

The Bible Notebook

THE BOOK OF ACTS

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Volume 3

(Chapters 9-12)

A Verse by Verse Study

By

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DEDICATION

To

The Memory of

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Precious daughter of Randy and Penny Knepper

Whom I love in the Lord

ACTS CHAPTER NINE

Paul's Damascus Road Experience

NOTE: There are three accounts of Paul's conversion given in the Book of Acts (chapters 9; 22; 26). It is interesting to compare the accounts. There are the natural variations one expects when a story is repeated, as in the accounts of the resurrection of Christ. One begins to wonder when the accounts do not vary.

9:1 - SAUL. “ *Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest...*” Some set the date for Paul's conversion at A. D. 36-37. Others believe it could have been no later than A. D. 35, and possibly as early as A. D. 34. We have met Saul of Tarsus in chapter 8 but it may help to review a few key facts about him:

“This verse introduces Saul as a leader in the attempt to stifle Christianity, following Stephen's death. Saul was born in Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia. As a child, he was taught the Jewish law by his parents. As a teenager, he was sent to Jerusalem to study with Gamaliel and probably attended the temple in which Stephen debated with the freedmen (6:9). He was thus familiar with the Christian movement and its threat to Judaism” [New Commentary on the Whole Bible - after this, NCWB].

STILL BREATHING THREATS. The word “still” ties this to the severe persecution alluded to in 8:1ff. Paul was breathing, not “out” threats and murder, but breathing “in” threats and murder. Threats and murder had become the very breath of the fanatical young Pharisee. He breathed out on the followers of Christ the vicious persecution and murder he had already breathed in from the death of Stephen. This shows a spirited determination to eradicate followers of this new Way. This is a good place to remind ourselves that the old advice, let your conscience be your guide, does not hold up unless one's conscience has brought under the control of the Holy Spirit. A. T. Robertson understood something of the intensity of the fanatical rage that drove Saul to commit atrocities that would haunt his memories for the rest of his life:

“He breathed on the remaining disciples the murder that he had already breathed in from the death of the others. He exhaled what he inhaled. Jacob had said that ‘Benjamin shall ravine as a wolf’ (Gen. 49:27). This greatest son of Benjamin was fulfilling this prophecy (Furneaux). The taste of blood in the death of Stephen was pleasing to young Saul (Acts 8:1) and now he reveled in the slaughter of the saints both men and women. In Acts 26:11 Luke quotes Paul as saying that he was ‘exceedingly mad against them’ [A. T. Robertson —Word Pictures in the New Testament - ATR after this].

9:2 - REQUESTED LETTERS. “*...And requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, either men or women, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem.*” The word “and” ties this verse to chapter 8, where Saul was consenting to the murder of Stephen. “While the gospel was reaching farther outside of Jerusalem,

Saul was continuing his relentless persecution of the church” [Bible Knowledge Commentary, QuildVerse Electronic Library - after this, BKC]. The request for letters authorizing him to take this persecution of the saints to Damascus illustrates how Satan can use those who think they are serving God by persecuting others. Blood and tears were the fuel that kept the engine of Saul’s rage running. The request shows that he is escalating the attack, determined to destroy the last trace of what he believes to be a heresy. Politics really do make strange bedfellows.

It is interesting the Saul, a fanatical young Pharisee, requested letters from the high priest, who was a Sadducee. Such was the zeal of this young Pharisee. According to Acts 26:11, Paul may have planned to take the persecution to other foreign cities. Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus had given the Sanhedrin jurisdiction over such matters as this in other provinces.

Fanatical religious zeal has been responsible for more deaths than we can calculate, but *The Voice of Martyrs* ministries has sought to inform the world about the slaughter of Christians since New Testament times. Today, any religious slight in the Middle East and in places in Africa and Southeast Asia can ignite rage and slaughter that Saul would have found unbelievable. The May issue of the *Southern Baptist Texan* carried a note about a teacher in Africa who picked up a child’s book bag and placed it in another place on the floor. The little girl who owned the bag cried out the bag contained her copy of the Quran and a Christian had touched it. The class beat the teacher to death. Paul, though not carried away to this extent, was driven by religious zeal.

MEN AND WOMEN. Three times (8:3; 9:2; 22:4) the persecution of women is mentioned as a special note to underscore Paul’s cruelty in persecuting the church. The third time, Paul mentions it himself. It was also one of the things that led him to call himself the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).

DAMASCUS. The residents of Damascus claim this is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world, a claim that would be hard to refute. In Biblical times, Damascus was the capitol of Syria, a neighbor and often a bitter enemy to Israel. The *Holman Bible Dictionary* (The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources - after this, HBD) provides a note that will help one to understand the importance of this ancient city:

“Its geographical location enabled Damascus to become a dominant trading and transportation center. Standing 2300 feet above sea level, it lay northeast of Mount Hermon and about 60 miles east of Sidon, the Mediterranean port city. Both major international highways ran through Damascus the Via Maris from Mesopotamia in the east through Damascus and the Jezreel Valley to the Plain of Sharon and the Mediterranean coast, then south to Egypt; and the King’s Highway from Damascus south through Ashtaroth, Rabbath-ammon, and Bozrah to Elath on the Red Sea and to Arabia. By the same token, Damascus saw armies march along the highways, often using Damascus as the staging area” [Holman Bible Dictionary - HBD].

While modern scholars look to archaeologist for information about many ancient biblical sites, there is little we learn from archaeologists about Damascus, for the simple reason that it is still inhabited.

However,

“Explorations do indicate settlement from before 3000 B.C. Tablets from the Syrian center of Ebla mention Damascus about 2300 B.C. Thutmose III of Egypt claimed to have conquered Damascus about 1475 B.C. The Hittites battled Egypt for control of Damascus until the Hittites were defeated by the Sea Peoples about 1200 B.C. At this time Arameans from the nearby desert came in and took control of an independent Damascus, gradually establishing a political power base” [HBD].

Israel had a long history of conflicts with Damascus. It seems to have been a known city when Abraham chased foreign kings north of Damascus to recover Lot, whom they had taken captive after invading Sodom (Gen. 14:15). That was 2000 years before Christ. Abraham’s servant Eliezer apparently came from Damascus (Gen. 15:2). It may have been founded not too long after Nimrod founded Nineveh and Babylon, and if so, it may well be the world’s oldest city.

The question is, with the history of war and conflict between Israel and Syria, why was Saul going to Damascus to continue the persecution of believers in that city? The answer is that both Jerusalem and Damascus had been conquered by Rome and were subjects of the Roman Empire. Rome often appointed local kings who led their people under the supervision and administration of Rome, and Roman soldiers were there to enforce the laws of Rome. The Jews, however, were a peculiar people to govern, and Rome allowed the Jewish Sanhedrin to deal with issues in Israel, as well as matters that were deemed religious in other countries. This was a religious issue and Rome was more than happy to permit the high priest and the Sanhedrin to deal with it.

THE WAY. The term denotes a course of life. Luke tells us that Saul and his “enforcers” were on their way to Damascus with the letter from the high priest, “*so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, either men or women, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem.*” This was, in a sense, a search and destroy mission. He would search for those who belonged to “the Way” - both men and women, a fact that would compound his guilt every time he remembered how he persecuted the saints in Jerusalem, and would have persecuted them in Damascus.

The Pharisees and Sadducees referred to the followers of Christ by the term, the Way, and that reference was in no way designed to offer them any recognition. It was the common way of referring to the followers of Christ in the decade after the crucifixion. The label, “The Way”, would become a part of the church jargon: “The way of life”; “the way of salvation;” the way of the Lord”. The believers would first be called Christians in Antioch of Syria, and that name was given to them as a term of derision, not respect.

TO JERUSALEM. As seen already, Paul had requested and received authority from the sanhedrin in Jerusalem to search out and arrest followers of Christ in Damascus, arrest them, and throw them into prison. He also had the authority to take them back to Jerusalem where they would stand before the Sanhedrin, which had shown no mercy in the case of Stephen. Synagogues outside Jerusalem existed primarily for teaching and would not normally deal with issues like this. Serious

religious matters would be referred to Jerusalem.

9:3 - A LIGHT FROM HEAVEN. *“As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him.”* Luke notes that they were “nearing Damascus” when a blinding light flashed all around Saul. The Lord could have sent that blinding light as they left Jerusalem. That would have been a lot more convenient for Saul and his traveling companions, since they could have taken him to his sister’s home and then gone on to their own homes. What we see here is the Lord acting according to His sovereign will and purpose. He knew when the time would be right, just as He knew that He wanted Saul in Damascus following the encounter on the road to Damascus. He already had someone in mind to minister to Saul, as well as a ministry for him.

A LIGHT. The details of the Damascus Road experience of Paul has been the subject of sermons and Bible lessons for two thousand years. But, first the flashing light, and then the debate:

“A light from heaven suddenly flashed around him.’ It was like a flash of lightning. Paul uses the same verb in Acts 22:5, but in Acts 26:13 he employs *perilampsan* (shining around). There are numerous variations in the historical narrative of Saul's conversion in Acts 9:3-18 and Luke’s report of Paul’s two addresses, one on the steps of the Tower of Antonia facing the murderous mob (Acts 22:6-16), the other before Festus and Agrippa” (Acts 26:12-20) [ATR].

Non-believers and liberal theologians have often attacked Luke to discredit the Book of Acts, and they have attacked elements in the Book of Acts to discredit Paul. One effort to discredit Luke as a writer focuses on his failure to have Paul’s two speeches conform at every point with his narrative. Robertson answers those critics:

“This objection has no weight except for those who hold that Luke composed Paul's speeches freely as some Greek writers used to do. But, if Luke had notes of Paul's speeches or help from Paul himself, he naturally preserved the form of the two addresses without trying to make them agree with each other in all details or with his own narrative in chapter 9. Luke evidently attached great importance to the story of Saul's conversion as the turning point not simply in the career of the man, but an epoch in the history of apostolic Christianity. In broad outline and **in all essentials the three accounts agree and testify to the truthfulness of the account** of the conversion of Saul. It is impossible to overestimate the worth to the student of Christianity of this event from every angle because we have in Paul's Epistles his own emphasis on the actual appearance of Jesus to him as the fact that changed his whole life (1Co 15:8; Gal 1:16). The variations that appear in the three accounts do not mar the story, when rightly understood, as we shall see. Here, for instance, Luke simply mentions "a light from heaven," while in Acts 22:6 Paul calls it ‘a great (*hikanon*) light’ ‘about noon’ and in Acts 26:13 ‘above the brightness of the sun,’ as it would have to be ‘at midday’ with the sun shining” [ATR, bold added by this writer].

We can only picture the light that flashed around Saul by recalling a blinding flash we have seen: a strobe light on a camera, a three million candle power spot light, a streak of lightening, or a flash of lightening that lights up an entire area. To the preacher, this light implies some interesting thoughts, some of which are enigmatic. First, there is the arrogant young Pharisee who feels highly enlightened, but is in fact spiritually blind. Then there is the Light of the World who sends a flashing light to physically blind him, not to leave him blind, but to bring him face to face with the Light.

9:4 - A VOICE. *“Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”* Paul heard a “voice”, not simply a sound. In 26:14, we learn that those were traveling with Saul heard the voice and that the voice was in Hebrew. From 22:9, we know that those who were traveling with him saw the light and fell to the ground. The Bible Knowledge Commentary (BKC after this) advances this another step:

“Saul both heard the voice of the Lord Jesus and saw Him (cf. 9:17, 27; 22:14; 26:16; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). Though there is no explicit statement of Saul’s seeing Christ, it is implicit in the reference to a light from heaven. It was fundamental to Saul’s apostleship that he saw the resurrected Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1) [BKC, bold added by this writer].

SAUL, SAUL. In Acts 26:14, we are told that the Lord spoke to him, calling his name in the Hebrew (Saoul, Saoul). In Luke’s writing, the repetition of a name like this seems to imply a rebuke or a warning. It is obvious from this verse that

“Jesus knew Saul before Saul knew Jesus. That Saul saw as well as heard Jesus is specifically stated by Ananias (9:17; 22:14), by Barnabas (9:27), and by Paul himself (26:16). Later, when Paul claims his apostleship, he expressly states that he had “seen Jesus” (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8)” [NCWB].

So, what Saul heard was not an unintelligible sound but a voice in a language he knew well. Furthermore, that voice addressed him personally: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Two things speak volumes to us as we read this. First, Saul was addressed by name, a fact that left no room for denial or debate. Second, the voice asked, “Why do you persecute Me?”, a question that is

“filled with significance for it shows the union of Christ with His church. The Lord did not ask, ‘Why do you persecute My church?’ The reference to ‘Me’ gave Saul his first glimpse into the great doctrine of Christians being in Christ. This same truth was implied earlier by Luke when he wrote that the Lord continues His work on earth in the church (1:1). Also Ananias’ lie to Peter was a lie to the Holy Spirit (5:3). Luke, with Paul, saw Christ and the church as the Head and its body” [BKC].

Clearly, when one persecutes the church he is persecuting Christ, since He is the Head of the church

and the church is the body of Christ. If that applied to those who persecuted the church in the First Century it applies today. Using the same logic, to pervert the message of the church, minimize the doctrines of the church, or to simply ignore the church is to commit a sin against Christ, the Head of the church.

As noted in earlier volumes in this study in Acts, I prepared a very long study on this Book many years ago and still rely on some of that research. At the time I was working on that study to prepare to teach it in a number of churches in Louisiana, Dr. H. Leo Eddleman was writing his commentary on Acts (A PRACTICAL AND EXEGETICAL COMMENTARY ON ACTS, Books of Life Publishers, Dallas, 1974). David Smith, who notes that he has served in Israel for 25 years, wrote an article in which he highlighted to work and influence of Baptists in Israel. He wrote, "During the 1930s a number of American Southern Baptists arrived in the Holy Land to bolster the local work. They included Leo Eddleman, later a college Hebrew professor, who was noted for his mastery of both Hebrew and Arabic. He attributed those skills to the curfew maintained during the British Mandate, saying there was little else to do but study from sunrise to sunset" [*Baptists in the Holy Land*, Internet Newsletter by David Smith, March 8, 2007].

As noted before in another volume, it was my privilege to talk with Dr. Eddleman, both in person and on the phone when I had questions about this study. I often found just the help I needed, as his comments on this verse will illustrate: "The validity of Christianity does not rest solely upon the conversion of this man. However, the fact that he had an experience that was tantamount to that of the disciples when they saw the Lord is further authentication of historical Christianity" [HLE: 114].

Many people desire such an experience as Paul had on the road to Damascus: a Damascus Road Experience. Who wouldn't like to look back to such a supernatural manifestation of the presence of the Lord as proof of the legitimacy of his or her salvation experience? The simple truth is, the Lord has something better for us! He desires something for us even better than the memory of a Damascus Road Experience. What could possibly be better than that? **The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.** He is not a memory but a reality, the living presence of Almighty God in the heart of the believer.

When one is not conscious of the presence of the Holy Spirit he or she should realize that His power and presence have been quenched by our sinful neglect, or grieved by our sinful rejection of His leadership. The inner conviction which leads the lost person to the point of being inescapable is enough to have brought countless millions to the same basic experience as Paul. Paul was saved by grace through faith, not by a blinding light or a voice, or even the sight of the risen Lord. There is no reason for any person to seek such an experience. There is no reason to doubt one's salvation because he has seen no light and heard no voice.

It is very import for every Christian to understand that the Lord has blessed each believer with a gift far greater than a phenomenal blinding light and audible voice. He sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to convict each person of sin, and to persuade that person to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. When the person is saved, God place His Spirit in that person's life permanently. What is better than

a Damascus Road Experience? A Holy Spirit relationship. A relationship with the one supreme God through His Son Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

One question remains: How a man one persecute One who is in heaven? In what sense could it be true that Saul was persecuting Jesus? Christ, the Head of the church is in heaven, but the church, the body of Christ, extends earthward in all directions.

9:5 - WHO ARE YOU? “*Who are You, Lord?*” he said. *‘I am Jesus, whom you are Persecuting,’ He replied.*” This is a logical question, given the circumstances. It may be interesting to speculate as to what was going through Saul’s mind, but we only know what is revealed. Sometimes people assign motives, reactions, and conclusions to people with little or no Scriptural support. What we know is that Saul has been blinded by a light that flashed all around him, and that he had heard someone call his name. The logical response would be to ask the identity of the person speaking to him.

LORD. At first, when one reads, “Who are you, Lord?”, he or she might jump to the conclusion that he was acknowledging Jesus. Or, he might assume that such phenomenal manifestation as he had experienced could only come from Yahweh, the God he had worshiped and served from childhood. Robertson explains that, “It is open to question if *kurie* should not here be translated ‘Sir’ as in Acts 16:30 and in Mat 21:29, 30; John 5:7; John 12:21; John 20:15; and should be so in John 9:36.” [ATR].

I AM JESUS. For those who are more interested in feelings than divine truth, this would be a good place to ask, “What did he feel at that moment?” One can only imagine how he felt, but when we understand that the Lord had been pointing this brilliant young scholar to the Cross even while he was waging a fanatical war against Christ, the words, “I am Jesus”, must have first brought shock to Saul, but it would soon open a floodgate of promises from the Law and the prophets that flooded his mind in a millisecond. What he heard Jesus say was, “I am Yeshua.” This is the Prophet Yahweh announced to Moses! This is the Branch of David, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah’s prophecy. This is the One of whom Jeremiah, Michah, and Zechariah wrote. This is the Seed of Eve, the Seed of Abraham. The Messiah!

For those who still question whether or not Jesus ever really lived, consider the impact of Jesus on the life of this zealous young Pharisee who was marching to Damascus to root out every vestige of His influence in the world. He was attacking the Way of Christ with a determination to wipe it out completely, but in a short period of time he would come to the Cross; he would come under the Cross; he would take up his cross and follow Jesus as few, if any, ever have.

Jesus is revealed in the Four Gospels, but the Epistles of Paul (along with the General Epistles and Revelation) would become the basis for the bulk of our theology. Paul would write one of the greatest Christological in the NT:

“For this reason God also highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, **so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow** - of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth - and **every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9-11, bold added).

WHOM YOU ARE PERSECUTING. The pronouns are emphatic here: “**I** am Jesus, whom **YOU** are persecuting”! (emphasis added by this writer). His worst fears have just been realized. Stephen was right after all! They had killed him for saying it, but now Saul knows he was right. Saul was persecuting the Messiah, the Son of the God he professed to love and serve. The word translated persecuting “is linear action here, stressing the unceasing efforts of Saul against Jesus.

There is another point that we do not need to miss. Jesus did not say, “You are persecuting my followers”; nor did He accuse him of persecuting the Way. What he said is “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Every person who has tried to destroy the church, persecute Christians, or destroy the Word of God has been attacking Jesus Christ. Islamic terrorists today are attacking Jesus Christ, and the so-called peaceful Muslims are denying Christ, whether they are persecuting Him or not. Hitler was at war with Jesus. Stalin was at war with Jesus. The ACLU is attacking Jesus every time the attack students who would pray at graduation, or pray in Jesus’ name during a Baccalaureate service, or sue to have a display of the Ten Commandments removed from a court house. They are attacking Jesus personally! Is there any wonder that He will return one day to destroy all enemies?

There is more. Every person who neglects the church is neglecting Jesus. Every church member who curses another member is cursing Jesus. Every church member who would use the church to promote his or her child or young person in a church program or ministry is using Jesus for his or her own purpose. Every person who uses his or her tongue to divide the church is using that tongue against Jesus. When one is unfaithful to the church he is unfaithful to Jesus. When one refused to bring his tithe to the church is robbing Jesus. Every person who does not keep the Lord’s Day holy is profaning the Name and Person of Jesus.

Every person who pollutes the church with false doctrine is attacking Jesus. After one mainline denomination elected a homosexual priest as bishop and when questioned about it on a news program, one priest arrogantly proclaimed, “The Bible is not our authority!” [Hannity and Colmes, Fox News]. That is a slap in the face of Jesus. I sat under a professor who denied the existence of Satan. He was calling Jesus a liar! It comes even closer to home: When I pray wishing instead of believing I am dishonoring Jesus. Martin Luther said that if we do not confess Christ at the point of attack, we are denying Him, no matter how loudly we profess faith in Him. I am guilty! Forgive me, Lord.

