no longer pretend that Jesus was not who He said He was or that Jesus did not do what He said He did.

Jesus added that it was difficult for Saul to resist the conviction that had touched his heart. Often, those who are most convicted of their sins will appear the most hostile to the gospel as a kind of defense to keep from admitting their sins.

Then, Saul offered a key prayer to Jesus. Saul asked Jesus what he should do. This prayer will always be answered if it is offered sincerely. When we honestly ask God what we should do, he will direct our paths (Prov. 3:6). "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6) should be our first prayer response in any situation.

Jesus gave Saul specific instructions. Jesus told Saul that he was a chosen vessel and that his ministry was to be a light to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17, 18). Saul rose from the ground but had to be led because he was now blind. The others who were with him had seen the great light, but only Saul had heard the voice of the Lord. Saul would never be the same after the meeting with Jesus. In an instant, he went from being a persecutor to being a disciple of Jesus Christ.



## II. Saul Meets the Disciples at Damascus

### Acts 9:17-19

**17. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. 18. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. 19. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.**

Saul was now a Christian, and the first thing he experienced as a Christian was the fellowship and help of other believers. That is a great lesson. He met two otherwise unknown believers and was immediately helped by them. First, there was a man named *Judas*. Saul was led to his house and a man named *Ananias* was instructed to minister to him.

It is ironic that the Holy Spirit chose men with infamous names for this task. Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus and another Ananias was the man who showed his deceit and hypocrisy in the church in Jerusalem. Here are two people in Damascus with the same names, but who were honored and used of God.

Ananias was understandably reluctant to come. Saul had come to drag people off to prison and put them to death because they were Christians. Ananias was understandably hesitant, but the Lord reassured him by telling him to go because Saul was praying.

Ananias had two blessings for Saul. One was the restoration of his sight and the other was the filling of the Holy Spirit. No one can truly serve the Lord without being filled with the Holy Spirit. As Ananias laid his hands on him, Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit. There were no signs or wonders. There was simply a quiet infilling of the Holy Spirit, the same thing that takes place today in the heart of anyone who believes in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit came to live in Saul, to fill his life and equip him to manifest the love and suffering of Jesus Christ.

Immediately, this changed Saul's vision. It was as if scales had fallen from his eyes. This is both literal and symbolic. All the long held prejudices of a Pharisee against Gentiles as well as his twisted and distorted view of the Gentile world disappeared in a moment. Saul saw Jews and Gentiles as lost men and women

who needed to be saved. He no longer saw other divisions. As he later said in 1 Corinthians 2:2, he learned to judge no man according to the flesh but to see in him only a soul who needed to be saved.

When Saul was baptized, he took his place as a Christian. He identified himself with those who bore the name of Jesus Christ. God had prepared this instrument to carry the gospel to all the nations of the world. Every believer in every church is there, in part, because of the conversion of the apostle Paul. Every Christian since has been blessed through the conversion of this man. The life and ministry of Saul has made an impact upon all of us. The great lesson is that we can be changed like Saul if we discover the same principle that he discovered. It is that those who are nothing can be filled with the One who is everything and that we can take our place in the service of the Lord in full assurance of eventual victory.

### III. The Hunter Becomes the Hunted

#### Acts 9:20-25

**20. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.**

**21. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?**

**22. But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.**

**23. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:**

**24. But their laying a wait was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.**

**25. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.**

Saul went immediately to the synagogue and began to preach Christ. He was telling the Jews that Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus had specifically sent Saul to the Gentiles, but, instead, Saul went to the synagogues in Damascus. Not surprisingly, those who heard Saul preach were amazed and confused. This was the man who had persecuted Christians in Jerusalem and

had come to Damascus to arrest more Christians. To the Jews, the trumpet was giving an uncertain sound.

None of those who questioned Saul could refute the arguments he made. As a Pharisee, Saul knew the Old Testament well, and as he increased in strength, he confounded the Jews at Damascus, proving beyond any doubt that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Messiah of Israel.

It is possible that Saul's visit to Arabia, mentioned in Galatians 1:17, took place about this time. From other verses, it is reasonable to assume that quite a long period of time elapsed between Acts 9:21 and 22.

The important thing about this time in Saul's life is that he "conferred not with flesh and blood," but received his instructions directly from the Lord (Gal. 1:10-24). Saul did not imitate the apostles in Jerusalem because he did not meet them until three years after his conversion.

When Saul returned to Damascus, he began his witness afresh. The Jews again sought to silence him. Saul discovered that he was no longer the hunter but the hunted. Saul's renewed testimony was rejected and once more the angry Jews decided to stop the message by killing the messenger. Saul heard of the plot, and the brethren let him down the wall in a basket. Saul went elsewhere with his ministry. A great and powerful man was led into Damascus as a blind man but smuggled out as a fugitive.

## A FINAL WORD

The things that happened to Saul were unique to him. Those who were with him saw the light, but they did not hear the voice of Jesus. This experience would not be repeated; however, the principles taught here apply to every age.

There are those who are enemies of the cross; yet, inwardly they struggle with the conviction of the Holy Spirit every day. Like Saul, it is difficult for them to deal with this situation, and often they do so with violence toward innocent believers. Many saints in Jerusalem were innocent victims of the persecution administered by Saul. Sadly, these memories stayed with this great man throughout his life. (See 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13.) Our sins can be forgiven, but we must still bear the consequences of our actions.

Also, we learn that God can change the hardest heart. Saul was never afraid to preach the gospel to anyone he met because he knew personally how Jesus could change a life and save a soul. Saul drew a lifetime of confidence from his personal conversion on the Damascus road. The lesson for us is that we should make our calling and election sure. Then, we can be witnesses even in the most difficult times.