9:6 - GET UP AND GO. “*But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.*” If we run the references we will see the constant use of the word (get up, or rise) in the Book of Acts (8:26; 9:11; 10:13, 20, 26., etc. Saul was prostrate on the ground and Jesus told him to get up and go into the city. Such details as this seem to authenticate the account of Luke throughout the Book of Acts. These words, “Get up and go”, resonate with the Great Commission. In Acts 1:8,

Jesus predicted that as soon as the Holy Spirit was come upon them, they would get up and go unto all the world, as Jesus had commanded in the Great Commission.

If we really confess our sins today, we may realize why the church is not reaching the world for Jesus. In fact, disobedient church members are bringing the world into the church. Jesus commands us to get up and go, but when the service is over on Sunday morning our members get up go to the restaurant, then to the golf course, the mall, to grandma's house, or back home to watch TV.

I had heard people quote Vance Havner most of my life so when I read the notice that he would be speaking to pastors at a Luby's Cafeteria in Port Author, Texas, I drove the short distance from Nederland, where I was pastor of the Hill Crest Baptist Church to hear him. He was the first I wasto hear say, "We sing, *Standing On The Promises*, but we had rather sit on the premises."

YOU WILL BE TOLD. Jesus is Sovereign. We must obey him, or we defy Him. When my sons

were young, I tried to explain that there were times when I would have the time to explain an order I gave them, but I would not always have that option. I wanted them to know that if I shouted, "STOP!", that was no time to ask for an explanation. Their life could depend on their immediate and complete obedience. I would have time for explanations when the danger had passed.

Jesus offered Saul all the instructions he needed and Saul obeyed immediately and completely. He must go into the city where his companions would find a place for him to stay. At the appointed time, Saul would receive his instructions. Jesus, whom Paul would address as Lord throughout the New Testament, commanded, and Saul obeyed. Those who translated the Holman Christian Standard Bible surprised some people when they translated the Greek word for slave literally, rather than the more familiar "servant" or "bond-servant." It was my privilege to sit with the General Editor, Dr. Ed Blum, and listen to him explain to a LifeWay Christian Resources trustee from Miami that this is a word-for-word translation, and therefore the right word. He then went on to explain that as a Christian, you are bought with a price, the blood of Jesus Christ. You belong to Him. Young Saul of Tarsus is possibly the greatest single example of what a servant (or slave) should be in the entire history of the church.

9:7 - THE MEN. "*The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the sound but seeing no one.*" The men with Saul were participants in the persecution, but spectators in this encounter with Jesus. They were aware that something was going on but could not comprehend it. They may well have suspected that heaven's communication system had gotten through to Saul but they could not understand what was happening.

VOICE. "Saul's traveling companions heard the voice, but only as a sound (see 4a). They heard the "sound" but did not discern the "voice" (9:4). The implication here is that Saul not only heard Jesus, he saw Him, though that is not declared here. He will provide that information later. The Believer's Study Bible Notes offer summary commentary:

“Those traveling with Saul heard a sound and looked around expecting to see the one who spoke. Only Saul heard the voice with understanding; the message was for him. Some suggest that “voice” here refers to what ancient Hebrew writers define as the bath qol (Heb.) or “echo.” This “heavenly echo” is hardly adequate to explain what took place. Luke’s words make it clear that others heard the sound but did not understand the words or message (Acts 22:9). Verse 7 states that Saul’s companions heard the voice (akouontes, Gk., with the genitive case), whereas 22:9 says they did not “hear the voice” (ekousan, Gk., with the accusative case). Both constructions say the same thing: The companions of Saul did not understand what the voice said to Saul. **They heard the sound of the voice but did not understand the message of the words.** They were spectators of this experience and not participants (9:4a; 22:9; 26:16)” [Believer’s Study Bible Notes - after this, BSB, bold added by this writer].

SPEECHLESS. The men with Saul were left speechless and astonished. This denotes the awe with which they witnessed what happened to Saul.

9: 8 - SAUL GOT UP. *“Then Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus.”* When the blinding light flashed around Saul he had fallen to the ground. Jesus had told him to get up and go into the city. His first action was to obey the voice and get up from the ground. Saul has a new Master and he obeys Him.

HIS EYES WERE OPEN. Saul had apparently closed his eyes against the blinding light, and when the Lord told him to get up, he got up and then opened his eyes only to discover that he was blind: “he could see nothing”. Paul had a problem with his eyes (Gal. 4:15) which many believe was caused by this blinding light. The other men were not blinded by the light, so this was a revelation to Paul, and Paul alone received the sign.

LED HIM. The arrogant, militant Pharisee would have charged into Damascus like a storm. Instead, he was led into the city like a helpless captive.

9:9 - UNABLE TO SEE. *“He was unable to see for three days, and did not eat or drink.”* Three days is a long time to go without food, but it stretched the normal limit where water is concerned. There is a “rule of three” recognized by emergency workers: Three minutes without air, three days without water, or three weeks without food; either limit is a threat to life. In this case, Saul’s life was never in danger because the Lord had singled him out for a special ministry.

These three days were days of waiting and change for young Saul. There is no reason to give special significance to the fact that he was required to wait three days for an answer, nor is there any reason not to consider the possibility that the three days he had to wait were insignificant. The number three is the divine number but we are not told that it held any special significance here. What seems more likely here is that Saul was pressed to the limit of his endurance through these three days of darkness

and deprivation. He was learning to wait on the Lord and trust in Him. That of which we can be certain is that the Lord knew exactly what He was doing. He is sovereign and it served His purpose for Saul to wait three days before He revealed His purpose to him.

Ananias Sent to Saul

9:10 - ANANIAS. *“Now in Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. And the Lord said to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’ ‘Here I am, Lord!’ he said.”* Ananias, a common name at the time, means “Yahweh is gracious”. Ananias, according to Acts 22:12, had the respect of both Jews and Christians in Damascus, a fact that may surprise some considering the tension between Christians and Jews during this time of persecution. All we know about him was that he had probably been a follower of Jesus for some time, and he had heard of Saul and the persecution he was leading. The Lord is sovereign in all His ways and he picked Ananias for a reason. “There was wisdom in sending such a Christian to Saul, as it might do much to conciliate the minds of the Jews there towards him” [Barnes’ Notes on the NT - BARNES after this].

A VISION. Those who would deny the miracles of the Bible must find a way around visions, which were clearly supernatural. But, is not any communication between God and man supernatural? God, in Scripture, communicates with people through dreams, visions, a voice (Samuel), and in a visible form, as in the case of Abraham.

THE LORD SAID. The Lord spoke to Ananias in the vision and called him by name. Whether he was awake or asleep makes no difference, but a distinction is made between dreams (when one is asleep) and visions in the Bible. Jesus had addressed Saul, who did not know Him by name, so it is not surprising that we would address one of His followers by name.

HERE I AM, LORD. Saul had asked, “Who are you, Lord?” Ananias knew who He was: “Here I am, Lord.”

9:11 -GET UP AND GO. *“Get up and go to the street called Straight,” the Lord said to him, “to the house of Judas, and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, since he is praying there.”* Jesus had told Saul to get up and go into Damascus. Now He tells Ananias to get up and go to the “street called Straight”

STREET CALLED STRAIGHT. This was one of two parallel streets that ran from the west wall of the city to the east wall [BKC]. There were many winding streets in ancient cities, so a straight street from the east gate to the west gate would understandably receive the designation “Straight”. As Damascus is the oldest continually inhabited city in the world, this may well be the oldest street in the world. The instructions the Lord gave Ananias were specific: go to the home of one Judas, apparently a believer, and ask for “a man from Tarsus named Saul.” The Lord provides

all the information he would need to find the right person. This is the first reference to Saul's birthplace.

HE IS PRAYING. The bitter enemy of the Cross had now come under the Cross. We are not told that Saul was converted when he saw the blinding light flash around him on the road to Damascus, but we can be sure that he was a follower at this point. He is no longer persecuting Jesus, he is worshiping Him. It is reasonable to assume that Saul was not praying in a vacuum. He was well grounded in the Law and the Prophets and he must certainly have been recalling Scripture as he prayed.

9:12 - A VISION. *“In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and placing his hands on him so he may regain his sight.”* God was communicating with both Saul and Ananias through visions, just as He communicated with both Cornelius and Peter in order to bring them together. The Lord had revealed that a man named Ananias would come to him and lay his hands on him and restore his sight. The Lord told Ananias this to assure him that Saul was no longer his enemy.

It is not unusual for the Lord to reveal Himself to two or more people He would bring together for His purpose. I have often recalled a personal experience that illustrates this point. I had been to Monroe, LA to make hospital calls and was on my way back into Bastrop where I served as pastor. It was around 11:00 clock and I was ready to go home, relax, and eat dinner before getting on with the rest of the things I had to do that day. Yet, as I came into the south side of the town, I felt a strong impression that I should stop by and speak with Mr. Carl. I had witnessed to him for years but could see no response. I tried to convince myself that another stop would be a waste of time, but just before I reached his street, I pushed all the negative impulses aside and hit the turn signal.

I had enjoyed many pleasant visits with Mr. Carl. We had met in a deer camp and became well over the next few years, as we visited his beagle club, talked of hunting, his work as a contractor, and his beagles. This time, I discovered that Mr. Carl had just returned from the hospital after suffering a heart attack. He talked on and on about the hospital and what Dr. Tugwell had done for him. When he finally stopped, I asked, “Mr. Carl, if Dr. Tugwell said, ‘I have a new prescription for you. If you will take it, it will heal your heart and you will never have any heart trouble again.’ Would you take it?” He said, “Oh, my goodness, YES!”

I then explained that he had another kind of heart problem, but that Jesus, the Great Physician, had the cure for it, and that if he would trust Jesus he would never have that kind of heart trouble again. I asked if he would accept His healing. There was no response. Here we go again, I thought. I asked if I might have a word of prayer with him, and even as I prayed I had to fight down the impression that I had wasted my time again. However, when I looked up there were tears streaming down Mr. Carl's face. He looked me in the eye and said, “God sent you here today.” He became a faithful member of our church and he loved our people. Several years later, after another heart attack, I visited with him and as I prepared to leave he said, “You tell those people at that church that the Bible says you gotta be born again, and by golly, I've been born again.” That is exactly what I told

them.

If we are open to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, He will bring us into contact with those who need Jesus Christ. He will also bring us into contact with suffering saints. We may initially assume that when He leads us to another person we must have a message for them. That is often the case, but in many cases what that person needs is someone to listen. We must not resist the Holy Spirit because we are afraid we may not know what to say. If we listen, the Holy Spirit will reveal what we should say - or if we should say anything under certain circumstances (grief, shock).

9:13 - I HAVE HEARD. *“Lord,’ Ananias answered, ‘I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem.”* Saul’s reputation as a persecutor of the followers of Jesus had preceded him, and the believers in Damascus had heard many stories about the violent persecution led by this young Pharisee (Acts 26:10). Damascus was located some 150 miles northeast of Jerusalem and both were of political and commercial importance to Rome. News traveled from Jerusalem to Damascus very freely.

YOUR SAINTS. The word saints is used here for the first time in the Book of Acts for followers of Christ, but before long it would be a common designation for Christians. I often spoke with a Catholic priest at my health club. One day, and I forget how it came up, I said, “I think we may get together and canonize John the Baptist.” He said, “We have already done that.” I knew his definition of a saint, but I did not get the impression that he understood my definition of a saint. In the New Testament, a saint is a believer, set aside for the glory of God. The word saint is used interchangeably with “Christian” and “believer”.

9:14 - HE HAS AUTHORITY. *“And he has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name.”* The word of the letter from the chief priests had reached Damascus before Saul arrived. Such was the nature of the political and religious intrigue that dominated the times and the culture. Someone had heard that Saul had been given the authority to take the persecution of The Way to Damascus and had rushed back to warn the saints. Saul may have had to recruit help and purchase supplies, which allowed the messenger to arrive ahead of him and warn the saints of the coming persecution.

ARREST ALL. Those early believers were identified by the designation, The Way, but they were also identified as ones who called on Jesus’ name. Christians today are people who call on the name of Jesus. A word of caution is in order here. Paul wrote a warning under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and sent to the church at Corinth that has an application for us:

“But I fear that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your minds may be corrupted from a complete and pure devotion to Christ. For if a person comes and **preaches another Jesus**, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you had not received, or a different gospel, which you had not accepted, **you put up with it splendidly!**” (2 Cor 11:3-4).

In May, 2007, Gov. Mitt Romney, a dedicated Mormon, was dismissed by Al Sharpton, who said that those who really believe in God would take care of Mitt Romney. Romney was offended by the criticism of his religion and denounced Sharpton as a bigot. The media had a new subject to fill the air time. Professing Christians were quick to jump to the defense of Romney. Across the country, Mormonism was proclaimed another Christian denomination. Only those who are grounded in the Word of God understand that Mormons do not worship the same Jesus true believers worship. Mormonism is a cult that seeks to identify itself as the only true church, yet they teach that in eternity past Jesus and Lucifer were brothers. The Mormon church preaches “another Jesus”. They are not the only ones. Anyone who would make Mary co-redemptrix with Jesus are preaching another Jesus. Those who preach that the grace of God is not sufficient to save us is preaching another Jesus.

9:15 - THE LORD SAID. *“But the Lord said to him, “Go! For this man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before Gentiles, kings, and the sons of Israel.”* The Lord does not waste time debating with Ananias. He simply tells him to “Go!” The Holman Christian Standard Bible rightly identifies believers as slaves of Jesus Christ. A slave does not argue with his master.

MY CHOSEN INSTRUMENT. “For” introduces the reason Jesus is sending Ananias to Saul. He said, “For this man is My chosen instrument.” Ananias had seen in Saul an enemy to be feared, but Jesus saw him as a chosen instrument which He would use to bear the Good News “before Gentiles, Kings, and the sons of Israel.” Jesus chose Saul before Saul chose him, but then He chooses us before we choose Him.

GENTILES, KINGS, AND THE SONS OF ISRAEL. Paul was not exclusively an apostle to the Gentiles. He was also chosen to bear the Gospel before kings, governors, rulers, and before the Jews. Jesus had announced that once the Holy Spirit came to empower the church, they would honor His Great Commission and be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). They were doing an effective job of that in Jerusalem and Judea, and Philip had reached out to Samaria. There had been contacts with Gentiles (Cornelius), but the Jews were not making a serious effort to take the Gospel to Gentiles. The Lord, however, had a plan, and when He has a plan He has a man (or woman) to carry out His plan. Paul was the chosen instrument to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. He would not, however, neglect any opportunity to be a witness for Jesus before Israel and before the authorities, either and Jerusalem or the Roman world.

9:16 - SHOW HIM. *“I will certainly show him how much he must suffer for My name!”* He will reveal the suffering “beforehand as a warning as in Luke 3:7, and from time to time” [ATR].

HE MUST SUFFER. This is an aorist active infinitive (*pathein*) covering the whole career of Paul. This is not a positive recruiting line. It is not good marketing for a job. Jesus never concealed the cost Saul would pay for his faith and obedience to the One he had so fanatically persecuted. Contrary to what some tel-evangelists tell their listeners, Jesus does not promise to make all of His followers healthy, wealthy, and wife. In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, Paul would mention some of the suffering to which Jesus refers here:

“Are they servants of Christ? I’m talking like a madman—I’m a better one: with far more labors, **many more imprisonments, far worse beatings, near death many times. Five times** I received from the Jews **40 lashes minus one.**

“Three times I was **beaten with rods.** Once I was **stoned.** Three times I was **shipwrecked.** I have spent a night and a day in the depths of the sea. On frequent journeys, [I faced] **dangers** from rivers, **dangers** from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, **dangers** in the open country, **dangers** on the sea, and **dangers** among false brothers; labor and hardship, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often without food, cold, and lacking clothing.

“Not to mention other things, there is the daily pressure on me: my care for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?” (2 Cor 11:23-29, Bold added for emphasis).

9:17 - ANANIAS LEFT. *“So Ananias left and entered the house. Then he placed his hands on him and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’”* Ananias was obedient to the Lord’s instructions, leaving his home, going to the home of Judas, and entering to find Saul.

PLACED HIS HANDS ON HM. This was not an ordination, but the ordinary way of communicating or passing on a blessing. This occurred just as the Lord had revealed it in the vision. **BROTHER SAUL.** Only a few days earlier, Saul had been a vicious enemy of the Ananias, but now they are brothers in Jesus Christ. Wayne Duncan is a long time friend and pastor of an area church. He told me about an older member of his church who had an interesting story to tell. During World War II, he led a squad in pursuit of German soldiers who had withdrawn ahead of them and entered a town. After carefully reconnoitering the area, they followed the Germans to a private home. He sent some men around the house to block escape and then he walked up and knocked on the door. The door was opened by a German woman who “spoke English better than we did.” She said, “It is Christmas Day and there will be no fighting here today.” She invited them into the house where they saw the German soldiers sitting at a table, eating their Christmas meal. Again, she said, “There will be no fighting here today.” She then went to each of them and took his rifle and then leaned it against a wall. On another wall, there stood the rifles of the German soldiers. They shared a Christmas meal that day. The lady then told the German soldiers to leave first and go in one direction, announcing again that there would be no fighting that day. She then sent the Americans in another direction. For a brief time, enemies shared a meal in honor of the birth of Christ.

Anis Shorrosh is an Arab evangelist whose father was killed by Jews when they captured the village of Nazareth. His hatred for Jews surpassed anything most Americans can imagine. Anis states that he lived with one thought and that was to get old enough to start killing Jews. However, when he was a teenager he got a job in a Baptist hospital in Israel. In time he became a Christian and was called into the ministry. Christians helped him go to America and enroll at Clarke College, one of

four institutions of higher learning owned by the Mississippi Baptist Convention. He finished at Clarke and transferred to Mississippi College, where he became my friend and classmate.

Anis Shorosh went to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary where he made top grades until it came to Hebrew and found himself struggling for the first time academically. Finally, he went to see Dr. Olin Strange to talk about his grades. As they talked he realized that he had a mental and emotional block. He rebelled against the idea of learning the language of his enemies. When he prayed that the Lord would enable him to forgive he was able to learn the Hebrew. Anis said, "When I go to Jerusalem and see a Jew and love him you know it is a miracle from God."

THE LORD JESUS. They are on the same frequency now, both accepting the fact that Jesus is Lord. Throughout the writings of Paul, his favorite title for Jesus is Lord. If we accept Him as Lord, we accept his sovereignty in every area of our life. Ananias made two specific points: (1) this is the same Jesus who had met him on the road to Damascus, and (2) Jesus had sent Ananias to Saul as he had revealed to him in the vision.

WHO APPEARED TO YOU. The appearance of Jesus to Saul was as real and objective as the appearance of the risen Christ to the apostles and other disciples for 40 days after the Resurrection.

REGAIN YOUR SIGHT. He had been blinded by the light three days earlier on the road to Damascus and had not been able to see since that time. One reason Ananias had been sent by the Lord Jesus was so that Saul might regain his sight. Some believe Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was poor eyesight stemming from this blindness. They can cite evidence in Scripture in support of that claim. Still others, believe Paul suffered from malaria or swamp fever, based on his description of his condition when he first arrived in Galatia (see Galatians).

BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT. If we follow the chronology and sequence of events, based on these verses alone, it becomes obvious that Paul's experience differs from some others in Acts, but the supreme experience: coming to know Jesus and being filled with the Holy Spirit is basic to all.

There is no mention of his speaking in other languages here, which is really not surprising. At times new believers did, but not always in the Acts account. We cannot develop a system of Apologetics around the Book of Acts. The one thing that stands out here is that God is sovereign. If he had wanted Saul to speak in another language He would have been given that gift at this point.

The normal experience in Scripture is that one is indwelt, once for all time, by the Holy Spirit at the point of salvation. Then, he needs a daily filling with/by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can be resisted by, or quenched in the life of a believer, which demands confession and repentance before one can really walk in the Spirit or bear the fruit of the Spirit.

Dr. Jimmy Draper, former President and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, was asked to write a series of seven articles for Baptist Press in 2007. The first article is added here with Dr. Draper's permission to use any or all of the articles as I see fit. For a number of years, I was a member of the

board of trustees and because of committee responsibilities I spent a considerable amount of time talking with him. The following article will help explain my respect for the man who served in the most influential position in the history of evangelical Christianity for fifteen years. He wrote:

Great confusion surrounds the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. For some it is viewed as a subsequent work of grace in a believer's life and is equated with the filling of the Holy Spirit. Others associate the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the gift of tongues. Still others diligently seek it as an unusual work of God in the life of the believer which confirms God's power and allows a special closeness to God never before experienced. The phrase "baptism of the Holy Spirit" does not appear in Scripture. Christ is always described as the baptizer in the Gospels (see for example Matthew 3:11) and Acts, and then the Holy Spirit is His agent in the epistles. The only verse that actually deals with the doctrine of "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" is 1 Corinthians 12:13. There are narratives in the book of Acts that deal with encountering the Holy Spirit under special circumstances. Acts is a history book that details the supernatural origin of the church. It is a transitional book. It is descriptive, but not generally prescriptive. It describes that unique time in history when Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be the Paraclete, comforter and companion. But Pentecost was not the beginning of the work of the Holy Spirit any more than the incarnation was the beginning work of Christ. We cannot build a theology of the Holy Spirit from the book of Acts. One thing is very clear today. We need the Holy Spirit! We need Him now, we need Him desperately and we need Him always. There is an experience for believers that is called "the baptism of the Holy Spirit". We need it and we need to understand it. It is a misunderstood experience. We actually have misnamed it. We refer to the baptism "of" or "in" the Holy Spirit as if He is an impersonal substance. From Scripture it should be "by" or "with" the Holy Spirit. First Corinthians 12:13 is a good example. The Greek preposition "en" can be translated "in," "by," "with" or "of." Here it is clearly instrumental and should be translated "by." The very meaning of the word "baptism" is often confused. The primary meaning of the word is "to immerse or submerge." It also means "to be joined with." It is a word used to describe the process of dyeing cloth. If you wanted a piece of cloth to be purple, you would dip it in purple dye. When the cloth came out of the dye, you had a different looking piece of cloth because it had been immersed or dipped into a colored dye. It was joined to the color. The baptism is not the dye; it is the act of immersing. A redeemed sinner experiences a transformation when converted. God chose the imagery of baptism to explain the Spirit's ministry of taking sinful people who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and immersing them into a whole new dynamic of life, an entirely new realm called the "body of Christ." The Holy Spirit is not the solution in which we are immersed; He is the agent by which we enter this experience. When does the baptism occur? The clear teaching of the New Testament is that it takes place at conversion. Note our key verse again. The word "baptized" is in the aorist tense, which refers to a past completed action. It refers to a once-for-all experience that is

not repeated. Ephesians 1:13 tells us that we were "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" when we believed. Every believer has been baptized by the Holy Spirit, but only once. You may be filled with the Holy Spirit many times, but there is no scriptural indication that baptism by the Holy Spirit is ever repeated. Some identify this experience with the "tongues of fire" described in Acts 2 and use John the Baptist's statement in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16 to substantiate that conclusion. But that is incorrect because it ignores the context of John's statement. In both those passages John says that the One coming has a winnowing fork in His hand to clean out His threshing floor and He will gather the wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn up with "unquenchable fire." Clearly the reference is to the fact that the coming Messiah will bring judgment as well as salvation and calls for a decision. Nowhere are we commanded to be "baptized with the Holy Spirit." We are commanded to be filled (Ephesians 5:18), but never to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Surely if this was a necessary experience we could expect the Word of God to urge us over and over again to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. But the subject is never mentioned in Scripture -- not one time, in one syllable of one word in any sentence. Baptism by the Holy Spirit is a wondrously unique experience. By that experience we are joined to the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13, Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27). It is personal, but it is also corporate. "We are all baptized." There is only one body of Christ, one family, one church. Baptism by the Holy Spirit is not some extra-ordinary manifestation, for it happens to all believers. This baptism by the Holy Spirit is positional, not emotional or empowering. It places us in a position in Christ which makes it possible for us to receive power. It does not guarantee power in our lives. The Corinthians were baptized by the Holy Spirit, yet they were a very sensual and carnal church. They lived by the flesh, soaked in immorality, saw rampant litigation, conflicts and disputes between church members, and even abused the Lord's Supper. Yet Paul said, "We are all baptized." That baptism has to do with our position in Christ and it is universal for all believers. This means that you don't get a piece of Spirit baptism when you get saved and then more later. God does not baptize on an installment plan. All of the Holy Spirit you are ever going to get as a believer you got when Jesus baptized you by means of the Holy Spirit into His body at your salvation. The question is not, "How much of the Holy Spirit do you have?" Instead, you should be asking, "How much of me does the Holy Spirit have?" A newborn baby has all he needs to be an adult. He will never get new parts as he ages; he simply grows in his ability to use the parts he has. The Spirit's baptism is a unique, completed ministry. Thank God there are no second-class members of the body of Christ. None of us deserves to be in that body, but we are by His grace. All of us are joined to Him by the Spirit's baptism and we all have access to the resources of the spiritual life that come through the continual filling of the Holy Spirit. Thank God for this wonderful experience of the baptism by the Holy Spirit. It brings us new life, a new identity and a new nature.

Jimmy Draper is the former president of LifeWay Christian Resources (NASHVILLE, TN. (BP) Permission given to use this article: "*Johnny, happy for you to use any or all of the article. I have*

actually written 7 articles on related subjects: i.e. divine healing, curses, demonic, tongues, etc. They will come out daily I suppose for 7 days...or at least once a week. Use any or all. Blessings on you. Jimmy”

9:18 - AT ONCE. *“At once something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized.”* We have come to anticipate the words, “at once” and “immediately” in connection to the miraculous workings of Jesus Christ, and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer. I like to look for words and phrases that speak so clearly of the authenticity of the account. Luke the physician writes, “At once something like scales fell from his eyes.”

BAPTIZED. This is exactly what Peter commanded in Acts 2:38. All those who repent were commanded to be baptized. The were baptized is a transliteration of the Greek word for immerse or dip, meaning to take beneath the surface and bring up again. Many Christian denominations practice some other mode of baptism, but Baptists and others (since the Anabaptist movement) feel very strongly that this is the only mode of baptism that fully portrays the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the believers identification with His death, burial, and resurrection. There are many godly Christians who were not baptized by immersion, and there are many who have been baptized by immersion whose lives do not honor the Lord. Immersion does not regenerate, it symbolizes the believer’s identification with our Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection. Robertson notes that Saul’s baptism was “Apparently by Ananias (Acts 22:16) as a symbol of the new life in Christ already begun, possibly in the pool in the house of Judas as today water is plentiful in Damascus or in Abana or Pharpar (Furneaux), better than all the waters of Israel according to Naaman (2Ki 5:12)” [ATR].

9:19 - SOME FOOD. *“And after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul was with the disciples in Damascus for some days.”* After three days without food or water that would be a high priority for Saul. He had regained his eyesight, which may have triggered an awareness of hunger for the first time since his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. He quickly regained his strength after eating. Physical food took care of his physical hunger. The Holy Spirit had entered his life to empower him for the ministry to which he had been called.

As one would expect, Saul immediately identified himself with the disciples in Damascus and continued in fellowship with the for a number of days. Another part of this miraculous experience is that Saul has charged out of Jerusalem on the way to Damascus with a letter in his hand, and murder in his heart, but now he humbly seeks to identify with the very people he had come to persecute without mercy. Perhaps now we understand why the three days of blindness. Not only did Saul need the time, the believers in Damascus needed the time to prepare them to accept him.

That Saul immediately identified himself as a believer is significant. There are no secret disciples. Either the secret destroys the disciple or the disciple destroys the secret. Saul wanted to identify himself with the disciples he had come to search out, arrest, and return to Jerusalem for trial. The true miracle of his conversion did not end on the road to Damascus.

9:20 - IMMEDIATELY. “Immediately he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues: ‘He is the Son of God.’” Immediately. There is that word again! So many things associated with this new Way happened immediately, or the people involved responded immediately to the message or to some miraculous manifestation of the Spirit. Since he immediately associated himself with the disciples in Damascus it might be assumed that he would have begun with this group. He went to the Jewish synagogues to proclaim Jesus to non-believing Jews. He never got over his burden for Israel, a fact to which he testifies in Romans and elsewhere.

HE IS THE SON OF GOD. Saul had only been a follower of Jesus for a brief time but he was very clear on this one point: Jesus is the Son of God, and thus the Messiah. He had an appointment from God, so he needed no approval from the apostles or the church in Jerusalem. All he needed was an audience. Saul was not just talking religion or religious experience, he was proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God. In a Baptist Press article carried in *The Southern Baptist Texan*, Southern Baptists of Texas Journal, May 7, 2007, p. 5), Emir Caner stresses the importance of faith in Jesus Christ. He writes:

“As someone who came out of a Sunni Muslim background, I can attest that I rejected God as Father (surah 5:18), Jesus Christ as the Son of God (surah 5:116; 19:88), and the very person of the Holy Spirit (surah 70:4). What part of the triune God did I understand? I was an idolater, plain and simple, and the vacuity in my prayers only proved that point. Like the Israelites who worshiped Baal, I know too well the pain of praying to a non-existent god...

“To argue then that I was worshiping the true God, just inadequately or incompletely, would have been to place false light on my total darkness....

“As Timothy George noted in a recent Christianity Today article, ‘No devout Muslim can call the God of Muhammad ‘Father,’ for this, to their mind, would compromise divine transcendency. But no faithful Christian can refuse to confess, with joy and confidence, ‘I believe in God the Father...Almighty!’ Apart from the Incarnation and Trinity, it is possible to know that God is, but now who God is” [CANER: SOUTHERN BAPTIST TEXAN, P. 5].

ILLUSTRATION: Simon Kenton is the subject of an historical novel, *THE FRONTIERSMAN*, written by Alan Ekkert. Kenton ran away from home when he was fifteen years old, after hitting a man so hard he thought he had killed him. He called himself Simon Butler until he discovered that the man he had hit had not died. Kenton grew up in the wilderness and became such a skilled woodsman that his services were used during the Revolutionary War by George Washington and others. Later, he was sitting in a tavern when a young lieutenant walked in and smarted off to him, and then when the young officer made the mistake of hitting him, Kenton left young Andrew Jackson out cold on the floor.

Daniel Boone said that Simon Kenton was the only man he ever went into the woods with that he

didn't have to worry about. He was once caught outside the fort with Boone when Indians wounded Boone and tried to cut them off at the gate to the fort. Kenton grabbed up Daniel Boone and ran for the gate, but when he saw that three Indians had made it to the gate first he simply threw Daniel Boone into them, knocking them down. The giant frontiersman quickly picked up Boone and ran on into the fort.

When Kenton was a more mature man he attended a revival meeting in the woods near a settlement. Following the message he asked to speak with the evangelist, but first he ask the evangelist to promise never to tell anyone about their talk. The evangelist agreed. Kenton wanted to ask questions about what he had heard in the sermon. The evangelist presented God's salvation to him and the giant woodsman prayed, confessing his sins and repenting. After the prayer, the normally quiet Kenton left the evangelist behind and ran to the clearing shouting, "I've been saved! I've been saved!" When the evangelist caught up with him he reminded him that he had told him he wanted to keep this a secret. Simon Kenton said, "This is too good to keep it a secret!"

9:21 - ALL WHO HEARD. *"But all who heard him were astounded and said, 'Isn't this the man who, in Jerusalem, was destroying those who called on this name, and then came here for the purpose of taking them as prisoners to the chief priests?'"* "All" would include non-believing Jews in the synagogue as well as the believers who heard Saul proclaim the Gospel. They were astounded because he had only a few days earlier been breathing threats and murder on his journey to Damascus to persecute the believers there. These saints were astonished at the extreme about face Saul of Tarsus had experienced. Robertson explains the construction: "They continued to stand out of themselves in astonishment at this violent reversal in Saul the persecutor" [ATR]. They were all aware of the identity of the preacher and they were all aware of his mission. Their response was what one would expect:

"The Greek verb *existanto* is literally, 'they were beside themselves; they were struck out of their senses'; several other people had the same response to Jesus (Mark 2:12; 5:42; 6:51). This word is used in Acts five times (2:7; 8:13; 9:21; 10:45; 12:16). Saul's intense persecution campaign had raised havoc in Jerusalem (cf. 8:3; 22:19; 26:11)" [BKC].

9:22 - SAUL GREW. *"But Saul grew more capable, and kept confounding the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that this One is the Messiah."* Saul grew progressively more capable of proclaiming the Gospel and defending the faith and these non-believing Jews were confounded both by his persuasive preaching and by the fact that the man they hoped would put an end to this new movement was now the most effective spokesman for it.

PROVING. The idea here is to establish a conclusion by placing two or more things side by side and comparing them. What Saul is doing is laying Judaism, which he had fanatically defended, along side the Gospel of Jesus Christ and thereby proving that He is the Son of God: the Messiah. "Paul's treatment of the Old Testament prophecy is that of a logician. A strong word made stronger because of one factor Paul and his Hebrew hearers had in common: faith in the trustworthiness of the

O.T. This is a distinct advantage of the first Christian witnesses over their modern counterparts” [HLE: 120]. New believers are often the most effective soul winners today, if only because of their enthusiasm, in part because they have a very good list of acquaintances who need to know the Lord. Sadly, most of our church members are very uncomfortable witnessing to others because they do not know the Scripture. That Saul was becoming “more capable” is obvious as we continue in the account.

“Saul used his theological training to good advantage in pressing home the truth that the Lord Jesus is the Messiah. He had gone to Damascus to persecute the church; he ended up preaching Jesus. What a contrast! What grace! No wonder the Damascus Jews were baffled (*synechynnen*, “bewildered, confused,” from *syncheoô*, used in the NT only in 2:6; 9:22; 21:27, 31)” [BKC].

9:23 - AFTER MANY DAYS. “*After many days had passed, the Jews conspired to kill him...*” Actually, the idea is “sufficient” days. With only a cursory reading of this verse one might assume that this denotes only a few days, but the expression was commonly used of a long period of time.

“According to Galatians 1:17, 18, Paul indicated that he went to Arabia and returned again to Damascus during this period. The time from his baptism to his return was three years. There are several possible reasons for Paul’s trip to Arabia: (1) Perhaps he felt a need for rest and seclusion after the excitement of his conversion. (2) Possibly he wanted to put off the confrontation that was sure to occur between him and his old friends and associates. (3) He may have needed the time to prepare for his eventual teaching and preaching” [NCWB].

Some have assumed that Saul went immediately into Arabia for three years to pray and study the Old Testament Scripture in order to fit Jesus into the Law, the sacrificial system, and the OT prophecies concerning the Messiah. It would seem from this passage that he met with the disciples, proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, then left and went into Arabia for some time to study the Law and the Prophets before returning to continue for some time preaching the Gospel before the Jews in Damascus conspired to kill him.

CONSPIRED. This is an interesting turn of events. The master conspirator is now the object of a conspiracy. These conspirators are deadly serious. They want Saul dead, just as the enemies of Jesus wanted Him dead. The nature and character of the conspiracy is a testimony to the effectiveness of Saul in proclaiming Jesus as Messiah - and their inability to refute what he was teaching.

9:24 - THE PLOT. “*But their plot became known to Saul. So they were watching the gates day and night intending to kill him...*” Little could Saul have imagined the plots that the enemies of the Cross had in store for him before his ministry was over. As in the case in Jerusalem when his nephew revealed a plot to kill him, someone here warned him that the non-believing Jews intended to kill him. These people did not want Saul to “just go away”, they wanted him dead. They hated him both because he believed in Jesus and because they could not match his argument that Jesus is the

Son of God, the Messiah.

It is not insignificant that Luke tells us that the plot became known to Saul. The Lord has often protected His servants against those would harm them. *The Voice of Martyrs* organization chronicles the persecution of saints around the world, and keeps before us the slaughter of earlier believers. Today, the bitter enemy is Islam. In the last century it was Nazism and Communism. Of course, Islam was an issue then as Communism is today, but the focus has shifted because of the horrendous violence Islamic terrorists are spreading around the world, and because they have learned to play to the media. Sensational illustrations could be set forth, but there is a much more practical application of this that is going on across America today.

Jerry Falwell was found unconscious in his study on Tuesday, May 15. Within one day of his death, enemies of Christ were making absurd, hurtful, and obviously false statements designed only to tarnish his image and hurt his ministry. One vicious enemy appeared on the the Fox News program, Hannity and Colmes, May 16, 2007, and talked continuously, often talking over the hosts and the other guest. He did not regret the death of Jerry Falwell - in fact, he was glad he was dead. His attack was vicious and evil and nothing Sean Hannity could say slowed him down. The one claim the man continued to make was that Falwell was filled with hate. Earlier, Molly Henniburg, reporting from the campus of Liberty University, interviewed a number of people who said, "Jerry loved us." Jerry Falwell loved people but he hated sin that destroys people. Well known ministers like Franklin Graham will be attacked, and there are reports that liberals in congress would like to pass legislation that would place the preaching of the Gospel (that Jesus is the only way whereby one can be saved) under restrictions of hate crime legislation. They would like to silence conservative Christians who appear on radio and television. They love the feel-good evangelists and pastors, but hate those who take a strong stand on moral and ethical issues.

Plots are not only directed toward well known evangelists and pastors. Local pastors often find themselves the victim of plots. The rate of termination of pastors in many denomination is only overshadowed by the basis given for asking a pastor to resign. One pastor I have known for years made it his practice to pick up young people who needed a ride to church. During one revival, he rushed out to pick up various young people before services began. At the close of one service, he had to wait for some time for a teenaged girl to show up to ride home. She had ridden to church with him, then slipped off with her boy friend. He talked with her in front of witnesses and explained that if she ever slipped off instead of attending the service he would not wait for her again. The next night the same thing happened, and when the girl got back to the church, she went across the street and asked the people who lived there to take her home. The lady, a friend of the family, asked if she had not ridden to church with the pastor. The girl told her she had and the friend asked why she had not ridden home with him. She said, "I didn't want to ride with him."

The lady then asked, "Did he say something "out of the way to you?" The girl hesitated, then said that he had. The lady called her husband, who called deacons. Then confronted the pastor and asked him to resign. He was shocked. When they confronted the teenaged girl she told the truth. The pastor had been completely innocent of the charges. He then asked the deacons what they thought he

should do. The told him that since the question had come up they thought he should go on and resign - with no place to go! Two of three of the deacons who pushed the hardest to get rid of the innocent pastor were dead withing months, according to reports. Forty years later, that pastor is still serving a church, faithfully visiting and ministering to his people.

If you find a pastor who has never had some plot developed against him he is probably a young pastor, or he has been very careful not to take a strong stand on issues. Many pastors have survived because faithful, fearless Christians stood with them and dealt with those who plotted to force them out. One pastor was told, "If they want to talk with you, do not talk with them by yourself because you will be misrepresented. Call some of us and we will be there." They protected their pastor. Two different men made arrangements to provide a place for that pastor to live if the group had been successful in running him off from that church. And he rejoiced in time because he came to understand that he had now been included in the ranks of those who have been persecuted for righteousness sake.

INTENDING TO KILL HIM. The Jews who rejected Christ were totally committed to their plot to kill Saul. They wanted nothing less, a fanaticism with which he could fully identify, for only three years earlier he was the one breathing threats and murder (9:1f).

9:25 - HIS DISCIPLES. *"But his disciples took him by night and lowered him in a large basket through [an opening in] the wall."* This is one of the great NT Bible stories children love to read and hear in Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. Three years after his "Damascus Road Experience", the Apostle to the Gentiles is surrounded by believers who are now identified as his disciples, in contrast to "the disciples" with whom he met after his conversion.

When the plot was made known to Saul's disciples, they hid him away and then placed him in a large basket and lowered him from an opening in the wall to the ground. That opening may well have been a window in a house built into the wall, or an opening that served as a lookout post for the defense of the city when there was a threat.