We also learn that we need each other in the service of God. Saul began his preaching ministry blind and helpless. Ananias and Judas were a blessing to him as were the other unnamed believers in Damascus who protected him and eventually helped him escape the wrath of the unbelieving Jews. No child of God is ever alone, and we should do our best to help others who serve the Lord to fulfill their ministries.

## FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the power of God's grace that could turn a persecutor to a proclaimer. Do you know anyone with a testimony like that?
2. Is anyone out of the reach of God's saving grace? How does that truth affect the way you share the gospel?
3. What practical implications can you draw from the fact that the "chief" of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15) was saved?
4. Christ identified Himself with His people so that when Saul persecuted them, Jesus said he was persecuting Him. What does it mean to you that you never suffer alone?



**Vacation Bible School 2013**

For more information, visit us on the web at:  
[www.vbs.bogardpress.org](http://www.vbs.bogardpress.org)

# 10 The Progress of the Gospel

**Text:** Acts 10; 11

**Focus:** Acts 10:1-6, 11-14, 34, 35,  
38-40, 43-45

**Key Verse:**

“To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”

Acts 10:43

**Sunday Devotional:** God Is Not Prejudiced, James 2:1-9.

**Application:** The message of salvation and God’s kingdom work is not restricted by race, language or nationality but is for every person in every condition in every place.

## A FIRST LOOK

God clearly revealed the direction He wanted His churches to take. His instruction to the church in Jerusalem was simple. They were to preach in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). When we understand this command in light of other verses, such as Mark 16:15-20, and Matthew 28:18-20, we can easily see that the mission of churches is a worldwide endeavor.

However, many of the early disciples were Jews. It would have been easy to conclude that Christianity was going to be a Jewish movement and that the Gentiles would play a minor role in it. The truth is that Jesus died for all men everywhere and the ministry of His churches likewise is to all men everywhere. For this to happen, some prejudices had to be overcome.

The overt demonstration of the Holy Spirit recorded in the lesson today should teach us that the gospel is for all. The lesson

### Daily Devotionals

- M. — There Is No Difference, Acts 15:5-11.
- T. — The Willing May Know, John 7:17.
- W. — What Makes Things Unclean, Mark 7:14-23.
- T. — Every Creature Is Good, 1 Timothy 4:4, 5.
- F. — No Respect of Persons with God, Ephesians 6:5-9.
- S. — God’s Kingdom—From East and West, Matthew 8:5-13.

today centers on two men God used in this wonderful event. He prepared a Roman centurion, named Cornelius, and He prepared the apostle Peter. For centuries the law of the Hebrews was clear. They were not to keep company with people from other nations (Acts 10:28). The Jewish worldview was simple in that anyone who was not a Jew was a Gentile. A Gentile was a foreigner, and Peter broke with a long tradition when he went to minister and to have fellowship with Cornelius. We read later in Acts 11:2, 3, that the Jews were offended by Peter's actions.

The lesson here is that more important matters are at stake than our individual prejudices. The work of God requires that we follow the plan of God, whether we like it or not. God had a wonderful future planned for Gentile churches. He had already called Saul, later named Paul, to the work of establishing Gentile churches, and now it was necessary for others to understand this part of the great work of taking the gospel to the whole world.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### I. A God Fearing Gentile

#### Acts 10:1, 2

- 1. TherewasacertainmaninCaesareacalledCornelius,acenturion of the band called the Italian band,**
- 2. Adevoutman,andone thatfeared Godwithall hishouse,which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.**

As Paul would later preach, God has set the bounds of all nations and has revealed Himself in His own way to all men, Acts 17:26, 27. This kind of revelation had taken place in the heart of a Roman soldier named Cornelius. Cornelius was a centurion meaning he was in charge of at least one hundred soldiers and his command was called the Italian band. Evidently, Cornelius was a good soldier and had risen through the ranks because of his valor. At this time, the Italian band was stationed in Caesarea, a Roman settlement on the Mediterranean Sea in northern Samaria.

Cornelius was a devout man which means he showed proper respect and reverence to others in his life especially toward God. He feared God which means that he had rejected the silliness of

the Roman idolatry and knew that there was only one true God. He had instilled this knowledge in his household and his beliefs found expression in his generosity to those less fortunate. He regularly gave alms or gifts to the poor.

In addition to this, he prayed to God always. This suggests that within the limits of his knowledge and experience, Cornelius was doing all that he could to serve and worship the Lord. His heart was like the good ground described in Matthew 13, where the truth could take root and bring forth an abundant increase.

The point here is that God responds to our faith, wherever that faith is found. When we believe what truth we have, we will be led to more truth. The light may at first be dim, but it will lead to more light and eventually the great light of God's Word. We also see that God rewards faithful service with more opportunities to serve Him.

It is important to learn that no one person or group has an exclusive right to truth. The sun will shine on anyone wise enough to get outdoors. The light of God's truth was never confined to a nation or a race of people. Wherever people will honestly consider the evidence before them and honestly endeavor to follow the truth they know, they will be led to truth that will eventually bring them to Jesus Christ, who is the bodily fullness of all things (Eph. 4:13, Col. 1:19; 2:9).

## II. God Works from Both Sides

### **Acts 10:3-6, 11-14**

**3. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.**

**4. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.**

**5. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:**

**6. He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.**

**11. And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:**

**12. Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.**

**13. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.**

**14. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.**

One day, while Cornelius was praying at about the ninth hour of the day, he saw a vision. In his vision, an angel came to him and in true military fashion gave him orders to carry out. Note carefully the response of Cornelius. It is similar to that of Saul on the Damascus road. Also note the contrast between the response of this devout Roman and the response recorded later from Peter. Cornelius asked the angel what he wanted, and the angel replied that God had been aware of Cornelius' search for the truth and his willingness to obey the truth he knew, and now it was time for this devout Roman to be introduced to Jesus.