One of the essential elements in any study of the Book of Acts is the opposition of Jewish leaders, to the Gospel. It is clear from 2 Corinthians 11:32-33 that the plot against Saul here was a joint effort between the Jews of Damascus and the governor under King Aretas (a Nabatean), with the Jewish leaders as the primary foes. When Saul's followers learned that the Jews conspired to kill him, they lowered him in a basket outside the wall since the city gates were guarded. Saul's plans for persecuting followers of Jesus in Damascus had taken an ironic turn. He had been led blind into the city and now he is leaving the city in a basket. The feared persecutor had become the object of an intense persecution.

Mention of his disciples proves that Saul had wasted no time in proclaiming Christ in Damascus and that he was having a fruitful ministry there. Luke does not mention Saul's visit to Arabia, the length of his stay there, or the purpose of the visit. Paul mentions it in Galatians 1:17. This visit to Arabia may have occurred between Acts 9:22 and 23. The purpose of Paul's time in Arabia is unknown, but

that does not keep people from speculating. As already mentioned he may have gone there to evangelize, but the area was sparsely populated, whereas Saul's mission strategy almost always led him to major population centers. Others have suggested that he may have left Damascus to reduce the church's persecution. It seems more likely that he went to Arabia to meditate and study, which may have demanded a lengthy visit to the region.

It has always been the position of this writer that Paul, following his dramatic conversion, needed time to relate his intense theological studies from the Old Testament Scripture to what had just happened to him. He had met the true Messiah on the road to Damascus where he planned to wage war against Jesus and His disciples. There had been his blindness, three day fast, his vision and that of Ananias, the recovery of his sight when Ananias laid his hands on him, and his specific call to be the carry the Gospel to the Gentiles, kings, and the sons of Israel. His study of the Law and the prophets had been deep and intense, but now he realized that, in the name of God, **he was waging war against the One** who had been **promised in the prophets** and **symbolized in the sacrificial system**. He gave his testimony immediately, but he needed time to work things out theologically. He needed to better understand just how Messianic prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus.

Saul Goes Back to Jerusalem

9:26 - ARRIVED IN JERUSALEM. *“When he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to associate with the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, since they did not believe he was a disciple.”* Jerusalem was the logical destination for Saul. He had left there three years earlier with a letter authorizing him to search out and arrest all followers of Christ. Now, after three fruitful years in the service of the Messiah he had once persecuted, he returns to the headquarters for the spread of the Gospel at that time. He would need to establish a relationship with leaders there. In Galatians he tells his readers about this visit to Jerusalem:

“Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas, and I stayed with him 15 days. But I didn't see any of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. 20 Now in what I write to you, I'm not lying. God is my witness” (Gal 1:18-20).

Then in the second chapter of Galatians, he writes:

“Then after 14 years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. I went up because of a revelation and presented to them the gospel I preach among the Gentiles—but privately to those recognized as leaders—so that I might not be running, or have run, in vain” (Gal 2:1-2).

“When James, Cephas, and John, recognized as pillars, acknowledged the grace that had been given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to me and Barnabas, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised” (Gal 2:9).

TRIED TO ASSOCIATE. Three years after Saul had departed from Jerusalem with fire in his eyes and a letter in his hand which authorized him to take the persecution of followers of Christ to Damascus, he shows up again in Jerusalem with plans to see Peter and other apostles (Gal. 1:18), ostensibly to discuss his ministry to Gentiles, or possibly to coordinate his work with theirs.

AFRAID OF HIM. Luke tells us that they were all afraid of Saul. They didn't trust him. "They knew him only as the persecutor of the Christians. Rumors of his conversion may have reached the Christians in Jerusalem, but the work of Saul since his conversion was generally unknown to Jerusalem" [New Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Testament Volume Edition: Second Copyright: Copyright © 1990, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Electronic Edition Files Copyright © 1998, Parsons Technology, Inc. - designated herein as NCWB].

Luke adds that the believers in Jerusalem did not believe he was a disciple. After all, what better way could there have been to get information on believers than to infiltrate the church?

9:27 - BARNABAS. "*Barnabas, however, took him and brought him to the apostles and explained to them how, on the road, Saul had seen the Lord, and that He had talked to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.*" James A. Brooks, in The Holman Bible Dictionary, looks at Barnabas as we see him in the Book of Acts, and then as we see him in the Pauline Epistles. First, there is the information from Acts:

"Barnabas was a Levite and native of the island of Cyprus, named Joseph (Joses), before the disciples called him Barnabas. He sold his property and gave the proceeds to the Jerusalem church (Acts 4:36-37). He introduced Saul of Tarsus to the Jerusalem church (9:26-27). The church chose Barnabas to go to Syrian Antioch to investigate the unrestricted preaching to the Gentiles there. He became the leader to the work and secured Saul as his assistant. They took famine relief to the Jerusalem church (11:19-30). On Paul's "first missionary journey," Barnabas at first seems to have been the leader (chs. 13-14). Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem to try to settle the questions of how Gentiles could be saved and how Jewish Christians could have fellowship with them (15:1-21). They agreed to go on another missionary journey but separated over whether to take John Mark with them again (15:36-41) [HBD].

In Galatians 2:1-10, Paul reminds his readers that Barnabas was his companion when they went to Jerusalem for the Jerusalem Conference, some believe in A. D. 51 (others as early as A. D. 49). See Acts 15 for the circumstances and outcome of that conference.

"In Galatians 2:13, however, Paul indicated that on one occasion Barnabas wavered on the issue of full acceptance of Gentile Christians. In 1 Corinthians 9:6, Paul commended Barnabas for following his (Paul's) practice of supporting himself rather than depending upon the churches. Colossians 4:10 simply states that Mark was Barnabas' cousin. Barnabas in Later Legend In the third century Clement of Alexandria identified Barnabas as one of the seventy of Luke 10:1; Tertullian

referred to him as the author of Hebrews; and the Clementine Recognitions stated he was the Matthias of Acts 1:23,26. All of these are most unlikely. In the second century an epistle bearing Barnabas' name appeared, became quite popular, and even received some consideration for a place in the New Testament. Later an apocryphal Acts of Barnabas and perhaps even a Gospel of Barnabas were circulated. Barnabas had nothing to do with the writing of any of these [HBD].

I have quoted Dr. Leo Eddleman often in this study on Acts, in part because he helped me when I was working on my first study years ago. I knew Dr. Eddleman and had the privilege of spending a lot of time with him. Dr. Calvin Cantrell once said to me, "Leo Eddleman is a preaching machine!" Cantrell, an associate in the Department of Evangelism for the Louisiana Baptist Convention had heard a lot of good preaching, but he recognized what I had observed. Dr. Eddleman could take you deeper in simpler sermons than anyone else I had heard. I have heard deep sermons and I have heard simple sermons, but rarely have I heard simple sermons that took one to such great depths.

There was a reason for his depth, and for his gift for keeping in simple. He had been a nineteen years old math major at Mississippi College when he had what he described to me as an experience that overshadowed anything else that had ever happened in his life. He could not be sure whether or not he was saved at that time, or when he was much younger, but he knew he had assurance of salvation and he was called to preach the Gospel at the same time. He took off one summer to study the Bible to be sure "there was nothing in there I could not preach." Then, even though his father was a pastor (and had been pastor of my home church years before), he wanted to know which denomination was closest to the Bible. He narrowed it down to Baptists and Congregationalists, but he said when he discovered that Congregationalists "would just as soon baptize infants as not, I decided to be a Baptist."

Dr. Eddleman said, "My greatest regret is the way I wasted my life between age 15 and age 19, when I could have learned five languages." He went on to tell me that his commitment to study the Word was such that he allowed himself one date per year between ages 19 and 25. This is the man was recently mentioned in a column on Baptists in Israel as a missionary who had mastered both Hebrew and Arabic.

Dr. T. J. DeLaughter, who had taught me Old Testament in seminary, told me he had gone to Israel around 1980, and asked older Baptists if they remembered Dr. Eddleman. It had been some 40 years since WW II forced him out of the land, but they remembered him. They also added that when he had visited Israel more recently he still spoke the language like a native. I asked Dr. Eddleman how he did it and he said, "This week I am reading Sherlock in unvoweled Hebrew." I often thought that Dr. Eddleman reminded me of Paul. I also wondered - as much as I loved Dr. Eddleman and as much as I loved to hear him preach - what it would have been like to have worked under a man with this kind of drive. Then I remembered Paul and John Mark, and concluded that **at some point, every young preacher needs a compassionate Barnabas more than a driven Paul.** However, with maturity, we can appreciate the dedication of one who is driven to learn and teach the Word of God.

BROUGHT HIM TO THE APOSTLES. It was not Peter or John, but Barnabas who first believed that Saul had been saved. He “explained to them how, on the road, Saul had seen the Lord, and that He had talked to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.” Robertson writes that:

“Barnabas saw the situation and took Saul to himself and listened to his story and believed it. It is to the credit of Barnabas that he had the insight and the courage to stand by Saul at the crucial moment in his life when the evidence seemed to be against him. It is a pleasing hypothesis that this influential disciple from Cyprus had gone to the University of Tarsus where he met Saul. If so, he would know more of him than those who only knew his record as a persecutor of Christians. That fact Barnabas knew also, but he was convinced that Jesus had changed the heart of Saul and he used his great influence (Acts 4:36; Acts 11:22) to win the favour of the apostles, Peter in particular (Gal 1:19) and James the half-brother of Jesus. The other apostles were probably out of the city as Paul says that he did not see them” [ATR].

Robertson states that Barnabas took Saul to Peter and that all the other apostles were probably out of town, but the Scripture uses the plural, “apostles”. It seems from Galatians that John was there.

Paul is called the Thirteenth Apostle, but both James and Barnabas are called apostles. The apostles had personally been singled out by Jesus. We are told that both Paul and James had seen the risen Lord, James before the Ascension and Saul on the road to Tarsus. We are not told when Barnabas may have seen Him, if in fact he did.

Paul might well have remembered what Barnabas had done for him later when Barnabas stood by John Mark even after he had turned back on the first missionary journey. Mark in time proved himself to Saul, but Barnabas was willing to give him a second opportunity to prove himself. Saul was blessed to have had a Barnabas there to believe him and convince Peter and others to accept him. Countless other ministers throughout the years have been in need of a Barnabas who understood that at a particular time in their life they needed compassion and encouragement more than they needed a demanding administrator, or taskmaster.

9:28 - COMING AND GOING. *“Saul was coming and going with them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.”* After Peter, James, and possibly other apostles accepted Saul the saints there accepted him. He spoke boldly in the name of the “Lord”, the favorite term of Paul and Luke for Jesus. We can be sure that no one in Jerusalem would have been offended if Saul had been using the term of the First Person of the Trinity, but he stirred up a hornet’s nest when he called Jesus “Lord”.

9:29 - DEBATED. *“He conversed and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they attempted to kill him.”* It was one thing to preach to the choir - or to the fellowship of believers, yet another to go into the synagogue of the Hellenistic (Grecian) Jews and debate with them. He proclaimed Jesus as Lord to them and they attempted to kill him. At the close of the Third Missionary Journey when

Saul and Silas returned with the love offering for the suffering saints in Jerusalem he was accompanied by Gentile believers who would be witnesses to the fact that the offering taken up in Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth was actually turned over to the church to help those who had been ostracized for their faith and in need of daily bread. Hellenistic Jews from Ephesus recognized those Gentiles and spread the story that Paul had taken Gentiles into the Temple complex, beyond the court of the Gentiles. That started a riot in which Palestinian Jews would again try to kill Paul.

Jesus had told Ananias in Damascus that Saul of Tarsus was His chosen vessel to take the Gospel to the Israelites, to kings, and to Gentiles. Paul never turned his back on his own people, but longed for their salvation. Here, Saul of Tarsus, a Hellenistic Jew, goes to the synagogues of Hellenistic Jews and proclaims Jesus. That took courage, but it also shows that he was faithful to his call. It is interesting that Saul went to the Hellenistic Jews and proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them “because he was of the same class and had spoken along with them against Jesus....Thus, Saul was made to experience what he had earlier made others feel—the cost of discipleship” [NCWB].

9:30 - THE BROTHERS. *“When the brothers found out, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.”* When “the brothers”, fellow believers, found out that the Hellenistic Jews were attempting to kill Saul, they escorted him to Caesarea, the seaport about 65 miles from Jerusalem.

TARSUS. The “brothers” from Jerusalem put Saul on a boat and sent him to his hometown. Tarsus was an ancient city, “then over 4,000 years old, Tarsus was an intellectual city in the Roman Empire.” [BKC].

Saul’s movements in chapter 9 may be summarized as follows:

1. Jerusalem (vv. 1-2)
2. Damascus (vv. 3-22)
3. Arabia (Gal. 1:17)
4. Damascus (Acts 9:23-25; Gal. 1:17; 2 Cor. 11:32-33)
5. Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-29; Gal. 1:18-20)
6. Caesarea (Acts 9:30)
7. Tarsus (v. 30; Gal. 1:21-24)

Source: [The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament, Second Edition, Copyright © 1997, Parsons Technology, Inc. - designated herein - BKC]

9:31 - THE CHURCH. *“So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace, being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, and it increased in numbers.”* Luke here gives us **the fifth report on the condition of the church.** There is peace in the church because the chief prosecutor is now a convert. That peace, however, will not continue very long. It would not be long before political events would move to center stage in

Jerusalem as Caligula tries to set up his image in the temple in Jerusalem. There is peace from persecution for the church for the moment and that peace was connected with the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. The word “so” relates “peace to its cause, namely the conversion of Saul” [Eddleman, H. Leo, A Practical and Exegetical Commentary on Acts, p. 123 - after this, HLE].

They had gone through a time of trials, especially while Saul was leading the persecution against them. Now, Luke tells us that the church (1) had peace; (2) was built up; (3) walked in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit; and (4) increased in numbers. The church walked in the fear of the Lord, not in fear of the Jews who rejected Jesus.

One wonders why there would be peace throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria after Saul left for Tarsus. One writer suggests and answer: “Paul was no longer leading the violent persecution, and the strict Jews were busy fighting the emperor Caligula who was trying to gain control over the temple worship” [NCWB].

Peter Heals Aeneas

9:32 - PETER WAS TRAVELING. *“As Peter was traveling from place to place, he also came down to the saints who lived in Lydda.”* It is believed that other apostles had already been traveling outside Jerusalem. Now, Peter goes on a mission trip, though not his first. He and John had been to Samaria after reports reached the church in Jerusalem about Philip’s success in reaching Samaritans for Christ (8:25). Lydda was twenty-five miles from Jerusalem, and the road from Jerusalem descends 2400 feet to the sea level town.

“Peter was involved in an itinerant mission around Judea which brought him to **Lydda**. Lydda, mentioned only here in the New Testament, is today called Lod; Israel’s international airport is just north of the city. Peter later carried on an extensive traveling ministry, evident from 1 Corinthians 9:5. This is also implied from the addressees of his first epistle (1 Peter 1:1). Philip had preceded Peter to the area in and around Caesarea (Acts 8:40)” [BKC].

9:33 - AENEAS. *“There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years.”* Clarke notes that, “This name has been celebrated in the annals of heathen poetry, in that beautiful work of the poet Virgil, called the Aeneid; which gives an account of the misfortunes, travels, wars, etc., of a Trojan prince of this name, after the destruction of his native city, Troy [Adam Clarke's Commentary, The Bible Navigator - CLARKE after this].

Aeneas was probably already one of the saints (9:32). Luke, the physician would have investigated the claim that Aeneas had been bedridden for eight years, since he tells us in the beginning that he investigated everything carefully. It is assumed here that Aeneas was a believer (possibly a Hellenistic convert) because most beneficiaries of miracles were believers - but not all of them. When God decides to act, man’s faith or lack of faith will not determine what He does.

Healing would have required restoration of nerve cells. This was more than a psychosomatic illness and healing required more than the power of suggestion. God, during this Apostolic Age, used His Apostles and certain other disciples to demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit in the implementation of the Great Commission. It is sad - far worse than sad - when certain so-called “faith healers” major in “healing” to the point that people lose sight of the true Gospel message. It gets worse when some of them are exposed by the secular media as frauds.

9:34 - PETER SAID. *“Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and make your own bed,” and immediately he got up.”* Peter demonstrates the gift of healing in a case in which there can be no question of deception. The emphasis is upon the fact that Jesus Christ is the One who heals Aeneas. The verb means that “Jesus Christ heals at this time, at once” [HLE: 124].

9:35 - TURNED TO THE LORD. *“So all who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.”* The word “Lord” is not used in the general sense here. Nor, is it used in the Old Testament sense of the Father. Luke joins Paul in using this term for Jesus Christ. Today, it is common to hear network news program hosts refer to someone as “a person of faith.” That could mean almost anything or any religion. They are afraid to offend Jews and Muslims by using the name Jesus, even though America was founded on Christian principles, regardless of what historical revisionists may say. Fortunately, we still have the testimonies of the Founding Fathers who verify that claim. Sean Hannity, on Hannity and Colmes (Fox News, 2007) asked one guest, “So, you are a person of faith?” She looked at him and he continued, “You are a Christian?” She said, “I like to think of myself as spiritual.” Spiritual is in; religious is in; person of faith is in; what is not in is Jesus. Muslims would be offended if we proclaim Jesus as Lord.

TURNED TO THE LORD. Luke uses these words three times in Acts for those who turned to the Lord for salvation (9:35; 11:21; 15:19).

“The gospel was beginning to attract a wider audience, for many in this coastal region were Gentiles. Sharon is the fertile plain along the coast of Palestine, about 10 miles wide and 50 miles long. Lydda was on the southeastern edge of the plain. This miracle was Peter’s second healing of a cripple (cf. 3:1-10; also cf. 14:8-10)” [BKC].

Peter Raises Dorcas From the Dead

9:36 - TABITHA. *“In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. She was always doing good works and acts of charity.”* The Greek name was Dorcas, meaning gazelle (the creature with the beautiful looks), but the Aramaic name was Tabitha. Tabitha was known, not so much for her good looks, as for her good deeds and acts of charity. A person like this is a blessing to a community and to a church.

My own mother, Claudine Sanders, was such a person. She taught Sunday School classes for many

years, but it was her good works and her acts of charity that made her a popular Sunday School teacher. She had grown up during the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression and did not have an opportunity to complete her education until much later, yet people from all over the area would go to her with problems and she would do informal scriptural counseling with them. She never talked about it, so her family was often unaware of how many people went to see her, or how many people she clothed or fed. People went to her because they trusted her and they knew she loved them. My mother fought a battle with cancer and treatments for eight years before her death, and twelve years after her death when I preached a revival in my home town, people made a point of telling me what she had meant to them. One lady said, "Your mother was my best friend." I did not know she knew my mother other than to speak to her. One man who owned a business there for years said, "Your mother was the best woman in the world." While I knew that was an exaggeration, I knew exactly why they were saying such things about her. She lived to serve others. I can imagine Tabitha being such a woman.

9:37 - DIED. *"In those days she became sick and died. After washing her, they placed her in a room upstairs."* Luke simply relates the story of the death of this godly woman and the respectful care given her body in preparation for burial. After the body was prepared for burial her family and friends placed her in an upstairs room for the wake.

My mother-in-law, Rachel Smith Turner, had a stroke in May, 2007, when she was almost 93 years old. The staff at the hospital tried to get a medical history: no physician, no pharmacy, no medical problems, no medications! One week after her stroke, she died in her home after being transferred to hospice that afternoon. Her daughter-in-law, Patsy Turner, called to check on Mrs. Turner every evening and the first time she did not get a response she drove to her house and found that something was wrong with her. She called family members and they got her to the hospital where they discovered that she had suffered a stroke. She lost consciousness while talking with her son Bud in the emergency room. I had her funeral and a niece, Leah (her grandson's wife), came to me in the funeral home chapel to tell me something she thought I would want to know. Every night when local family members called Mrs. Turner, she would say, "I have my night garments on," or "I have to put on my night garments." Leah told me that Patsy had gone to buy her some new "night garments" so she could be dressed in them before the family viewing. She was wearing a beautiful bed jacket (and all new night garments). I made a note in the palm of my hand to mention that and then forgot it. Later, I thought how much more something like this means to a woman than to the average man. Tabitha was blessed to have had loved-ones to prepare her body for burial.