Cornelius was instructed to send men to Joppa, about thirty miles to the south, and look for Simon Peter who was temporarily living in another man's house whose name was Simon who was a tanner. Then, Simon Peter would come and tell Cornelius what he was to do.

When we are honestly seeking the will of God, we will find it. The method taught here is that we should do the best we can with whatever resources we have and trust God to show us what we are to do in the future. Today, God reveals His will through His Word and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Once the Bible was completed, the need for visions vanished. Today we can study the Bible and find all we need to know about the will of God for our lives. In addition to this, God works by opening and closing doors of opportunity for us. Like Cornelius, we should be willing to obey immediately and thoroughly the instructions we have.

Thirty miles away, God also was working in the life of Simon Peter. Several years had passed since Jesus gave the church in Jerusalem the command to go into all the world, and the church had barely reached to Judea and Samaria. One of the reasons was the prejudice the Jews felt toward the Gentiles. A great part of this prejudice concerned the various foods that Gentiles ate that were forbidden to the Jews. Although he had denied the Lord three times in one night, Peter was still proud that he did not eat unclean food.



To help Peter overcome this prejudice toward Gentiles, God gave Peter a vision of a great sheet coming down from Heaven and in this sheet were all kinds of creatures, including four footed animals, creeping things and various birds. The command was for Peter to kill and eat any of these creatures. Peter's response was interesting. He said, "Not so, Lord" (verse 14). If we think carefully about this answer, we will see that we can say, "No," and we can say, "Lord," but logically we can never say, "No, Lord." If Jesus is our Lord, we must do as He says. If we refuse to do as He says, He is not our Lord. Jesus is either Lord of all or He is not Lord at all.

Peter was proud that he had never eaten anything that was ceremonially unclean, and God repeated this vision three times for Peter. After the vision was over, Peter was still wondering what it all meant when he was told that three men were at the gate looking for him. These were the soldiers of Cornelius who had come to bring Peter to Caesarea. The Holy Spirit told Peter not to be afraid, but to go with the men. They brought Peter to the home of Cornelius and also brought the gospel to the Roman Gentiles.

### III. A Great Ministry Defining Sermon

#### **Acts 10:34, 35, 38-40, 43-45**

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

**35. But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.**

**38. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.**

**39. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:**

**40. Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;**

**43. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.**

**44. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.**

**45. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.**

When Peter came to the household of Cornelius and saw the crowd gathered there, he understood the meaning of the vision. He realized that although it was against Jewish Law to eat the unclean food of the Gentiles, God had shown Peter not to call any man or any food unclean. Then, Peter proceeded to deliver this great message.

His first point is that God is no respecter of persons. There is a great life-changing teaching in that simple statement. There is no way we can make God love us more, and there is no way we can make God love us any less. God does not love us because of who we are; He loves us because of who He is. Understanding that will keep us from many foolish actions and judgments based on our personal prejudices.

Peter also realized that in every nation on earth those who fear God and work righteousness are accepted by God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and it is never wrong to do right or right to do wrong. Right belief will lead to right conduct and will lead us to a closer walk with God under any circumstances. Men may not have perfect light, but if they follow the light, it will lead them to Jesus.

The next verses are the heart of this message. Peter quickly turned the attention of Cornelius and his household to Jesus. Peter preached the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. In brief, Peter preached that Jesus was who He said He was and that Jesus did what He said He did. This message brought conviction and change to those who heard it. As Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit came on these Gentiles in a manner similar to what happened to the Jews earlier at Pentecost. This was testimony from Heaven that Gentiles were also accepted as a part of the kingdom of God. This astonished the Jews probably because they thought that they had some special relationship with God that excluded the Gentiles. They saw visibly that God was indeed no respecter of persons.

## A FINAL WORD

When this obvious demonstration of the Holy Spirit took place, no one could deny that the Gentiles had been accepted like the Jews. The result was that these new believers were baptized in water. Then, Peter stayed in Caesarea for a considerable length of

time teaching and instructing these new believers the teachings of Jesus.

These Roman Gentiles were not saved by being baptized; they were baptized because they gave evidence of being saved. Those who use this passage to teach salvation by baptism are ignoring the nature of God's plan of salvation. Sinners have always been saved by faith, and that is a principle God has never changed. However, God does change His method of dealing with men, and this is clearly seen in the early chapters of Acts. The experience of Cornelius and his household makes it clear that baptism is not essential for salvation. It also established that the order of things now is—hear the Word, believe on Christ as personal Savior, be baptized and unite with a New Testament church to serve and worship God and receive instruction in the truth of the New Testament.

## FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. How would you describe the spiritual condition of Cornelius as revealed in Acts 10:2?
2. Although he was a good man, did Cornelius need to hear the gospel in words to believe? (Read Acts 10:6 and 11:14.)
3. Read Acts 10:43. Is that description different from the message of the gospel today?
4. What did Cornelius and his newly believing family do after believing in Christ (verses 47, 48)?

## 11

# The Power of a Praying Church

**Text: Acts 12:1-25**
**Focus: Acts 12:1-17**
**Key Verse:**

“Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.”

Acts 12:5

**Sunday Devotional:** Pray with Persistence, Luke 18:1-8.

**Application:** There is power in a praying church. However, the power is not in the people who pray but in God who answers.

## A FIRST LOOK

The persecution of churches began with the religious leaders of Israel and spread to political leaders. The opposing Jews lost a champion when Saul was saved and baptized, but their hatred of the disciples had not abated. This hatred was escalated when news came that Gentiles were now included in churches. Herod, an evil king, saw this as an opportunity to do the Jews a favor by persecuting, or vexing, those left in the church in Jerusalem. Remember that many of the disciples had been scattered by the first persecution.