9:38 - THE DISCIPLES HEARD. *"Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples heard that Peter was there and sent two men to him who begged him, 'Don't delay in coming with us.'" Joppa was only about 12 miles from Lydda and word of Peter's ministry there would have been spread by word of mouth. "The disciples" are not identified beyond the common designation for followers of Jesus. They were disciples of Jesus, not Peter. The disciples at Joppa sent two of their number to Lydda to ask Peter to come. "No one had been raised from the dead in the early church so far as the records of Acts declare, but the faith of the believers was so great they expected the Lord to use Peter to resurrect Dorcas" [BKC].*

DON'T DELAY. There was an urgency in the appeal to Peter to come without delay. Jesus has deliberately delayed so that when He arrived at Bethany Lazarus had been dead four days. He knew what he was doing. As a sign that He is the Resurrection and Life, he raised Lazarus even though decay had already set in and Lazarus had been dead for four days. Tabitha's friends seemed to be convinced that if Peter did not come at once it would be too late for him to help.

9:39 - PETER GOT UP AND WENT. *“So Peter got up and went with them. When he arrived, they led him to the room upstairs. And all the widows approached him, weeping and showing him the robes and clothes that Dorcas had made while she was with them.”* Simon Peter, the man who denied Christ three times, is now following Him and, not wanting to miss an opportunity to serve Him, immediately accompanies the two men back to Joppa. When he arrived, he found the mourners in the room upstairs where they had prepared the body.

SHOWING THE ROBES. The mourners continued weeping and showing Peter the robes and clothes Dorcas had made for them. *“Dorcas had fed and clothed many helpless people. She was continually making and giving away clothes to these widows”* [NCWB]. The first test for the earliest disciples in Jerusalem had been the charge that Hellenistic widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food to widows and orphans in the church. That issue was settled when the church elected seven Hellenistic Jewish believers and put them over this ministry (Ch. 6). Obviously, Dorcas had a similar ministry in Joppa.

9:40 - KNELT DOWN. *“Then Peter sent them all out of the room. He knelt down, prayed, and turning toward the body said, ‘Tabitha, get up!’ She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up.”* The first thing Peter did was to send all the mourners out of the room. The first thing modern “faith healers” seem to do is to invite an audience, publicize the healing meeting, and then televise it. Peter was not about to put on a show for these people. When the people had left the room he knelt down and prayed. If we had needed to know what he said in this prayer the Holy Spirit would surely have inspired Luke to have recorded it. All that matters is that he prayed before doing anything else.

TABITHA, GET UP. After praying, Peter turned toward the body and said, “Tabitha, get up!” He commanded a dead body to rise! He commanded her spirit to reenter her body. She immediately “opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up.” It is noteworthy that “To avoid ceremonial defilement (cf. Lev. 21:1; Num. 5:2; 9:6-10; 19:11), Peter did not touch her until after God restored her to life” [BKC].

9:41 - HELPED HER STAND. *“He gave her his hand and helped her stand up. Then he called the saints and widows and presented her alive.”* He had not touched the dead body, but after the life reentered her body, he does not hesitate to take her hand and help her stand, just as he had seen Jesus take the hand of his mother-in-law (Mark 1:31).

9:42 - BECAME KNOWN. *“This became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.”* News that Dorcas had been raised from the dead would have spread by word of mouth

throughout the region. This miracle led many others in the region to believe in Jesus Christ.

9:43 - PETER STAYED. “*And Peter stayed on many days in Joppa with Simon, a leather tanner.*” It is interesting that Peter would not touch the dead body of Dorcas, but he would take up residence in the home of Simon, a leather tanner, which might have had him declared unclean if he had been on the way to the Passover or Pentecost.

“This passage (9:32-43) shows the excellent preparation given Peter for his ensuing experience with Cornelius. (1) Two outstanding miracles confirmed his ministry; God was with him in a special way. (2) He was ministering in an area that was partially Gentile. (3) His living in the home of Simon the tanner was significant. Tanners were considered to be ceremonially unclean because they were constantly in contact with the skins of dead animals (Lev. 11:40)” [BKC].

Chapter 10

Cornelius’ Vision and Request

10:1 - CORNELIUS. “*There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment.*” In this extraordinary passage we will see the Lord using visions to bring together two very different men, Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and Simon Peter, a fisherman from Galilee who had been appointed an apostle by Jesus Christ. The Lord had commanded His followers to reach out to Gentiles but the whole idea flew in the face of everything the devout Jew had been taught.

CENTURION. Cornelius was a centurion, a Roman officer in charge of 100 soldiers. The centurions mentioned in the New Testament are usually mentioned in a complimentary manner, solid men who had received outstanding training, and demonstrated leadership qualities. “In the New Testament centurions are consistently viewed in a favorable light (cf. Matt. 8:5-10; 27:54; Mark 15:44-45; Acts 22:25-26; 23:17-18; 27:6, 43). Centurion Cornelius became one of the first Gentiles after Pentecost to hear the good news of Jesus Christ’s forgiveness” [BKC].

Students of the NT find not only the centurion of interest, and Cornelius is among the most interesting:

“It has been supposed by many interpreters that this man was ‘a proselyte of the gate;’ that is, one who had renounced idolatry, and who observed some of the Jewish rites, though not circumcised, and not called a Jew. But there is no sufficient evidence of this. The reception of the narrative of Peter, Acts 11:1-3, shows that the

other apostles regarded him as a Gentile. In Acts 10:28, Peter evidently regards him as a foreigner; one who did not in any sense esteem himself to be a Jew. In Acts 11:1, it is expressly said that ‘the Gentiles’ had received the word of God; evidently alluding to Cornelius and those who were with him: [BARNES].

THE ITALIAN REGIMENT. A Roman regiment consisted of 6,000 men. “This regiment, unlike the native soldiers, probably served as bodyguard to the Roman administrator who lived there” [NCWB].

10:2 - A DEVOUT MAN. “*He was a devout man and feared God along with his whole household. He did many charitable deeds for the [Jewish] people and always prayed to God.*” The word may simply denote one who is reverent before God, but may mean one who worships God. Some see this as a term used of “a person who worships the true God, and is no idolater” [CLARKE]. However, this may need some clarification. Once again, we can depend upon Robertson to provide applicable commentary:

“It might refer to a worshipful pagan (Acts 17:23, *sebasmata*, objects of worship), but connected with ‘one that feared God’ (*phoboumenos ton theon*) Luke describes ‘a God-fearing proselyte’ as in Acts 10:22, 35. This is his usual term for the Gentile seekers after God (Acts 13:16; Acts 26; Acts 17:4, 17, etc.), **who had come into the worship of the synagogue without circumcision, and were not strictly proselytes**, though some call such men ‘proselytes of the gate’ (cf. Acts 13:43); but clearly Cornelius and his family were still regarded as outside the pale of Judaism (Acts 10:28, 34; Acts 11:1, 8; Acts 15:7)” ATR, bold added by this writer].

We find an answer to our questions about Cornelius when we read verse 4. He was a man of authority under Rome, but unlike many, he showed respect for the Jews and while many may have abused the Jewish subjects, he showed respect and continually doing “many charitable deeds for the Jewish people.”

ALWAYS PRAYED TO GOD. These words help answer questions raised by various commentaries. Cornelius was a Gentile who had come to honor the God of the Jews and he “always prayed to God.” The emphasis here might suggest a habit of prayer, it may denote personal faith in God to whom he prayed, or it may do both. It would seem that, even though he had not become a “‘a proselyte of the gate”, he worshiped the same God the Jews worshiped, and that he prayed only to Him.

10:3 - A VISION. “*At about three in the afternoon he distinctly saw in a vision an angel of God who came in and said to him, ‘Cornelius!’*” This is a significant milestone in the implementation of the Great Commission, and the fulfillment of the statement Jesus had made in Acts 1:8 before the Ascension. It is so significant that “Luke repeats the account of this vision to Cornelius twice (Acts 10:30; Acts 11:13) and also the story of the vision to Peter (Acts 10:1-16, 28; Acts 11:5)” [ATR].

In this verse, we have another of those interesting comments that add credence to the story. Luke tells us that this vision came to Cornelius “At about three in the afternoon.” This was no nighttime dream, but a special vision. “Saw a vision” should be translated, “saw in a vision clearly” [NCWB]. The reference to the time “may refer to a Jewish time of prayer (cf. 3:1). If so, the Lord approached Cornelius by means of an angel while he was at prayer (cf. 10:9). Later Cornelius called this angel “a man in shining clothes” (v. 30)” [BKC].

10:4 - LOOKING INTENTLY. *“Looking intently at him, he became afraid and said, ‘What is it, Lord?’ And he told him, ‘Your prayers and your acts of charity have come up as a memorial offering before God.”* From the words, “looking intently”, we may infer that this was not the figment of his imagination. In other words, he was not deceived by what he saw.

BECAME AFRAID. This is the response we expect to see when anyone in the Bible experiences any kind of epiphany, vision of the Lord, vision of an angel, or a visit by an angel. In the Revelation, we find that when John saw an angel he was afraid and had to be told not to fear. A pagan might tremble in the presence of some pagan god or some witch doctor, but that is not a healthy fear. The fear we see here is a reverential awe in the presence of the Lord’s messenger.

I once saw a tape in which John MacArthur told about meeting with some popular charismatic preacher. The man told him that he talked with Jesus every morning while he was shaving. He said, “Jesus comes and stands behind me and looks over my shoulder while I am shaving. Do you believe that?” MacArthur said that he answered by saying, “Let me ask you this. Did you keep on shaving? Because if you did, it was not Jesus.”

A guest preacher spoke in my home church and during the message he told the people that Jesus would come to his bedroom and stand at the foot of his bed and talk with him. He said, “I would sit up and talk with Him and after He left I would lie down and go back to sleep.” After the service, as they were driving home, my young sister asked my father what he thought about what the man said. His answer explains why we had no communication gaps in our home: “I think he was lying.” Linda asked, “You mean you don’t believe Jesus comes and stands at the foot of his bed and talks with him?” Daddy said, “No, I am not saying that Jesus did not appear at the foot of his bed. But if he says he laid down and went back to sleep he is lying.”

There is a destructive, crippling fear that grips some people and they need counseling and prayer. There is, however, a healthy fear that brings one into subjection before the Lord. This kind of fear is essential to worship, fellowship with the Lord, and to spiritual blessings.

WHAT IS IT, LORD? We are not told how, but Cornelius recognized the person in his vision as a messenger from God. This is remarkable for a pagan Roman official, but Cornelius feared God and “always prayed to God.” (Vs. 2).

A MEMORIAL OFFERING. He may not have gone to Jerusalem with a lamb to sacrifice at Passover, but the angel of the Lord said, “Your prayers and your acts of charity have come up

as a memorial offering before God.” In verse 2, we learn of his prayers to God and his acts of charity. Now we know that his prayers did not go unnoticed. We also have the answer to the questions that naturally come to mind when one reads the first 2.

10:5 - CALL FOR SIMON. *“Now send men to Joppa and call for Simon, who is also named Peter.”* Jesus gave Simon the name Peter and that would distinguish him from other Simons, just as Saul is identified with Tarsus. Peter is *petros* or a small piece of rock, a pebble, compared to *petra*, which is a boulder, rock cliff, or rock layer (upon which the church is built). Peter would later write, *“Coming to Him, a living stone—rejected by men but chosen and valuable to God— you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 2:4-5) .

The angel gave simple instructions to Cornelius to send to Joppa for a man named Simon, who was also called Peter. The Lord knew where to find Cornelius and He knew exactly where Simon Peter was. It was his purpose to bring them together.

10:6 - LODGING. *“He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.”* They had no modern address designations in Joppa, but the directions would be sufficient. They would know to go to Joppa, and follow the sea coast to the home of Simon the tanner. Any neighbor could have provided more specific directions once they arrived in the vicinity. Simon had located his business outside the city walls because he was a tanner and he had to have a source of water to use in his work.

10:7 - WHEN THE ANGEL. *“When the angel who spoke to him had gone, he called two of his household servants and a devout soldier, who was one of those who attended him.”* As soon as the angel left, Cornelius called for two servants and one “devout” soldier. First, the simple, prompt obedience to the command of the angel speaks of the simplicity and sincerity of his faith. In the second place, the soldier is called “devout”, a term Luke likes to use for Gentiles who sincerely follow the Lord.

“This is an instance of the effect of piety in a military officer. Few men have more influence; and in this case the effect was seen not only in the piety of his family, but of this attending soldier. Such men have usually been supposed to be far from the influence of religion; but this instance shows that even the labours and disadvantages of a camp are not necessarily hostile to the existence of piety” [BARNES].

The servants were trustworthy and the soldier was devout. In fact, the soldier was a personal attendant to Cornelius. He trusted this man to protect the servants and to bring Simon Peter back to his home.

10:8 - SENT THEM. *“After explaining everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.”* He explained the details of the appearance and instruction of the angel and then sent them on their way, with the soldier to protect the servants. If he had thought they would be in physical danger he would

sent more soldiers, so the protection may have been, in part, legal. No one would hinder them if they were accompanied by soldier who was the personal attendant to Cornelius. “It has been properly remarked, that from Joppa, Jonah was sent to preach to the Gentiles of Nineveh; and from the same place Peter was sent to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles at Caesarea” [CLARKE].

Peter’s Vision and His Response

10:9 - NEARING THE CITY. *“The next day, as they were traveling and nearing the city, Peter went up to pray on the housetop at about noon.”* This was the second day after leaving the home of Cornelius in Caesarea, some 28 miles from Joppa. As the servants and devout soldier of Cornelius were approaching the city on the day following his vision, the Lord was about to prepare Simon Peter for a special task by means of another vision.

PETER WENT UP TO PRAY. Simon Peter wanted to be alone to pray, so he went up onto the housetop. “The roof was nearly flat with walls around and so was a good place for meditation and prayer and naps” [ATR]. The house top, accessible by stairs on the outside of the house, would be a cool place to wait for the noon meal and a private place for prayer.

“That Peter prayed morning and evening may be assumed, for those were normal times of prayer. In addition he prayed at noon. Prayer three times a day was not commanded in the Scriptures, but Peter followed the example of pious men before him (cf. Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10). Peter went up to the (flat) roof to pray; this would have given him privacy” [BKC].

10:10 - HE BECAME HUNGRY. *“Then he became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing something he went into a visionary state.”* Peter’s hunger may well have been awakened by the aroma rising from the food being prepared below to his secluded spot on the roof. It may have been time for lunch, but his hunger suddenly became acute, even though in that day the Jews, Romans, and Greeks ate only two meals a day and the first was a light meal late in the morning, or possibly at noon. “They had no breakfast: their supper was their principal meal. And, in very ancient times, they ate only once in the day. Supper was the meal at which they saw their friends, the business of the day being then finished” [CLARKE].

Robertson says that the construction shows that he was very hungry [ATR]. While he was waiting to be called down to eat what was being prepared he “went into a visionary state.” Luke was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write what happened, and he also told us he researched everything he wrote very carefully, so he may well have interview Peter about this vision. It is not called a dream. We have all drifted off to sleep when were tired and sleepy, had a dramatic dream, and then awoke to try for a few seconds to sort out reality from some that dream. This was not a dream, though if it had been it would have been a spectacular and dramatic one.

Peter went into a “visionary state”. The intense hunger, possibly excited by the aroma of the food being prepared below, sets the stage for one of the most remarkable visions in history. “The natural

and the supernatural border closely on one another, with no definable limits” [ATR].

10: 11 - HE SAW HEAVEN OPENED. *“He saw heaven opened and an object coming down that resembled a large sheet being lowered to the earth by its four corners.”* This is no dream, but a vivid and dramatic vision in which Peter saw heaven opened and “an object” coming down on what appeared to be a large sheet (or a linen cloth), lowered to earth “by its four corners.” The sheet were being lowered by cords attached to each corner [ATR]. The language is highly figurative.

10:12 - FOUR-FOOTED ANIMALS. *“In it were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth, and the birds of the sky.”* The Lord gave Cornelius a vision in which an angel appeared to him and told him to send to Joppa for Simon Peter. Cornelius was a Gentile who had learned about the God of the Hebrews and had been praying to him so he would have no problem reaching out to a Jew. With Simon Peter there was a serious problem where Gentiles were concerned. Peter was a Galilean Jew, a Palestinian Jew. When he traveled from his home in Capernaum to Jerusalem he crossed over the Jordan River and traveled south through Perea, avoiding Samaria where he might come into contact with a Samaritan and be declared unclean, and therefore unfit to take of the Passover until he went through ceremonial cleansing.

At that time, when Peter went to the temple complex there was a sign on a wall designating the place for Gentiles to worship that announced that any Gentile who went past that point would be stoned. Someone accused Paul of taking a Gentile into the temple complex at the close of his third missionary journey and the Jews sought to kill him for doing it - without determining whether or not the charge could be substantiated.

The NASB renders the word “trance”, whereas the HCSB has “visionary state”. One commentary states that the “trance” Peter had was different from the “vision” of Cornelius. It may be more accurate to note that while both were miraculously brought into a visionary state by the Lord, there was a big difference in the minds and hearts of these two men. Cornelius would have had no problem visiting or associating with Peter, but Peter would have had a serious problem association with Cornelius. The woman at the well in Samaria was surprised that Jesus would ask a drink from her because Jews did not drink after Samaritans (John 4).

In his visionary state, Peter saw “all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth, and the birds of the sky.” There before Peter on this sheet that was being lowered to the earth in front of him were all the animals, birds, and reptiles of the earth, including all the unclean animals of the earth. One today can hardly imagine the revulsion Peter would have experienced in seeing these unclean animals.

“Every species of quadrupeds, whether wild or domestic; all reptiles, and all fowls. Consequently, both the clean and unclean were present in this visionary representation: those that the Jewish law allowed to be sacrificed to God, or proper for food; as well as those which that law had prohibited in both cases: such as the beasts that do not chew the cud; fish which have no scales; fowls of prey and such others as are specified in Leviticus 11:1, etc.” [CLARKE].

10:13 - A VOICE. *“Then a voice said to him, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat!’”* The command is both simple, and to Simon Peter, shocking. He was being commanded by the Lord to rise and eat animals that were forbidden by the Law. Had he not been given this message the invitation from Cornelius would have been even more shocking. There is no doubt that the clean animals on the sheet represented the Jews and the unclean animals represented the Gentiles. The time had come to reach out to the Gentiles and Peter had been chosen to take the next step. Saul of Tarsus was the chosen apostle to the Gentiles, but all the other apostles would be reaching out to Gentiles.

10:14 - NO LORD. *“No, Lord!” Peter said. “For I have never eaten anything common and unclean!”* Peter’s response is definite and strong, but it is neither strong refusal as some might claim, or a mild refusal as others have taught. It carries the idea of “may it not be so” [ATR]. He immediately adds his reason: “For I have never eaten anything common and unclean!” He has strong convictions against eating anything the Law declares unclean. “This was the third time in Peter’s career that he directly refused God’s will (cf. Matt. 16:23; John 13:8)” [BKC].

It is interesting that God offered no explanation and Peter asked none. One writer suggests that “Peter may have reasoned that....”, but I am not sure Peter is reasoning at all at this point. It seems more likely that he is reacting according to the guidelines he had been taught all his life.

10:15 - A SECOND TIME. *“Again, a second time, a voice said to him, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call common.’”* By “a second time”, Luke does not mean that the sheet with all the animals was lowered a second time, but that God spoke to Peter a second time. What God commands cannot be unclean. Jesus, in Mark 7, would remove food restrictions set down in the ceremonial law, but it is doubtful that His message had been processed and applied by His disciples at this time. The purpose in this vision was to show Peter that “they who had been esteemed by the Jews as unclean or profane--the entire Gentile world--might now be admitted to similar privileges with the Jews. That barrier was to be broken down, and the whole world was to be admitted to the same fellowship and privileges in the gospel” [BARNES].