This persecution was at the hand of Herod. This Herod was Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, and the nephew of Herod Antipas, the king who killed John the Baptist. He had become intimate with the ruling powers in Rome, and he was unusually popular with the Jews. He sought to further win their favor by killing James. James became the second recorded martyr and the first of the apostles to die. James is the only apostle to have his death

**Daily Devotionals**

- M. — Peter Trusted Christ's Promise, John 21:18, 19.
- T. — Following Jesus Means Suffering, 1 Peter 2:21-24.
- W. — Pray One for Another, James 5:16.
- T. — Prayer: Ask, Seek and Knock, Matthew 7:7-11.
- F. — Remember Your Brethren, Hebrews 13:1-3.
- S. — Pray, Watch and Persevere for All Saints! Ephesians 6:18-20.

recorded in the Bible. This fulfills the promise of Mark 10:39 that he would follow Jesus in death. His brother John, would outlive all the other apostles, but would suffer exile at the hands of the Romans (Rev. 1:9).

The Herodians were Edomites and were a family of evil people. These men exercised great power in Israel in their day, but as the lesson shows, God is still sovereign in the affairs of men and He can overrule any decision or action that is contrary to His will. Herod suffered a horrible death, as recorded in Acts 12:23. God eliminated this evil man, and Herod paid a terrible personal price for his unreasonable persecution of God's men.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### I. The Rage of Herod

#### Acts 12:1-4

- 1. Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the church.**
- 2. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.**
- 3. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)**
- 4. And when he had apprehended him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.**

The time referred to here is the Passover season, about ten or eleven years after the resurrection of Jesus. This Herod had ingratiated himself with the Emperor Claudius in Rome and had been appointed tetrarch, not only of Galilee, but of Judea as well. One historian suggests that Herod had converted to Judaism to win the favor of the Orthodox Jews. It may be that the recent inclusion of Gentiles into Christianity gave Herod an occasion to renew the persecution that had begun under the council or Sanhedrin.

Herod stretched forth his hands, an expression that suggests that prior to this time his hands had been restrained in some way. For whatever reason, Herod saw a political advantage to persecuting the church in Jerusalem and so he captured and killed James, one of the leaders of this church. There are two apostles named James mentioned in the Bible. This James is

the brother of John. The other James is the brother of Joses. It is possible that many other Christians had been killed in Jerusalem, but we only have a biblical record of the deaths of Stephen and James.

The Jews were happy that Herod had begun the persecution again and killed James. Herod was encouraged in his actions. He proceeded to arrest Peter. Note that Herod was tentative in his actions. If the Jews had rebelled at his execution of James, he was ready to change his mind. Like many politicians he had a keen regard for public opinion.

The timing of all this kept Peter from being killed immediately. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was near. Herod intended to keep Peter in prison and execute him after the Passover. The same word translated *Easter* is translated Passover in other places. This sounds familiar, doesn't it? Herod intended to repeat the actions of Pilate in the crucifixion of Jesus. He would bring Peter before the people and execute him.

Herod was aware that Peter had escaped before so he did his best to make his prisoner secure. He assigned sixteen soldiers to keep this one man. Four men were to guard Peter in rotating shifts and Peter was chained to two of them, while the other two stood guard. Herod thought his plan was secure, but God was not through with Peter.

We can wonder why God allowed Herod to kill James, but miraculously preserved Peter. The truth is that God is sovereign. He does what He wills and He does not have to explain it to us. Further, we must realize that God has a plan for each of us. In God's plan, the work of James was done, but God had other things for Peter to accomplish. God called James home to Heaven and allowed Peter to stay on earth for a while longer. God was not cruel to James, and God did not show special preference to Peter. God deals with all of us according to the plan He has for our lives (Eph. 2:10), and we should do our best to discover that plan and live according to it.

## II. The Miraculous Release of Peter

### Acts 12:5-11

**5. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.**

**6. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and the keepers before the door kept the prison.**

**7. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison; and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.**

**8. And the angels said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.**

**9. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.**

**10. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto their iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.**

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

These verses describe a miracle. There is no way we can explain this in any other way, nor should we attempt to do so. There is a combination of divine power, doing what could not be done otherwise, and human activity, doing what anyone could do under any circumstances. These are factors in many miracles. God could have simply taken Peter out of prison and set him down among the believers in the church, but God chose this method for this occasion.

We first note that the church was in constant prayer for Peter. Peter may have been in prison for several days and his situation seemed hopeless, but the Christians in Jerusalem did not give up. No doubt, they were shocked by the death of James and the imprisonment of Peter, but they believed that God could help them. They constantly prayed for Peter. Fervent prayer is effective. For many, prayer is a last-ditch effort employed when all else fails, but prayer should be our first response to any situation. Philippians 4:6 teaches us to pray about everything, and this church did that.

God answered these prayers because these prayers were within His divine will. God was not through with Peter. While Peter slept on the night Herod intended to bring him forth for a

mock trial and execution, God intervened. Peter was not anxious; he was sleeping. It would be difficult to sleep chained between two soldiers, but Peter was at peace with himself and with God. He was ready to die, and he was ready to live as well. Peter had grown in grace and knowledge, and he was able to strengthen others.

As he slept, an angel came to him and a light shined in the darkness of the prison. This angel was not a baby with wings; it was powerful creature. The angel poked Peter in the side, woke him and told him to arise. When the angel said this, the chains fell from Peter, and he was awake. The angel told Peter to put on his clothes and shoes and follow him. Peter did so, and the soldiers guarding him did not interfere in any way.

At this point, Peter thought it was a vision. Peter was in the innermost part of the prison, and as they walked toward the streets, they passed the first and second levels of the prison and eventually came to the iron gate that separated the prison from the city. The gate opened by itself, and Peter and the angel left the prison and walked out into the city streets alone, unharmed. At this point, the angel left. Peter was free and alone.

Peter surveyed his surroundings and realized that an angel had freed him from prison. The Lord had intervened, and Peter was free from Herod and from the expectation of the Jews. Herod and the Jews wanted to silence Peter and discredit Jesus. God had overruled and now Peter was free.

### III. The Reaction of the Church

#### **Acts 12:12-17**

**12. And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.**

**13. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.**

**14. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.**

**15. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.**

**16. But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.**



**17. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Goshew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.**

Peter was free, but the church did not know this. They were still praying. At this time the church was meeting in the home of Mary, who was the mother of John Mark, the later companion of Paul and the author of the gospel that bears his surname. This church, once numbered in the thousands, could now assemble in a home. We know that there were others who were not present at this time because Peter later ordered that these things be told to them.

As this church was praying, Peter arrived and knocked at the outer gate of the home. A young lady named Rhoda heard the knock and went to see who it was. When she got to the gate, she heard the voice of Peter and was so happy to hear him that she forgot to open the gate, ran back into the house and told those inside that Peter was free and standing outside.

Notice an interesting thing about prayer. When Rhoda told this church that their prayers had been answered, they told her that she was mad. Did they not expect God to set Peter free? Why is it madness to suppose that prayers can be miraculously answered? Rhoda would not be denied. She kept insisting that Peter was free and standing outside the gate. Then, those inside decided that she must have seen his angel which means messenger. They were saying that she had seen a messenger sent from Peter, and she had mistaken the messenger for Peter himself. Once again, we see doubt in the middle of a prayer meeting and an attempt to explain a miracle in ordinary terms.

Peter was still outside. No one in the prayer meeting wanted to simply go outside and see whether their prayers had been answered. It seems that they would have ignored Rhoda and kept on praying if Peter had not kept on knocking at the gate. Finally, they opened the door and were astonished that Peter was there before them. Why are we astonished when God answers our prayers? Do we not take His promises literally? Jesus promised to answer our prayers when we pray in the will of God. Often, we are absolutely amazed when our prayers are answered. Real prayer can never be pessimistic. We are not praying as we should when we come to God with a formal, dry attitude. Effective prayer must begin with the sure and certain knowledge that we will definitely

get what we ask for as long as our requests are within the will of God. Understanding that fact changes the dynamic of prayer.

## A FINAL WORD

Peter addressed this congregation and told them how he had been miraculously released from prison and told them to go and tell these things to James and to the other brethren that were not there that night.

This is a great lesson about the power of prayer. Prayer can change things in any life, but we need to learn how to pray. We need to take prayer seriously. The people who prayed for Peter were serious about what they were doing. This was not a ritual prayer that was casually offered in a hurry so those folks could go back to doing other things. This was prayer by people who were genuinely seeking God's will for a friend in serious trouble.

There is no situation that is beyond prayer. No situation is hopeless to a child of God. Peter's situation was beyond the power of men, but not beyond the power of God. It was not a strain for the angel to deliver Peter; he did not even have to touch the iron gate to the prison. Things that are impossible with men are easy with God. We need not be timid in our praying as long as our prayer is for God's will to be done on earth.

Finally, even if we are surprised by the answer to our prayers, we know that the surprise will always be pleasant. God does more than we ask or think, never less. We should pray with that expectation (Eph. 3:20).

## FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the fact that James was beheaded and Peter was delivered. Why does God answer prayers differently for different situations?
2. Do you think the church believed in prayer? (Consider Acts 12:5, 15).
3. Do you believe in cottage prayer meetings like the one at Mary's house (Acts 12:12)?
4. Have you ever prayed sincerely about something but did not believe it when God answered your prayer? Discuss any experiences you have had regarding specific answered prayer.

# The Pattern of a Sending Church

**Text:** Acts 13:1-52

**Focus:** Acts 13:1-5, 26, 29-33,  
38, 39, 43-47

## Key Verses:

“As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away.”

Acts 13:2, 3

**Sunday Devotional:** Evangelize, Baptize and Stabilize, Matthew 28:19, 20.

**Application:** The Great Commission includes evangelism, baptism and instruction. As churches obey, souls are saved, saints are edified and new churches are planted.

## A FIRST LOOK

In a way, the sending of missionaries from the church in Antioch is a testimony to the success of the work of the church in Jerusalem. The gospel had gone into Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. Now, it would also go to the uttermost parts of the earth. God chose a church other than the church in Jerusalem for this work. This teaches us that local churches are equal units in the kingdom of God. Although the commission in Acts 1:8 was given first to the church at Jerusalem, it applies equally to every other church.

The church at Antioch readily engaged in the wonderful work that we have labeled missions. The terms *mission* and *missionary* do not appear in the Bible, but the teaching is surely there. We can imagine what a great adventure this was for the believers in Antioch in Syria; yet, they gladly accepted the task and began a great season of expansion for the Lord's churches.

### Daily Devotionals

- M. — A Light to Gentiles, Isaiah 49:6.
- T. — The Righteousness of God in Him, 2 Corinthians 5:21.
- W. — He Takes Away Sin, John 1:29.
- T. — In Him Is Forgiveness, Ephesians 1:7.
- F. — Our Advocate with the Father, 1 John 2:1, 2.
- S. — Forgiveness with God, Psalm 130:3-7.

There is also a warning about timing behind these verses. The church in Jerusalem was entering a season of decline, and worship would be impossible there in a few years. God had chosen another church to continue His work. We must immediately seize every opportunity God gives us to serve. An open door today may be closed tomorrow. It is a wonderful and precious thing to be led by the Lord, and we should strive to recognize that leadership and follow it without question.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### I. The Pattern for a Sending Church

#### Acts 13:1-5

**1. Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.**

**2. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.**

**3. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away.**

**4. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.**

**5. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to *their* minister.**

The church in Antioch was made up of many people from all walks of life. We see this diversity in the names mentioned in verse 1. This church had already reached out in their community across the dividing lines of class and race. Now, they were ready to reach out to the rest of the world with the gospel. Note some important things about how this process worked.