Peter could not have been expected to recall it all the time, but there was passage in Exodus which deals with the repetition of a vision or dream sent from God. “**Because the dream was given twice to Pharaoh, it means that the matter has been determined by God,** and He will soon carry it out” (Gen. 41:32, bold added by this writer).

10:16 - THREE TIMES. *“This happened three times, and then the object was taken up into heaven.”* Our thinking is Greco-Roman. The number three has a numerical value. To the Jewish mind of the day, numbers had both a numerical value and a symbolic meaning. The number one represented unity: God is one. The number two represented added strength: two hands are better than one. The number three was the divine number: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (though some would insist that we may be hard pressed to explain what they understood about the Trinity before the coming of Jesus).

When God spoke the second time Peter, we would think, should have been convinced. Now, He speaks for the third time, after which the sheet with all those animals “was taken up into heaven.” The Bible student may wonder:

“Why did Peter refuse **three times** to eat the unclean foods? For one thing, this indicated emphasis. But more than that it revealed certainty and truth. Here was one place where Peter was being scrupulous beyond the will of God. His intentions were good, but he was being disobedient. Also, was there some link here with Peter’s threefold denial (John 18:17, 25-27) and with his three affirmations of his love for the Lord? (John 21:15-17)” [BKC].

What no one seems to address is the possibility that a distinction might be made between the Simon Peter of the vision and the fully awake, conscious Peter who was about to receive visitors from Cornelius. The message was the same, but just as some tend to elevate Peter to a position never given him in Scripture, others judge him rather harshly. The point is that God had used a vision to direct Cornelius to send for Peter, and He was using a vision to prepare Simon Peter to move beyond his comfort zone (Jerusalem, Judea, and possibly Samaria) into the “uttermost part of the world” (Acts 1:8).

Peter Goes to the Home of Cornelius

10:17 - DEEPLY PERPLEXED. *“While Peter was deeply perplexed about what the vision he had seen might mean, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions to Simon’s house, stood at the gate.”* Peter might have brushed off a dream in which the sheet was lowered with all those animals on it one time, but following what was clearly a vision from the Lord, he was understandably puzzled as he pondered the meaning of the vision. He was deeply perplexed by what he had seen and what he had heard, because what God had commanded flew in the face of the deepest religious convictions of the Jews.

THE MEN. While Peter was trying to figure out the significance of the powerful and disturbing vision he had just received, the two servants and the soldier Cornelius had sent appeared at the gate of Simon the tanner. “Having asked directions to Simon’s house” fills in the gap for anyone who might wonder how they found the house.

10:18 - THEY CALLED OUT. *“They called out, asking if Simon, who was also named Peter, was lodging there.”* This is one of the most remarkable accounts of how God’s providence brings together two people, who would normally never have met in any social setting, so that one might witness to the other for Jesus Christ. The timing is amazing.

Francis Schaeffer distinguished between what he called class A miracles and class B miracles. A class A miracle occurs when one walks on water, raises the dead, gives sight to the blind, or heals a leper. A class B miracles occurs when circumstances comes together in such a way that one sees the hand of God directing the events and preparing us to understand them and respond as He leads.

When I was in my mid-thirties, I had a pinched nerve in my left foot. My secretary asked if she could call their foot specialist and make an appointment and I asked her to do so. After a series of medical errors by two different doctors, I could walk only a short distance, and experienced intense pain and burning. I prayed for a class A miracle. I appealed to the Lord to heal me instantly. He chose to bless me with a class B miracle. I was asked to return to a smaller church where I had previously served for eight and one-half years. I could hardly believe it, but my wife and I concluded that the Lord was leading us back to the smaller church to allow time for healing. I sat on a bar stool to preach for twenty-five years before the Lord lifted me up and let me stand and walk. I could walk enough in time to make calls and visit members in hospitals and nursing homes, but I paid the price for it. I had to learn to live with pain.

The Lord did not heal me as I begged Him to, but watched over me constantly to enable me to do the things I absolutely needed to do, when I needed to do them. Pain was my constant companion when I was on my feet, but in time I could get relief when I got off my feet. It was during this time that the Lord made me conscious of the fact that without being able to attend conferences, Bible studies, and denominational meetings, I was in danger of seeing the well go dry. I prayed about that and the Lord seemed to focus my attention on an interest I had developed immediately after graduating from seminary. First, I was interested in preparing sermons from Romans, so I began to study Romans. Knowing the “gift” I have for forgetting, I decided to systematically prepare notes for future use. In time, the Lord transformed a would-be hunter, fisherman, gun collector, and shooting enthusiast into a student of the Word.

I can remember lying on an old pew cushion on the floor with Bibles and books spread all around me, studying, outlining books, and adding notes. The Lord gave me a passion for writing verse by verse Bible studies, such as this study from Acts. In time, as the collection grew, I began to think about the collection. The Lord led me to do the work but never revealed what I was to do with these studies. It took some time for me to decide what to call the studies. Most of them were not formal commentaries and the all needed more work. In time, I called the studies The Bible Notebook. Then, I began to bring together sermons under the title, The Sermon Notebook. Only one, *UNDEFATED: Finding Peace in a World Full of Trouble* (a verse by verse commentary on Philippians) had been published.

One day I sent a sermon manuscript to a friend and for some reason that escapes me now, forwarded the sermon to Dr. Wayne Hamrick, whom I had nominated as chairman of the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources. Our friendship had grown and I copied the sermon to him. Shortly after that, I received word that Dr. Mike Minnix, Vice President in Evangelism for the Georgia Baptist Convention had receive a copy of that sermon from Wayne Hamrick. Dr. Minnix, who edits the PastorLife.Com web site, asked me to send any sermons I had and while I was doing that, I asked if he could used the verse by verse Bible studies I had been writing for over thirty years. He asked for a sample, and alter asked me to seen all I had written.

Along about that time, I met retired General Dutch Shoffner at the funeral service for his brother’s wife. His brother and I had done a lot of hunting and fishing together when we were much younger.

General Shoffner was a senior vice president for Lockheed Martin at the time and had expressed an interest in my ministry. He and I stayed in touch as we watched John fight a battle with a terminal illness. I do not remember how Dutch became aware of the work I was doing in *The Bible Notebook*, but he asked permission to share books with friends at Lockheed Martin. When Mike Minnix asked for all the “commentaries” I had written, I mentioned it to General Shoffner and was blessed with an editor who had, during the Cold War, commanded everything the US Army had in Europe. At another time, he was over all education for the Army. He has gone through some thirty books and over 150 sermons before forwarding them to Dr. Minnix for them to be uploaded to the PastorLife.Com site. Too many things came together, involving too many people, for this to have been an accident.

The Lord did lift me up and let me stand, but only after a less than well disciplined student became a serious student of His Word. The Holy Spirit is continually bringing together people, circumstances, and opportunities for His purpose.

10:19 - THE SPIRIT TOLD HIM. *“While Peter was thinking about the vision, the Spirit told him, ‘Three men are here looking for you.’”* The verb “was thinking” means to ponder carefully in the mind. What we are not seeing here is the impulsive, impetuous Simon Peter of earlier days, but a serious, totally focused apostle who is completely open to any impression from the Holy Spirit. “The Spirit told him” is a statement as to the personality of the Third Person of the Trinity. This writer is fully aware of the fact that the word trinity does not appear in the New Testament. He is also aware of a lot of other words that do not appear: Theology, Geology, Biology, or Zoology. Yet, animals exist, plants exist, rocks exist, fossils exist, and the study of God saturates the pages of the Bible. Those who reject the doctrine of the Trinity must come up with a better argument than that.

I was in a meeting of the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources when then president, Dr. Jimmy Draper, shared a list of Baptist Essentials he had prepared. I asked Dr. Draper and received his permission to use his list in a study similar to this. They are:

1. Salvation by grace through faith, plus nothing.
2. The Lordship of Jesus Christ
3. Sufficiency of Scripture
4. Autonomy of the Local Church
5. Religious Liberty
6. Trinitarian view of God (One in essence, three in person)
7. The Great Commission

Dr. Draper pointed out that while there are many Baptist distinctives, these are Baptist the essentials. Many other denominations also embrace these essentials and differ more in the “distinctives”. At the same time, there are Baptists who reject the Trinitarian view of God in favor of a Unitary view. Francis Schaeffer said that it was the doctrine of the Trinity that enabled him to move from being an agnostic to the position of a theist. For one thing, this mean that God did not create man to fulfill something lacking in Himself, or because there was no one with whom He could have fellowship

until He created beings with whom He could have a vertical relationship. There is a horizontal relationship in the Godhead that is totally adequate for God. He created man for His pleasure, not for His fulfillment.

THREE MEN ARE LOOKING FOR YOU. Now, Peter will understand the purpose in his vision. I found in a study I prepared a number of years ago a note that seems appropriate to add here. After reading this account one can see why some call this book The Acts of the Holy Spirit rather than The Acts of the Apostles. Luke uses the name Holy Spirit more than any other Gospel writer: 11 times in the Gospel According to Luke and 41 times in Acts.

10:20 - GET UP AND GO. *“Get up, go downstairs, and accompany them with no doubts at all, because I have sent them.”* The strong imperative calls for immediate action. “The Holy Spirit, who told Peter about the arrival of the three men, may have been the One whose unidentified voice Peter heard earlier (vv. 13, 15)” [BKC]. He commanded Peter, to “Get up, and go” - two commands often associated with the work of the Holy Spirit in calling out those whom Jesus commands to obey the Great Commission. Pastors, missionaries, and evangelists today, even after twenty centuries, are still responding to the command to “get up, and go”. The Holy Spirit also commands lay-persons to get up and go into their communities to witness and serve.

ACCOMPANY THEM. The Spirit commanded Peter to accompany the men who were looking for him “with no doubts at all.” The Christian today is hard pressed to appreciate the full significance of this command. Peter had expressed the problem immediately in response to the command to rise and eat from the animals displayed before him in the vision: “Not so, Lord!” Not only would he not have eaten unclean animals, he would never have associated with unclean people, meaning Gentiles.

Years ago, Dr. Frank Stagg, Greek and New Testament professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, as mentioned in another volume, wrote a commentary on Acts in which he set forth his conviction that the Book of Acts proved how the Gospel overcame barriers - racial barriers, class barriers, and gender (sexual) barriers. He unfortunately forced the point when he used the outreach to the Samaritans to help make the case. The Samaritans were despised by the Jews, not because of race, but because of religion. They were also Semitic people, and as former missionary to the region, Dr. Leo Eddleman, told this writer, “If you had dressed them alike and stood them side by side you couldn’t tell the Samaritan from the Jew.”

Dr. Eddleman was not denying the fact that the Gospel overcomes barriers, he was simply saying that you must look elsewhere for the proof. As a matter of fact, Dr. Eddleman himself was a proof that God overcomes barriers, as he preached to both Jews and Arabs (both descended from Abraham) immediately before the outbreak of the Second World War. What we see in this passage is a dramatic account of that barrier coming down. Simon Peter was a Palestinian Jew, who would find any association with a Gentile more troubling than a Hellenistic Jew like Saul of Tarsus. One can hardly imagine the cultural and religious shock a command such as this would have been to a strict Palestinian Jew.

When I was a seminary student, a professor asked me about the racial situation in the Mississippi Delta. I told him about the lady who did mission work in New Orleans who had spoken to a group of students at Mississippi College two years earlier. This lady told us about stopping to pick up a girl on the street in New Orleans. She said, "This girl was black! And did I make her sit on the back seat? NO! I let her sit on the front seat right by me." I then told the professor that statements like that would have been viewed as foolish by the Mississippi Delta farmer who drove his hands, black and white, to the field, drove them to town, and sat on the tail gate of his truck and ate lunch with both black and white people almost daily. Yet, this lady though she would impress us with an absurd illustration. For several years, I had been going to the Hinds County Jail in Jackson, where I worked with both black and white prisoners. I had, for about a year, been going to the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman, where I not only preached to both black and white prisoners, I had been asked by the chaplain to baptize both black and white prisoners in an outdoor baptistry that looked like a big horse trough. The lady missionary's testimony would have been laughable if it had not been so sad. My father let a young black neighbor who had moved back home from Chicago use a large, late model John Deere tractor one whole year as he tried to return to farm his father's cotton farm. The neighbor had a small tractor, but my father knew it was too small for that buckshot soil. He never charged his friend one cent for using that tractor. It didn't cost that missionary one cent to pick up a young lady she saw on a New Orleans street corner.

BECAUSE I HAVE SENT THEM. Through two amazing visions, the Lord was bringing a Roman centurion who needed Jesus and a believer who could share the good news of salvation with him. Peter had helped take the Gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, and even to Samaria, but now the time had come to take the next step in the implementation of the Great Commission. One needs only to look at the barrier between the Jew and the Arab in the Middle East today to understand what this command meant to Peter. I have often recalled hearing Arab evangelist Anis Shorrosh say, "When I stand on the street in Jerusalem and look at a Jew and love him, it's a miracle from God." This is what the Holy Spirit commands us to do and it is what He enables us to do.

10:21 - PETER WENT DOWN. *"Then Peter went down to the men and said, 'Here I am, the one you're looking for. What is the reason you're here?'"* This is a testimony to the power and authority of the Holy Spirit. Simon Peter, a Palestinian Jew goes down to meet three Gentiles, introduces himself, and asks what he can do for them. The Holy Spirit is working from both sides to bring Cornelius and Peter together. The way He goes about it is a testimony to the omniscience and omnipresence of the Lord.

10:22 - THEY SAID. *"They said, 'Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who has a good reputation with the whole Jewish nation, was divinely directed by a holy angel to call you to his house and to hear a message from you.'" Cornelius' servants briefly explain their mission, and tell Peter about Cornelius. Their testimony affirms what Luke has already told us about the centurion. He was an upright, God-fearing man who was highly respected "by the whole Jewish nation", meaning the large Jewish community living in and around Caesarea, where Cornelius was known as a sort of "semi-proselyte".*

Peter was aware of his vision, and now he hears that Cornelius had been “directed by a holy angel to call you to his house and to hear a message from you.” That he was fully aware of the fact that the Holy Spirit was the One behind these visions is clearly seen by what follows.

10:23 - INVITED THEM IN. *“Peter then invited them in and gave them lodging. The next day he got up and set out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went with him.”* Peter had now taken the first step in carrying out the divine directive. He not only invited the three Gentiles in, he gave them lodging, possibly meaning that he invited them to sleep in the room he had been provided by Simon the tanner.

SET OUT WITH THEM. After a night’s rest, Peter set out for Caesarea with the two servants of Cornelius and the soldier who accompanied them. There is an interesting side-note here. When they set out for the home of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, he was accompanied by “some of the brothers from Joppa.” These were orthodox Jewish Christians (vs. 45), and there were six of them (11:12). Peter made seven Jewish believers.

Some will surely see this a wise move on Peter’s part, but others have wondered whether or not Peter had invited them to protect himself against charges that he was association with Gentiles. Before dismissing that as a ridiculous idea, remember two things. First, Paul tells us that he rebuked Peter to his face in Antioch of Syria when Peter saw some Jews from Jerusalem come into their presence and he got up and disassociated himself from the Gentiles there. Then there was the reaction of the Jews in Jerusalem after someone spread the word that Paul had taken a Gentile to the temple complex.

During the Jerusalem Conference in Jerusalem in A. D. 51, Peter would remind those present of this encounter, and how the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that Gentiles are saved the same way Jews are saved. They all knew the story and they were all aware that there were a number of Jews who were witnesses to the conversion of Cornelius.

10:24 - ENTERED CAESAREA. *“The following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.”* The matter of fact accounting here does not detract from the urgency of the business at hand. They had to spend the night on the way from Joppa to Caesarea, and when they arrived the second day Cornelius, who had anticipated the approximate time of their arrival, had called together “his relatives and close friends.”

10:25 - PETER ENTERED. *“When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet, and worshiped him.”* One wonders how Peter felt as he entered the home of this Roman centurion and looked around and saw all of his Gentile relatives and friends. He obeyed the Holy Spirit and another barrier fell before the Holy Spirit.

On the day of Pentecost Peter had opened the door of the Kingdom to the Jews from every nation. After Phillip had won many Samaritans to the Lord, Peter and John were sent to confirm that fact and they stayed and preached to Samaritans, who were part Jews and knew something of the

Scripture. Now, he takes a bigger step and opens the door of the church to Gentiles. And this was only the beginning. Paul would take up where Peter leaves off and plant Gentile churches on three great missionary journeys.

WORSHIPED HIM. Cornelius had been given a vision of an angel, had sent for Simon Peter, and now that he has come, falls down to worship him. This was a common action in the East by one who considers himself inferior, so this would have seemed only natural to Cornelius under the circumstances, but it was a shock to Peter. Paul would have to deal with this kind of adoration on the mission field.

10:26 - HELPED HIM UP. *“But Peter helped him up and said, ‘Stand up! I myself am also a man.’”* It is significant that Peter did not simply react and rebuke Cornelius. He reached out to him and helped him up first. Then, as he was getting to his feet he said, “Stand up!” As he did so, Peter added, “I myself am also a man.” This prohibits worship of men or angels.

10:27 - TALKING WITH HIM. *“While talking with him, he went on in and found that many had come together there.”* As any witness knows, it is important to establish a relationship with a person to whom he would bear a witness. Initial exchanges often reveal the best approach. For example, an evangelist once met the world champion checker player and asked to play a game with the world champion. The request was granted and the game was over before the evangelist got started! He then began to talk with the champion checker about his need for the Lord and why the Lord had provided a means whereby he could be saved. At one point the evangelist looked at the champion checker player and said, “Now, it’s your move.” The man understood.

While Peter and Cornelius were getting acquainted, it was important for Simon Peter to establish a relationship with Cornelius. Then, entering the house he found a number of friends and relatives who had gathered to see and hear him. This is a picture of “commendable cordiality between a nationalistic Jew and a soldier authorized to contain Jewish patriotism. But this cordiality was heaven-born and supra-national” [HLE: 137].

10:28 - IT IS FORBIDDEN. *“Peter said to them, “You know it’s forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner. But God has shown me that I must not call any person common or unclean.”* Peter states the obvious barrier of which they were all conscious. “Any form of intimate social fellowship between Jews and Greeks was thought to violate the spirit of the law and was therefore nonexistent” [NCWB]. “Forbidden” denotes that which violated their laws and customs. The Jews went far beyond the exclusiveness of the Law of Moses.

These Gentiles knew the attitude of the Jews toward them, and they knew that the resentment and animosity of the Jews ran deeper than that which they found in other countries over which Rome ruled. The Jews avoided social contact at all cost. Business was a different matter, however. They limited contact with Gentiles to the essentials and avoided them socially. Peter may have had a problem with this but Cornelius and his friends seemingly did not. During the time of segregation in the south, black people were usually more open to worshipping together than whites. Conversations

at times led to an invitation to worship together. For some, race was not as much a barrier as worship style, especially the music.

Peter Douglas, a black farmer living west of Sledge, Mississippi, was talking with a man from the Quitman County ASC Office (USDA) and discovered two things. One, the man was a Christian, and two, they both knew about the young white woman who had a bi-racial little son. Peter was faced with a dilemma. He said, “That little boy needs to be in church and he is not going to be welcome in the white church. I would like to take him to church with me, but I don’t know how to ask the family for permission.” I was that young ASCS reporter, working to pay for my education. I have never forgotten that conversation, nor my admiration for Peter Douglas. I discovered during those days that, though we did not worship together, except on special occasions (like revivals), it was very easy to have conversations about the Lord and His church with believers from another race.

That they were more than a little conscious of the barrier between Jews and Gentiles is highlighted in Peter’s statement, “But God has shown me that I must not call any person common or unclean.” They knew about Cornelius’ vision, but until this moment would not have known about Peter’s vision. He had learned the lesson well, though it would be interesting to know what his companions were thinking at the moment. We may assume that Christ had overcome that barrier for them, too. No Christian should regard any other person as common or unclean. Only sin defiles, not color, national origin, gender, or physical health.