First, God called those who were already working for Him. Those named in verse 1 were workers in the church. If we want to be used by God, we should be busy doing what He has given us to do where we are. There are many who dream of doing a great work for the Lord, one day, but who will not go next door and invite their neighbor to church. If we want God to use us in His service, we must begin by serving Him where we are.

Second, we see that this process began with God, not men. The Holy Spirit directed the church to separate two of these men, Saul and Barnabas. This was not the idea of Saul and Barnabas, and it was not the directive of a planning and goals committee. The plan for this mission work began in Heaven; that is why it was successful. Over the years there have been many man-made plans for doing mission work, but the best plan ever given is the plan the Holy Spirit recorded in the Bible.

Also, note that there was no disappointment mentioned on the part of the men who were not chosen for this work. It was as much God's will that Simon, Lucius, and Manaen stay at Antioch as it was that Barnabas and Saul be sent out. God has a rewarding ministry for every one of His children. No one should be disappointed because God calls another to a special ministry because God is not a respecter of persons. God was simply using the resources in this church as He saw fit. Saul was a talented speaker and had a great zeal for the Jews. Barnabas was a Cypriot and, no doubt would be well received on that island.

Beyond this, we see that God already had a plan for Saul. God had already called Saul to the ministry of preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17). God decided that Saul was going to go to the Gentiles, and this process was another step in accomplishing His master plan.

We also learn that this process involved the church as much as it involved Saul and Barnabas. When God is truly in a work, He works from all sides. Saul and Barnabas were willing to be sent, and the church was also willing to send them out.

This church took three steps to help in this first mission work. They fasted, prayed and publicly laid hands on Saul and Barnabas to show their approval of their new ministry. Fasting is often overlooked, but it is a fascinating subject and is definitely taught in the New Testament. Prayer is appropriate in any situation. The laying on of hands was a public way of showing approval of the decision that Saul and Barnabas and the church had made to follow the leadership of the Lord.

When churches and individuals listen together and follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the work of God will always go forward, and the will of God will always be accomplished. If we ignore God's leadership, or even worse, if we substitute our will for His will, we will eventually fail.

## II. The Preaching of a Missionary

**Acts 13:26, 29-33, 38, 39**

**26. Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.**

**29. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre.**

**30. But God raised him from the dead:**

**31. And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.**

**32. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,**

**33. God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.**

**38. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:**

**39. And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.**

The first missionary journey was a mixture of great success and unexpected trouble. Saul and Barnabas first went to Cyprus, the home of Barnabas. There, they met with considerable success, but they also had opposition from a sorcerer. After they completed their work on Cyprus, they sailed to Perga and then traveled overland to Antioch in Pisidia. This began their rugged journey through what we call Asia Minor. Antioch was about one hundred miles inland and nearly four thousand feet above sea level. This was rough going physically, and it was at this time that John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas, decided to turn back. We can only speculate about his reasoning, but he did leave and this would later be a sore spot between Saul and Barnabas.

In Antioch of Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas went into the synagogue, and Paul delivered the sermon recorded here. By this time, Saul had taken the Greek form of his name and was called Paul.

Paul began with a brief history of the nation of Israel that was probably familiar to those present. Then, in these verses, he gets to the heart of his message. Paul announced that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel and had come to offer salvation to both Jew and Gentile alike. He brought out how the life and the death

of Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies and how Jesus had risen from the grave as He promised that He would.

The resurrection is the keystone of the gospel. Without the resurrection the gospel is an empty promise. The resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything about life. It promises life after death and reunion with our loved ones who die before we do. The gospel is the greatest hope ever offered mankind, and it is the resurrection that is truly the good news of the gospel. Paul stressed this to these Jews.

Paul brought this message home by telling those listening that Jesus was the way to have their sins forgiven. Jesus could actually do what the Law of Moses only promised. The Law revealed sin, but offered no remedy for sin. Through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus our sins are forgiven, and we are fully justified in the sight of God.

The Jews received this message well enough and left the synagogue on that Sabbath to consider the wonderful implications of this great sermon. We must keep in mind that this was a new message for these people. They had never before heard anything like this. They may have heard about Jesus and the trouble in Jerusalem, but the gospel had not been preached here.

The Gentiles who had overheard this message were impressed and asked Paul to stay and preach again to them on the next Sabbath.

### III. The Product of the Gospel

#### **Acts 13:43-47**

**43. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.**

**44. And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.**

**45. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.**

**46. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.**

**47. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.**

Many of the Jews who heard Paul speak followed Paul and Barnabas to learn more about the message. No doubt, many of them were saved, and Paul and Barnabas instructed them to continue in growth in the grace and knowledge of God.

On the next Sabbath day the whole city, Jew and Gentile alike, gathered to hear Paul preach again. Some of the Jews, who were jealous because of the interest Paul had generated, spoke against the message of Paul. They were not speaking out of doubt or because Paul had said things that were not true. They were envious of his popularity.

The gospel garners unreasonable opposition wherever it is preached. There is no rational reason to oppose this message. If it is true, then we should believe it, and if it is not true, ignore it. No one is harmed by the gospel. This life-giving message will help you if you will truly believe it, but it will not harm you.

These Jews caused a great stir among the people, and Paul announced that, as a result, he was turning to the Gentiles. It was necessary that the gospel go first to the Jews and here it had, but now Paul would minister to the Gentiles. There is a great lesson here. There are many who refuse to hear or heed the gospel message, but there are also many who welcome its saving truth. When hard hearts reject the Word, the Word is not diminished, but those hearts are. The gospel was readily received by the Gentiles, and it is still being preached to them today.