10:29 - WHY I CAME. *“That’s why I came without any objection when I was sent for. So I ask, ‘Why did you send for me?’ ”* Aware that God had broken down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles, Peter treated these Gentiles with respect and dignity. Cornelius may have had the authority to have commanded them to come into his presence, but that would have driven the wedge between them deeper. At this point, both Peter and Cornelius are submitting to a higher authority. He had responded to the invitation, but no one had told him why he Cornelius had sent for him. Either that, or, he wanted Cornelius to state the reason for the request.

10:30 - CORNELIUS REPLIED. *“Cornelius replied, “Four days ago at this hour, at three in the afternoon, I was praying in my house. Just then a man in a dazzling robe stood before me...”* The series of events were still vivid in Cornelius’ mind. “From Gentile seeker to Spirit-filled Christian was to be the case history for Cornelius now” [HLE: 138]. Cornelius, too, had seen a vision. Instead of calling his visitor an angel he refers to him as “a man in a dazzling robe.” That “dazzling robe” may have symbolized power, authority, and holiness. It may have been the white robe of righteousness.

10:31 -AND SAID. *“...(A)nd said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your acts of charity have been remembered in God’s sight.’ ”* Cornelius recounts the encounter, quoting the angel.

10:32 - SEND SOMEONE. *“Therefore send someone to Joppa and invite Simon here, who is also named Peter. He is lodging in Simon the tanner’s house by the sea.”* He continues to quote the heavenly messenger, providing the information Peter had requested.

10:33 - THEREFORE IMMEDIATELY. *“Therefore I immediately sent for you, and you did the right thing in coming. So we are all present before God, to hear everything you have been commanded by the Lord.”* “Therefore” connects the vision and Cornelius’ response. He had sent for Peter because he was commanded to do so by the heavenly messenger, and now, he and his family and friends were gathered together “to hear everything you have been commanded by the Lord.” There is no doubt in their minds that what they would hear was the message God wanted them to hear.

Good News now for Gentiles, too

10:34 - PETER BEGAN TO SPEAK. *“Then Peter began to speak: “In truth, I understand that God doesn’t show favoritism...”* “Began to speak” is the prelude to an importance utterance. Peter had exchanged greetings and asked why Cornelius had sent for him. Now, he addresses Cornelius and his guests. The first thing he says is an expression of the great lesson he had learned through his vision and the testimony of his host. What he has learned is that God does not regard people with undue partiality, such as race, social status, national origin, or position. The ground really is level at the foot of the cross. John MacArthur adds:

“In contrast to his indicting sermons on the Day of Pentecost and at Solomon’s portico, and his bold defenses before the Sanhedrin, Peter here is led by the Spirit to give a simple gospel presentation. Some situations call for a detailed apologetic and historic presentation before the hearers can understand the gospel message. Others, with divinely plowed hearts, require only the simple truths of the gospel. Cornelius and the other Gentiles gathered with him were such divinely prepared individuals.” [MacArthur’s New Testament Commentary: Acts 1-12] Copyright © 1994 by The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1997, Parsons Technology, Inc. - After this, MAC ARTHUR].

10:35 - THE PERSON WHO FEARS HIM. *“...(B)ut in every nation the person who fears Him and does righteousness is acceptable to Him.”* Peter now understands that God offers His salvation to those in every nation who fear Him, meaning to reverence Him and respond to His great salvation.

WHO FEAR HIM. There is a fear that paralyzes, and there is a healthy fear that protects the individual. The fear of which Peter speaks is a sense of reverential awe in the presence of the majesty and omnipotence of Almighty God. This is a reverential fear that comes through God’s revelation of Himself and His salvation.

10:36 - HE SENT THE MESSAGE. *“He sent the message to the sons of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all.”* This is a lesson that should have been learned centuries before this in Israel, because God had revealed His offer of salvation to the nations through various prophets. God had announced his plans for the nations but it had fallen on

deaf ears, just as it had apparently fallen on Peter's deaf ears until reality broke through to him by means of a spectacular vision.

PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS. That is the very definition of the Gospel: God News. A brilliant scholar was asked, "What is the greatest thought you ever had?" He only thought for an instant before answering, "Jesus love me." Another was amazed that, "The Creator of all things permits me to call him my Father." While it is true that Jesus loves me, and that our Creator permits us to call him Father, there is more. The world's religions hold that God's favor is reserved for those who find the key to eternal mysteries, or some how "find" God. Not only does God love us, He commands that the message of His redemptive love be proclaimed throughout the world.

PEACE. The good news God commands His people to proclaim is that we have peace through Jesus Christ. As we have seen in Acts 4:12, the peace of God is reserved for those who receive Jesus Christ by faith, and for no one else. It is not popular in the postmodern culture in America to question any message that implies that God is exclusive, but the New Testament is very clear on the subject. Jesus is God's peace, and only those who come to the Father through Jesus will ever know the peace that passes all understanding.

HE IS LORD OF ALL. He is either Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all. We see that on bumper stickers, and hear it from the pulpit, but it is absolutely true. These words assert our Savior's lordship and unique authority, and affirm His sovereignty in relationships with all people, Jews and Gentiles. Robertson adds here that this is, "A triumphant parenthesis that Peter throws in as the reason for his new truth. Jesus Christ is Lord of all, both Jews and Gentiles" [ATR]. For more on this subject, see that great Christological passage in Philippians, chapter 2.

10:37 - YOU KNOW. *"You know the events that took place throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John preached..."* Only one living in a vacuum could have missed hearing the story of Jesus: He walked on water; He raised the dead; He gave sight to the blind; He cast our demons; He had compassion on people; and He baffled the critics and enraged religious leaders until they had Him crucified. And then, on the third day His body had disappeared from the sealed tomb. His followers claimed that He had risen from the dead. The transformation that took place in their lives proved that they believed it, and those with most at stake tried without success to disprove the resurrection.

Cornelius and other Roman officials were held accountable for keeping their collective finger on the pulse of a people in this land who were never pleasant or happy subjects. Failure to keep up with events could have cost an officer his life. Peter was well aware of the fact that they knew certain things about Jesus. Robertson summarizes:

"The story began with a skip to Galilee after the baptism just like the Gospel of Mark. This first message of Peter to the Gentiles (Acts 10:37-44) corresponds in broad outline with Mark's Gospel. Mark heard Peter preach many times and evidently planned his Gospel (the Roman Gospel) on this same model. There is in it

nothing about the birth and childhood of Jesus nor about the intervening ministry supplied by John's Gospel for the period (a year) between the baptism and the Galilean Ministry. Peter here presents an objective statement of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus with proof from the Scriptures that he is the Messiah. It is a skillful presentation" [ATR].

10:38 - GOD ANOINTED JESUS. *“(H)ow God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and curing all who were under the tyranny of the Devil, because God was with Him.”* There was an historical Jesus. He was a real Person, living at a real time, in a real place, and these people were aware of that, though they did not yet understand the full significance of what they knew. That is why the Lord has used miraculous visions to bring together those who had heard certain things about Jesus with one who could proclaim “the good news of peace through Jesus Christ” (vs. 36).

A professor of history from a nearby university had a number of men upset with him when I walked into the health club where they were engaged in a heated argument. He had said that Muslims had no way of knowing that Jesus ever lived, and that no Roman historian had mentioned Christ. He did not seem to be aware of the fact that both Tacitus and Suetonius mentioned Christ, as did the Jewish historian Josephus.

Luke tells us that he carefully researched everything he wrote (and we know he was inspired by the Holy Spirit). Peter’s audience, we may reasonably assume from their response, did not question the existence of Jesus Christ.

WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND POWER. To be anointed with the Holy Spirit is to be anointed with power! The New Testament clearly teaches that ours is a Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - one is essence, three in personality. I cannot understand that - but I do understand that if I could understand it I could not explain it. Years ago, Dr. Leo Eddleman told me that a highly respected pastor, writer, and conference speaker was attending a convention when he accepted an invitation to visit with a well known liberal theologian (both of whom I had seen and heard in chapel when I was a seminary student). Dr. Eddleman said, that his highly respected denominational leader “went into that hotel room with a Trinitary view of God and came out with a unitary view of God.” Sadly, he continued to write articles, lessons, and Christian books without clearly revealing the change in his position with reference to the Trinity.

Peter was there when the Son was baptized, the Spirit descended, and the Father spoke. He says here that the Father anointed the Son with the Spirit and with power. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in the upper room and immediately there was a display of great power among the believers. The Holy Spirit still anoints believers with power, but many people do not understand how that power is manifested in this age apart from some visible sign like speaking in other tongues or healing the sick and diseased.

A man, woman, or young person who lives a life of holiness in a world filled with vile, evil people is

manifesting the power of the Holy Spirit every day. Those who walk with the Lord daily are aware of the power of God in their daily life. I will never forget standing in the First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida a number of years ago, talking with the late Stephen Olford. While we were visiting, I became aware of a deep truth that was forming in my mind. I became conscious of the conviction that I was standing in the presence of a man who combined great meekness with great power. He never raised the dead or restored sight to a blind person in my presence, but the Holy Spirit revealed to me that his may had been anointed with great power.

DOING GOOD. Peter added that, “He went about doing good and curing all who were under the tyranny of the Devil, because God was with Him.” This condensed statement summarized His life: “He went about doing good.” What Cornelius and his guests could not have understood at the time was that, compared to His goodness, man’s goodness is as filthy rags.

The word “curing” (healing) is used by Luke the physician more than any other NT writer. He uses the term 11 times in the Gospel and 4 times in Acts. Jesus is the ultimate and only cure for those who are under the tyranny of the devil. We are surrounded by people who have been enslaved by the devil. This slavery is manifested in addiction to alcohol, drugs, pornography, gambling, immorality, homosexuality, lust, envy, covetousness, and hate. There is but one sure deliverance from this slavery and that is through Jesus Christ.

10:39 - WITNESSES. *“We ourselves are witnesses of everything He did in both the Judean country and in Jerusalem; yet they killed Him by hanging Him on a tree.”* By “we” Peter would have meant the apostles and other disciples who followed Him during His earthly ministry. John wrote, “We have seen and we testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14, HCSB). John introduced the First Epistle in this way:

“What was from the beginning, what **we have heard**, what **we have seen** with our eyes, what **we have observed**, and have **touched with our hands**, concerning the Word of life—that life was revealed, and **we have seen it** and **we testify and declare to you** the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—what we have **seen and heard** we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete” (1 John 1:1-4, bold added by this writer).

10:40 - GOD RAISED. *“God raised up this man on the third day and permitted Him to be seen...”* The resurrection of Jesus Christ was central to the preaching of the Good News in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and now, for the first time it is presented to Gentiles. It would continue to be proclaimed, and Paul would stress later that many were still living who had seen the risen Christ. Luke, who had researched everything he had written in the Gospel of Luke and in the Book of Acts, had no doubt interviewed many people who had seen the risen Lord. Jesus died for our sins, He arose for our life, both of which are symbolized in believer’s baptism, as he new believer is “buried with Him in baptism, raised in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3ff).

One question that one seldom hears asked is why the third day? Why not two days, or six days? Of course, we know the number three was the divine number, which is interesting when I recall a seminary professor who taught that three was the divine number, but rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. Some have taught that the Jews believed the spirit left the body on the third day, so they would know that Jesus was really dead. I seriously doubt, however, that the Roman soldiers would have made a mistake when they broke the legs of the two thieves who were crucified, one on either side of Jesus. Nor, would there have been any question when the spear was thrust into his side and blood and water flowed from his side. When Joseph of Aramatheia and Nicodemus prepared His body for burial, they wrapped strips of cloth around His head. He had not, as some claimed, merely swooned from the pain, hunger, and thirst, only to revive in the cool tomb.

It is the conviction of this writer that Jesus was in the tomb on three successive days for the very reason suggested by many people. The number three was the divine number and His resurrection on the third day was a testimony to the fact that His resurrection was the work of the infinite God, not the work of finite man.

PERMITTED HIM TO BE SEEN. No one can appreciate the depth of the love of God for us apart from the Cross. No one can fully appreciate what a blessing it was for those early disciples to be permitted to see the risen Lord. The Lord would use their eye-witness testimony as proof of the crowning miracle of Jesus Christ.

10:41 - WITNESSES APPOINTED. *“(N)ot by all the people, but by us, witnesses appointed beforehand by God, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.”* Jesus did not appear in the temple complex to those who plotted to have Him put to death, nor in the streets to those who had demanded, “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” He appeared to the eleven apostles and to other select believers before finally appearing to more than five hundred at one time. All those who had the most to gain by proving that His disciples had stolen His body tried and failed to prove it. Nor, could they ever disprove the testimony of those who did see the risen Lord.

BEFOREHAND. Jesus did not reveal Himself randomly to the masses, which He could have done if it had served His purpose. Those who demanded that He be crucified would have been shocked and most would have been convinced that He had either risen, or that the whole thing had been somehow staged. God had predetermined the witnesses to whom Jesus would be revealed.

WHO ATE AND DRANK. Those “who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead” were witnesses predetermined by God, so that they could give credible evidence that they had seen the risen Christ. The resurrected Christ could appear and disappear at will; He could appear in different places, from Jerusalem to Galilee; and He could eat and drink with His disciples.

It is significant that those who ate and drank with the risen Lord included men who would be inspired to write a major part of the New Testament: Matthew, John, Paul, Peter, James, and Jude. There would be natural variations in the account, but the testimony was absolutely compelling to a large number of people who heard these witnesses.

10:42 - HE COMMANDED US. *“He commanded us to preach to the people, and to solemnly testify that He is the One appointed by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead.”* He had commanded them in the Great Commission to “preach to the people, and solemnly testify” that Jesus was the “One appointed by God” to be, not only the Redeemer, but also “the Judge of the living and the dead.” Long after Peter’s death, John would write, “And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14). That Jesus was appointed or “ordained of God fits into the Jewish conception of history which was controlled by (the) omnipotent covenant-making God” [HLE: .143].

Jesus is the Savior, and He has been appointed by God to be “the Judge of the living and the dead.” Paul wrote to Timothy, “Before God and **Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead**, and by His appearing and His kingdom, **I solemnly charge you: proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching**” (2 Tim 4:1-2, bold added by this writer).

The world will embrace a sweet, peaceful Jesus who inspires us to do good deeds and feel good about ourselves, and it will reward those who proclaim this false Christ. What the world does not want to hear is that we are all sinners in need of redemption. The world does not want to hear that “All have sinned” (Rom. 3:23), or that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23a) - they only want to hear that “the gift of God is eternal life” (Rom. 6:23b), and the masses do not even want to hear that the gift of eternal life is given “through Jesus Christ” (Rom 6:23c). Popular preachers today announce, “I just want people to feel good”. These false prophets do not preach on sin, demand repentance, warn of the coming judgment and an eternity in hell for those who reject Jesus Christ. What could be more fitting than for every person who rejects Jesus Christ to die and open his eyes in the presence of Jesus and realize that He is “the Judge of the living and the dead.”

10:43 - ALL THE PROPHETS TESTIFY. *“All the prophets testify about Him that through His name everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins.”* All the prophets is a general statement of the prophets through whom God revealed His Messianic covenant, including Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Zechariah, and Micah. The point is that the cumulative impact of Old Testament prophecy is Messianic.

THROUGH HIS NAME. Paul would write to the Philippian church that Jesus is the name above every name, and that the day is coming when every eye shall see Him and every tongue shall confess Him (Phil. 2).

“Peter made it clear that Christ’s ministry results either in judgment (v. 42) or salvation (v. 43). The key phrase is, Everyone who believes in Him. This Greek construction consists of a present participle with an article, which is almost the equivalent of a noun (in this case “every believer in Him”). The key element in salvation is faith, belief in Christ. This message of forgiveness of sins (cf. 2:38; 5:31; 13:38; 26:18) through faith in the Messiah was spoken of by the prophets (e.g., Isa.

53:11; Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25-26)" [BKC].

Gentiles Saved and Baptized

10:44 - THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME. *"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message."* There is no magic formula - or even a spiritual formula here. According to the sovereign purpose of God, "the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message." The Book of Acts is the Book of History in the New Testament, and though we learn a lot of doctrinal truths in Acts, it is still a record of the ministry of the Holy Spirit through those early disciples. According to the New Testament pattern, God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell believers when they were saved. Some spoke in other languages, some did not. God determined when, where, and to whom that blessing would be given.

What we see here is what has been called "the Pentecost of the Gentiles." This was God's sign from heaven that Gentiles were accepted in exactly the same manner as Jews. Judaizers would reject this truth and hound Paul throughout his ministry because he preached that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised in order to be saved,

ON ALL THOSE WHO HEARD THE MESSAGE. It must be assumed that those who heard Peter's message believed. The Holy Spirit comes into the hearts of believers.

10:45 - CIRCUMCISED BELIEVERS. *"The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also."* Some have suggested that Peter had taken these "circumcised believers", meaning Jewish believers, with him because of his aversion any contact with Gentiles. We might just as well conclude that the Holy Spirit had led him to invite the Jewish believers so that there would be enough witnesses to this incredible experience that it would be hard for the believers in Jerusalem to deny it.

These Jews had been taught that salvation is of the Jews. Before long, many of the Jewish believers would fanatically attack Paul for preaching that Gentiles could be saved without first becoming proselytes to Judaism. These Jewish believers could not have been more astounded when they witnessed the gift of the Holy Spirit "poured out on the Gentiles also." Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, would witness God's salvation come to Gentiles on the first Missionary Journey. He preached: "For this is what the Lord has commanded us: I have appointed you as a light for the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced and glorified the message of the Lord, and all who had been appointed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:47-48).

10:46 - LANGUAGES. *"For they heard them speaking in [other] languages and declaring the greatness of God. Then Peter responded..."* The Holy Spirit had come upon these Gentiles in full measure, just as He had come upon the one hundred, twenty in the upper room. Gentiles are saved

exactly as Jews, and they receive the Holy Spirit in full measure. This is the message here, rather than teaching that all believers will speak in other languages. John MacArthur is right:

“This passage does not teach that speaking in tongues is normally to be expected with the coming of the Spirit. The Spirit granted it on this occasion as visible proof that He indwelt these Gentiles. He knew that the Jewish brethren with Peter would be hard to convince, so He granted the same manifestation experienced by Jewish Christians at Pentecost. It should be noted that here, as throughout Acts, speaking in tongues is a group, not an individual, phenomenon” [MAC ARTHUR].

This is not a proof text for tongues or languages as proof of salvation or sanctification. Neither is it a proof text for any claim for a “private prayer language.” Those who advocate either must go elsewhere for a proof text.

As mentioned in other places, I spent some time talking with the late Dr. Leo Eddleman while he was writing his commentary on Acts, and after he had written it. It was written during the time that charismatic churches were springing up across the south, so it was natural that we would talk about this, and that he would mention it in his commentary. He once told me that J. Edgar Hoover had said that “Dr. Leo Eddleman had the best working knowledge of Hebrew of any non-Jew in the United States.” What many were not aware of was that his major was Greek. Dr. Eddleman was an academic who had the depth to evaluate professors in various fields, but when he preached a child could follow him. In fact, Cecil Gregory and I have often talked about the time I offered to take Dr. Eddleman to the Cherry Ridge Baptist School in Bastrop, LA, to speak to the children (there was no high school). One hundred, three children were saved that week and Cecil Gregory followed up on those decisions and told me that 92 were baptized in various churches.

Dr. Eddleman was an academic, but he was also practical. Writing of the gift of languages, he said: “Glossolalia at Pentecost was an incursion of the life of heaven into time and space. Disciples witnessed to the works of God in Christ in languages unknown to them previously. It was, in the genuine sense, an extension of the Incarnation, of the invasion of this world by the Life of heaven” [HLE: 145]. We can see why many would call what happened in the home of Cornelius the “Gentiles Pentecost”, though Pentecost, in the truest sense, is irrepeatable.