## A FINAL WORD

Paul and Barnabas had been successful on Cyprus, but not in Antioch of Pisidia. The jealous Jews stirred up the people, especially the devout and honorable women and the politicians of the city, and in this deceptive way, they forced Paul and Barnabas to leave. Paul and Barnabas merely shook the dust off of their feet and went to Iconium.

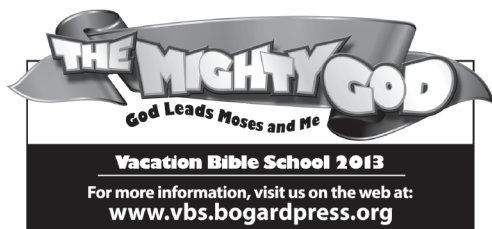


The message was not diminished, and the messengers were not discouraged, but the people of Antioch had deprived themselves of an opportunity to hear the gospel and be saved. Only eternity will reveal what these hard-hearted men could have learned from the teaching of Paul and Barnabas. Many blessings were in store for them, but they refused the blessings and chose to send the messengers away.

Men are still making this same shortsighted mistake today. Those who preach the gospel of Jesus have the words of life, and there is no other place to find them. We should honor those who preach the gospel, and we should support them in every way we can.

## FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What is a “sending church?”
2. Why should a missionary or church planter have a sending church?
3. Who sends out the missionary/church planter besides the sending church? (Hint: Acts 13:4)
4. What are the duties of a missionary/church planter?



## 13

# The Preeminence of the Gospel

**Text:** Acts 14:1-28

**Focus:** Acts 14:1-7, 20-28

**Key Verse:**

“And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.”

Acts 14:27

**Sunday Devotional:** We Preach Christ! I Corinthians 1:17-24.

**Application:** The saving gospel should be preeminent in all you do. Some will disagree, a few will ridicule but sharing the message of salvation in Christ is your primary task.

## A FIRST LOOK

This lesson is about change. Many things changed on this first missionary journey. The church in Antioch changed because they took on a new phase of the work of the Lord. The people in Asia Minor who heard the word of God were changed. Many of them were saved but all of them were touched by the preaching of the gospel.

Certainly the men who went out to preach the gospel and establish churches were changed. It was at this time that Saul of Tarsus changed his name to Paul. Paul is the Greek form of the Semitic name, Saul. Paul was identifying with the Gentiles by making the change and was obeying the teaching he would later give in 1 Corinthians 9:22 to become all things to all men so that he could win some of them to Jesus. Barnabas had already changed his name. He was originally known as Joses, but the apostles in Jerusalem had named him Barnabas.

**Daily Devotionals**

- M. — The Conflict of the Gospel, Luke 12:51-53.
- T. — Christ—The Hope of Glory, Colossians 1:27, 28.
- W. — The Main Focus of Preaching, I Corinthians 2:1, 2.
- T. — Only Glory in the Cross, Galatians 6:14.
- F. — The Offense of the Gospel, Matthew 13:54-58.
- S. — The Gospel Is Not for Hiding, 2 Corinthians 4:3-6.

Jesus sometimes changed the names of those who followed him. For instance, Levi became Matthew and Simon Bar-jona became Peter. For Saul and Barnabas this name change was a way to identify themselves totally with the work of the Lord they had been called to do. The greatest evidence of the power of the gospel is that it changes those who believe it.

Not everyone who hears the gospel will believe this life-giving message, but the power of the gospel is obvious. It will help and change anyone who honestly takes it into his heart and follows where it leads him. The saving power of the gospel has not diminished over the years. The gospel still has the power to change all men everywhere in every way that is necessary.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### I. The Gospel Causes Trouble

#### Acts 14:1-7

**1. And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.**

**2. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.**

**3. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.**

**4. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.**

**5. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them,**

**6. They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about:**

**7. And there they preached the gospel.**

Here we see the powerful reactions that can result from the preaching of the gospel. Paul and Barnabas went into the synagogue in Iconium and preached to the Jews and Greeks who were gathered there. Note that many who were Greeks by birth had evidently converted to Judaism and were worshiping in the synagogue.

A great multitude of Greeks and Jews believed in Jesus there, but many did not. Here we see a strange but often repeated situation. Men are never neutral toward the gospel. They will either believe it, or they want to destroy it and those who preach it. The desire to stop the gospel is a kind of tacit admission of the real power of God behind this message. If the gospel is just a kind of holy fairy tale like other fables, it is relatively harmless. Why not leave it alone? We never see atheistic groups trying to stamp out all mention of cartoon characters. There is no effort to eliminate Mother Goose from public life. If the gospel is really a made-up story, why do men react to it so violently? The truth is that even the enemies of the gospel recognize its power.

Paul and Barnabas stayed in Iconium a long time and confirmed their words by many signs and wonders. Here was undeniable proof for any reasonable person that these men were speaking as the messengers of God. No one denied that they could do what they had done, but still the city was divided. Some believed the apostles and some sided with the unbelieving Jews.

Make no mistake here; those who oppose the gospel are not doing so philosophically. These evil people were out to kill Paul and Barnabas. They wanted to capture them and stone them to death. This is unreasonable hatred. Even if you reject everything a gospel preacher has to say, why does he need to be killed for preaching? This kind of hatred is another silent testimony to the reality of the gospel.

Paul and Barnabas used the wisdom God had given them. They realized that it would be futile to try to resist this irrational mob, and they fled to the cities of Lystra and Derbe in the province of Lyconia.

To their eternal credit, Paul and Barnabas did not change their message. They went to new cities and continued to preach the gospel. This was a great act of courage, because they were strangers in this land, and they already knew that their message could divide men and stir up strong feelings in those who rejected it. The servants of God should never be discouraged when the truth is rejected. We are to be witnesses for Jesus, and we are to preach and teach the truth as long as we are on this earth, no matter what the reaction to the truth may be.

## II. The Gospel Confirms and Establishes Churches

### **Acts 14:20-23**

**20. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.**

**21. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,**

**22. Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.**

**23. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.**

Paul and Barnabas had many adventures in Lystra. These are recorded in verses 8-19. In Lystra, they were mistaken for Greek gods and had to deny this to the people. Later, the hatred of the Jews in Antioch and Iconium caused evil men to follow Paul and stir up people against Paul and Barnabas. This rose to the level of a riot and Paul was actually stoned and left for dead.

God was with Paul. The stones may have injured him but they did not kill him even though those who stoned him, thought he was dead. They disrespectfully threw Paul out of the city, supposing that he was dead, but God was not through with this great man. The disciples who had followed Paul, and perhaps those who had believed in Lystra, stood around him, and he rose up and went back into the city. What faith, courage and determination this took! The next day Paul and Barnabas left Lystra for Derbe and in spite of all that had happened to them, they preached the gospel in Derbe like they had in the other cities in the region.

Paul and Barnabas continued in Derbe for some time and taught the new converts in the churches they established there. Then, these men realized that this phase of their work was over and so they prepared to return to Antioch, the church that had sent them out.

They retraced their steps back through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. We must remember that although there was opposition

in these cities, there were also many who believed in Jesus there. Paul went to those who had believed and began the vital work of confirming and exhortation.

Confirming means “to strengthen.” We are made strong in our faith by our exposure to the Word of God and by our fellowship with other believers. Paul and Barnabas offered both to the new believers in these cities. To exhort means “to admonish and comfort.” It carries the idea of one walking alongside another to aid and guide him. Again, this is made possible by the Word of God and the fellowship of other believers. Paul and Barnabas were teaching these people to continue in the faith. Tribulation was certain to come. For a child of God, trouble is never an *if*, it is *when*. The Bible is clear about such trouble (See 2 Timothy 3:12.)

We should never be surprised when we are persecuted for preaching and teaching the truth. This is exactly what Jesus said would happen. (See John 15:18-20.)

After spending time teaching, confirming and exhorting these churches, Paul proceeded to give these young Christians organization. They chose, or ordained, elders, or preachers, in each church. The word *ordain* can mean “to select by a vote,” and it is not unreasonable to suppose that these congregations participated in this decision. Paul was definitely not acting like a supervisor or hierarchal leader who made decisions contrary to the will of these churches.

It is important to understand that Paul and Barnabas were willing to leave the future of these churches in the hands of God. Paul had done his work in reaching out to these cities and establishing churches there. It would be up to the people in the individual churches, guided by God, to keep these young works going.

### III. The Missionaries Return and Report

#### Acts 14:24-28

**24. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.**

**25. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia:**

**26. And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.**

**27. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.**  
**28. And there they abode long time with the disciples.**

Paul and Barnabas were retracing their steps along the way they had come. They were not only traveling home, but they also used each stop as an opportunity to preach the gospel once more in these cities. They wanted to use every opportunity to share the wonderful news of the gospel with as many people as possible.

When they reached Attalia, they boarded a ship and sailed back to Antioch in Syria. This church had recommended Paul and Barnabas for this work, and they had fulfilled the work they set out to do. There was much more work to do in these young churches, and later, Paul would desire to return to these places to visit with these brethren, but churches had been established and the work was accomplished.

At this point, Paul and Barnabas knew what they had done and what God had done through them, but few others did. Here we find the important process of reporting back to a recommending church. Paul and Barnabas called the entire church in Antioch together, perhaps for a series of special meetings, and they carefully and thoroughly went over all their activities on this journey. They saw this as God working in and through them. This is an important viewpoint. Although Paul and Barnabas were working for God, they saw their ministry as God working through them.

Paul reported that God had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. Later Paul would experience a closed door when he wanted to go to Bithynia and Asia. God leads us through His Word and by opening and closing doors of opportunity. This was an example of an open door and what an open door means.

An open door means possibilities, but it is not a situation free from all troubles. Paul had been stoned and left for dead behind this open door. Still many churches had been established, and many souls had been saved as a result of this journey. The gospel had reached into places it had not gone before, and this trip was a success.

There may have been many questions about this trip in the minds of the members of the church at Antioch, so Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch for a long time providing all the information that this church needed about this trip.

Everyone sent out by a church has a biblical duty to give a full and complete report to the sending church. Over the years much confusion has arisen in mission work simply because adequate reports were not given. Here is our biblical example of missionaries sharing completely with their sending churches.

## A FINAL WORD

As we study this first missionary journey, we can see the principles Paul and Barnabas used, and we can apply them to mission work today.

Paul and Barnabas went to the key cities of these provinces and taught the churches they started in these cities to take the gospel to the more remote areas.

Paul applied a method that was suitable for the audience he was addressing. In the synagogues, he preached from the Old Testament Scriptures, but when he was preaching to the Gentiles, he began with the God of creation and His goodness to all nations. Paul always ended at the same place, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul had as his goal establishing and organizing local churches. This is what Jesus taught in Matthew 28:19, 20. Winning people to Christ fulfills one part of this commission, but it takes a local church to fulfill all of what Jesus commanded us to do.

Paul grounded the believers in the Word of God, and he encouraged fellowship through his interaction with these churches. These two things are still a great source of strength and stability for the Lord's churches. Paul and Barnabas opened a door of faith to the Gentiles, and that door is still open today.

## FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Are there present-day martyrs who give their lives for the gospel?
2. Why are many people so vehemently opposed to the saving gospel of Christ?



3. After Paul was stoned and left for dead, he rose up and returned to Lystra. What did that action reveal about him? What did it reveal about his faith and his task?

4. Read Acts 14:27. What did Paul and Barnabas do when they met with the sending church? Why did they report to their sending church? Why do missionary/church planters report to their sending and supporting churches?