10:47 - BAPTIZED. *“Can anyone withhold water and prevent these from being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”* Peter had proclaimed on the Day of Pentecost that those who were under conviction of sin must repent, and that all who repented should submit themselves for baptism (Acts. 2:38). These Gentiles had believed and received the Holy Spirit just as the Jews in Jerusalem. Now, Peter asks his Jewish companions if they would prevent them from being baptized (without requiring them to be circumcised). Baptism here follows salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

10:48 - COMMANDED THEM. *“And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for a few days.”* On the day of Pentecost, Peter had stressed that

sinner must repent for the remission of their sins. He also commanded those who do repent to submit themselves for baptism (Acs 2:38). Both commands are imperative in that verse, the first command there is second person, plural, imperative, active. The second is third person, singular, imperative, passive. All are commanded to repent, and the individual who does repent is commanded to submit himself or herself for baptism, an ordinance which identifies the believer with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. John MacArthur has wisely concluded that

“...Peter’s entire argument for baptizing Cornelius and the others rests on the fact that they had received the Holy Spirit, and therefore were saved. Baptism thus plays no part in salvation. Through it, believers publicly confess in symbolic fashion the inner transformation of salvation. Rather than do it himself, **Peter wisely ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ by the Jewish Christians who accompanied him.** He thus involved the Jews in this momentous reality, knowing they would then be even more willing to support it. Peter could anticipate the reaction when he reported back to Jerusalem, and wanted all the support he could muster” [MAC ARTHUR, bold added by this writer].

Chapter 11

Salvation of Gentiles Defended

11:1 - APOSTLES AND BROTHERS. *“The apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles had welcomed God’s message also.”* The apostles were apparently still focusing their ministry on Jews in Jerusalem and Judea, though there had been some work among the Samaritans, as in the case of Philip and the visit by Peter and John. “Brothers” denotes Jewish Christians, the leaders of whom would have been men. It is interesting that the church observed the democratic process and the autonomy of the local church. There was no official body of elders or presbyters who had authority over others, except for the authority given the apostles by the Lord Himself.

THE GENTILES. Word of what happened in Caesarea, that Gentiles had “welcomed God’s message also”, would have spread like wildfire throughout Palestine, where it was believed that salvation was of the Jews. It would have been inconceivable to them that God would have offered His salvation to Gentiles who had not first become proselytes to Judaism. It was especially disturbing that God would send His message of redemption to the enemy, Rome, to which they were living in humiliating subjection.

What happened in the home of Cornelius had served to polarize some elements in the church in Judea, where most of the members were Palestinian believers, who believed that God’s salvation was for the Jews and for those proselytes who had accepted the Law and been circumcised. In other words, one must become a Jew before he could become a Christian. The Jerusalem Conference,

following Paul's first missionary journey (with Barnabas), would settle this issue doctrinally, but never in the hearts of the Judaizers.

11:2 - UP TO JERUSALEM. *“When Peter went up to Jerusalem, those who stressed circumcision argued with him...”* It is interesting to note that anytime the Jews spoke of going to or returning from Jerusalem, they were going up to Jerusalem, or going down from Jerusalem. This was geographically and topographically true, but there was a spiritual quality in their minds as well. Jerusalem had symbolized the presence of Yahweh with His Chosen People since the Babylonian Captivity (Jeremiah 3:16ff).

THOSE WHO STRESSED. There was an exclusive party among the Hebrew Christians, who stressed circumcision, that is, continuing in strict adherence of the Mosaic Law. These people would militantly oppose any effort to evangelize Gentiles, or to accept the fact that God would make His salvation available to Gentiles who did not first embrace Judaism. Recent events and Samaria, combined with these reports from Caesarea, may have served to polarize this group. It is amazing how a report like this will polarize church members even today.

Students of the Word often think of these people as Judaizers, Jewish believers who insisted that since salvation is of the Jews, Gentiles, in essence, become Jews. These people would hound Paul for years to come and become a source of temptation so great that even Peter and Barnabas would yield to temptation. Paul would rebuke Peter to his face in Antioch over this very issue.

ARGUED. These Judaizers did not question Peter for the sake of information so that they might rejoice with Peter. They confronted him and argued with him. Would it not have been wonderful if this issue had been settled once for all time, and that there would never have been arguments over who could be saved after that time? One can hardly imagine what it would have meant to the church throughout the centuries if all barriers between the races, nationalities, sexes, and classes had been set aside in the First Century. As I was being driven through a section of Omaha, Nebraska a number of years ago, a friend began to explain that during World War II, there was intense hatred between the citizens of that city along the lines of national origin. He pointed out the Polish section, the Italian section, the German section, the Jewish section, and other sections in which groups with a common background lived. During the Second World War, German and Italian Americans were hated by Polish Americans, and those from other countries that had been overrun by Germany. There were people who professed to be Christians who hated others who professed to be Christians, but placed more emphasis on nationalism than on the teachings of Jesus.

11:3 - YOU VISITED. *“...(S)aying, “You visited uncircumcised men and ate with them!”* This was a serious charge made by those believers who still considered themselves under the Mosaic Law. Robertson explains that this is literally, “Men having uncircumcision.” He explains the significance of this charge:

“It is a contemptuous expression. They did not object to Peter's preaching to the Gentiles, but to his going into the house of Cornelius and eating with them,

violating his supposed obligations as a Jew (Hackett). It was the same complaint in principle that the Pharisees had made against Jesus when he ate with publicans and sinners (Luke 15:12). The Jews had not merely the Mosaic regulations about clean and unclean food, but also the fact that at a Gentile table some of the meat may have been an idol sacrifice. And Peter himself had similar scruples when the vision came to him at Joppa and when he entered the house of Cornelius in Caesarea Acts 10:28). Peter had been led beyond the circumcision party” [ATR, bold added for emphasis).

11:4 - ORDERLY SEQUENCE. “*Peter began to explain to them in an orderly sequence, saying.*” Peter, who may well have returned to Jerusalem specifically to report to the “apostles and brothers” there on what had happened in the home of Cornelius, began to relate his experience and tell them of the conversion of the Gentiles who were there. Often when wild rumors are spreading, what is demanded is a full accounting in an orderly sequence. This has often been the case in the church, but today, with twenty-four hour news networks trying to be the first with a new story, we are much more aware of the importance of getting the full story in orderly sequence.

11:15 - I SAW. “*I was in the town of Joppa praying, and I saw, in a visionary state, an object coming down that resembled a large sheet being lowered from heaven by its four corners, and it came to me.*” Peter simply relates the story about what he had seen “in a visionary state”, trusting that those believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, would understand the significance of the vision.

IT CAME TO ME. Some have seen these words as a graphic fact not mentioned in chapter 10, which gives additional force to the fact that the vision was a personal revelation of God’s will, and that he had no option but to obey God. Peter had not opened the door to Gentiles, God had. Peter had not saved them, God had.

11:6 - LOOKED CLOSELY. “*When I looked closely and considered it, I saw the four-footed animals of the earth, the wild beasts, the reptiles, and the birds of the sky.*” Peter stresses that he had given careful attention to the vision. This was not simply a dream that he had recalled and assigned special significance to the details. He had seen this clearly and considered the meaning of it. No religious Jew would ever forget what he saw in that sheet. The thought of eating the unclean animals contained in the sheet was more than he could bear, and the command more than he could fathom.

11:7 - A VOICE. “*Then I also heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat!’*” The vision, standing alone, may have been open to speculation but the voice was clear and unmistakable (10:13).

11:8 - NO LORD. “*‘No, Lord!’ I said. ‘For nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth!’*” The Jewish audience in Jerusalem would appreciate his revulsion at the thought of killing and eating any of those unclean animals on the sheet.

11:9 - A SECOND TIME. “*But a voice answered from heaven a second time, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call common.’*” Peter is telling, in orderly fashion, what God said to him.

Clearly, He was preparing Peter for the visit by messengers from Cornelius. If Peter had been traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem for Passover and the very shadow of a Gentile had passed over his body he would have been ceremonially unclean and could not have taken of the Passover meal before going through ceremonial cleansing.

11:10 - THREE TIMES. *“Now this happened three times, and then everything was drawn up again into heaven.”* One time, and Peter might have thought of it as a dream. Two times, and the Lord had his attention. Three times, and there could be no doubt.

11:11 - AT THAT VERY MOMENT. *“At that very moment, three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea arrived at the house where we were.”* The timing was too perfect to have been an accident. The Lord was working from both directions to bring the witness and the lost person together. In this case the circumstances come together dramatically, but the Lord continually amazes Christian witnesses today by bringing us into contact with those who need to know the Lord. One man to whom I had witnessed for several years looked up at me after I had prayed and said, “God sent you to see me today!”

11:12 - THE SPIRIT TOLD ME. *“Then the Spirit told me to go with them with no doubts at all. These six brothers accompanied me, and we went into the man’s house.”* Through this vision, Peter had received his marching orders, “Go” and make no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. That is the command that binds every Christian of every age. No one can say he or she honors the Great Commission if he erects barriers between himself and others based on race, color, national origin, or gender. Those who honor the words of our Lord found in Acts 1:8 will accept this as a guideline for reaching out to others.

11:13 - HE REPORTED TO US. *“He reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa, and call for Simon, who is also named Peter.’”* Cornelius told Peter and his companions that he had seen an angel “standing in his house”, telling him to send to Joppa and ask Simon Peter to come to his home. Peter did not go to the home of a Gentile on his own; he was sent there by the Lord, who was preparing Cornelius to hear the Good News.

11:14 - HE WILL SPEAK. *“He will speak words to you by which you and all your household will be saved.”* This statement makes it clear that Cornelius had not been saved before receiving this vision, even though he was genuinely interested in Jewish worship and called on the Lord as did the Jews who did not receive Jesus as Savior. “Clearly also the household of Cornelius would likewise be won to Christ by the words of Simon Peter. This is household conversion before the household baptism (Acts 10:48; Acts 11:17)” [ATR].

This verse indicates that though Cornelius was a devout man and observed Jewish hours of prayer and gave alms, he was still lacking the one essential thing necessary for salvation. He needed a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Being “good” or being “religious” is not enough.

11:15 - THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME. *“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came down on*

them, just as on us at the beginning.” Apparently, Peter did not finish his testimony before the Holy Spirit “came down on them, just as on us” at Pentecost. The people responded immediately to his words. I had invited a friend to preach in revival services a number of years ago. A lady came who had grown up in the church was visiting with her mother and asked us to come by to pray with her. She was very anxious to receive Jesus Christ as her Savior, and having grown up with a godly mother who had her in church all her life, she knew what she needed to do. She just wanted to get it settled with the Lord as soon as possible. We went to her mother’s home and I let my friend witness to the young lady. He went on and on, and I wondered if he would ever stop long enough for her to pray to receive Christ. I could see from the look in her eyes that she did not need to sit there and listen for an hour, she wanted to pray right then. Recently, I had an opportunity to talk with lady and she confirmed what I had concluded.

Just as Peter didn’t get to finish his testimony, there may be times when we may have to depart from our presentation. If we are sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit we should be able to tell when it is time to skip our complete presentation of “The plan of salvation” and go to the Lord. God saves when the individual places his or her trust in Jesus.

AS ON US. From the time the Holy Spirit came down upon those Gentiles in the home of Cornelius, God has made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. When the church starts making a distinction along those lines it ceases to become a New Testament church. That is not to say that we are to receive the world’s culture into the church. We must refuse membership in the church to those who are not willing to separate themselves from the world.

11:16 - I REMEMBERED. *“Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”* Jesus had promised Peter and the other apostles that when the Holy Spirit came He would call the words of the Lord to their remembrance (John 16). These were the words Jesus had spoken to His disciples just before His ascension (Acts 1:5).

11:17 - THE SAME GIFT. *“Therefore, if God gave them the same gift that He also gave to us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I possibly hinder God?”* Peter stresses this point over and over, as would Paul and Barnabas. There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile when it comes to salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit at the point of salvation. The Gospel is very clear on the subject of the salvation God offers to human beings. We are not saved by the works of the Law (Gal. 2:16); we are not saved by any combination of works and grace (Rom. 11:6); but by grace through faith plus nothing (Eph. 2:8; Gal. 2:16).

They should have known this from the teachings of Jesus, but since they had not reached out to Gentiles, God declared this great truth in power and demonstrated it in a spectacular manner when He sent the Holy Spirit to take up residence in these Gentiles in the home of Cornelius. The Holy Spirit would inspire Peter, Paul and others to write various epistles in which this truth is stressed.

WHEN WE BELIEVED. These Jewish Christians understood that they were saved when

they believed in Jesus Christ. Peter stresses that the Holy Spirit was sent to indwell these Gentiles when they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. He then asks, “How could anyone hinder God?” To have refused these Gentiles the message of salvation, or to deny that they had been saved would have been to hinder God.

11:18 - THE BECAME SILENT. *“When they heard this they became silent. Then they glorified God, saying, ‘So God has granted repentance resulting in life to even the Gentiles!’”* These Jewish critics desisted from their opposition (for a time), but that did not mean that the issue was permanently settled as we see from the Jerusalem Conference (Ch. 15; Galatians 2).

THEY GLORIFIED GOD. Does this mean that they unanimously glorified God, or that the overwhelming majority glorified Him to the point that any remaining opposition was silenced for all time? If we wait for a unanimous opinion we lose a lot of battles before they begin. Satan can fill one person’s heart to oppose the outreach and ministry of the church and if the majority caves in, he wins the battle. These saints glorified God because “God has granted repentance resulting in life to even the Gentiles!” The church, when they had heard the testimony of Simon Peter, celebrated the conversion of Gentiles, and the accepted the fact that the God wanted them to reach out to Gentiles with the message of salvation.

GOD HAS GRANTED. This is incredible! Luke does not say that these Gentiles took it upon themselves to repent. What he said was that “God has granted repentance resulting in life to even the Gentiles.” Repentance is a change of mind that results in a changed life. What God demands, and what God initiates and accomplished in the hearts of those who believe in Him is repentance, not ritual, ceremony, or a display of emotions. Repentance involves the total person: mind, emotions, and volition. Eternal life is the object and goal in God’s granting repentance.

The Church in Antioch of Syria

11:19 - SCATTERED. *“Those who had been scattered as a result of the persecution that started because of Stephen made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one except Jews.”* Jesus, in the Great Commission, had commanded His disciples to evangelize the world. Then, before His ascension, He stated that when He returned to the Father, He would send the Holy Spirit to indwell believers and empower them to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). The risen Lord did not need to restate The Great Commission, but they needed to be empowered and guided in the implementation of it.

Stage one in the plan was going well. There had been peace for a little while after the persecution under Saul of Tarsus had abated. That peace, however, was short lived, principally because of the success of the church in reaching people for Christ in Jerusalem. There were three things that held the believers in Jerusalem: (1) This was the what they knew, the world was the unknown; (2) There

was air of anticipation as the disciples looked for the imminent return of the Lord; and (3) This is where it was happening and they were not about to leave. No doubt many were unwilling to leave the relative security of that which was familiar to them. Only one thing could compel them to leave Jerusalem. The one thing which could scatter the saints was persecution.

Satan has certainly learned by now that the surest way to weaken the church is to offer it security, peace, and prosperity. It is not his nature, however, to see those who follow Christ enjoy either peace or prosperity. It is his nature to want to inflict pain and suffering, to kill and destroy. He has killed a lot of churches with prosperity, dignity, culture, class, and pride, but when the church is persecuted by those whom he controls things can get out of his control in a hurry. He knows that, but it is against his nature to do anything other than cause pain and suffering. That was happening in Jerusalem. The church was being persecuted by satanic forces parading in the robes of priests, teachers, and scribes. The Lord permitted that persecution, which began with the martyrdom of Stephen, because it would drive the saints out of Jerusalem and begin moving them into the world. That scattering we know as the Dispersion.

AS FAR AS. The persecuted saints left Jerusalem and “made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch.” Some of the first believers to leave Jerusalem and settle in these places may well have been Hellenistic Jews who had families in those places, or they may have had contacts that would help them transition into new work or markets. Luke stresses that, for the time, they were “speaking the message to no one except Jews.” From a human standpoint, that is understandable, especially for a Palestinian Jew. No effort had been made to reach out to Gentiles.

“This is a crucial hinge in the Acts account. For the first time the church actively proselytized Gentiles. The Samaritans of chapter 8 were partly Jewish; the Ethiopian eunuch on his own was reading Isaiah 53 on his return from Jerusalem; and even Cornelius took the initiative in seeking the gospel from Peter’s lips. But here the church took the first steps to take the message to uncircumcised Greeks” [BKC].

11:20 - TO ANTIOCH. *“But there were some of them, Cypriot and Cyrenian men, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Hellenists, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus.”* John MacArthur astutely connects this reference to the persecution to that began by the death of Stephen (even though Luke tells us parenthetically that he had known peace for a little while)

“This passage picks up where 8:4 left off, discussing the effect of the persecution that arose in connection with Stephen. That persecution, led by Saul of Tarsus, scattered the Jerusalem fellowship all over. While some went to Samaria (8:5, 25) and Caesarea (8:40; 10:24ff.), Damascus (9:10), Lydda, Joppa, and Sharon (9:35–36), at the same time in the far north a church was being planted among Gentiles. Some of the displaced Jews made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch. Phoenicia was the coastal region immediately north of Judea, where the cities of Tyre and Sidon were located. From there they could take ship for the major island of Cyprus, some

sixty miles offshore. They could also continue up the coast to Antioch, approximately 200 miles north of Sidon”, [MAC ARTHUR].

ANTIOCH. Little did those pilgrims who were fleeing persecution in Jerusalem realize that Antioch would soon become an important center for the spread of the Gospel, or the role it would lay in taking the Gospel to the Gentile world.

Antioch was the capitol of the Roman province of Syria. It was built by Seleudus Nicator about 300 B. C. and named after his father Antiochus. After Rome and Alexandria, it was the third most important city in the Roman Empire. It contained a large Syrian population, as well as a large number of Jews, but its civilization and culture was mostly Greek, and its political and official tone was distinctly Roman. The Gospel had now spread to a very strategic center.

“This city, one of many bearing the same name, was the third largest in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria. Located on the Orontes River 15 miles inland, it was known as Antioch on the Orontes. Beautifully situated and carefully planned, it was a commercial center and the home of a large Jewish community. In spite of the fact that it was a vile city, with gross immorality and ritual prostitution as part of its temple worship, the church at Antioch was destined to become the base of operations for Paul’s missionary journeys. The Roman satirist, Juvenal, complained, “The sewage of the Syrian Orontes has for long been discharged into the Tiber.” By this he meant that Antioch was so corrupt it was impacting Rome, more than 1,300 miles away” [BKC].

Jesus had announced that the gates of hell would not prevail against the Gospel. Now, these humble, displaced Palestinian Jews were marching into a satanic stronghold with courage and faith, but they could not have imagined the full significance of what was about to happen. The church established in this city would soon become the launching pad for the three most significant missionary journeys in the entire history of Christianity.

SPEAKING THE GOOD NEWS. The Jews who moved into the area “began speaking to the Hellenists, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus.” They did not immediately reach out to Gentiles. We are not told why they chose to speak to the Hellenistic Jews but not the Gentiles, but it stands to reason that they would stay in their comfort zone and speak to those with a common heritage, an understanding of the Law and Prophets, and an anticipation of the coming of the Messiah. This was the logical place to start.

11:21 -THE LORD’S HAND. “*The Lord’s hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.*” A day with the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day! The Holy Spirit inspired Luke to use an expression with which the early Jewish readers as well as Gentile converts were familiar: “Indeed, the Lord’s hand is not too short to save, and His ear is not too deaf to hear” (Is. 59:1). Luke had used this term in his account of the birth of Jesus: “ All who heard about [him] took [it] to heart, saying, “What then will this child become?” For, indeed,

the Lord's hand was with him" (Luke 1:66, HCSB).

In a time when many people see racism everywhere they look, it would be profitable for the student of the Word to take a look at the whole picture. These Palestinian Jews had fled persecution in Judea and traveled to the third most important city in the vast Roman Empire. What would be more natural than for them to make contact with the people with whom they had something in common? Did not these Jews from Antioch of Syria take the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover or Pentecost? Is it not possible that some of these Jews of the Dispersion knew some of these Hellenistic Jews in Antioch?

What we do know is that as soon as they made contact with the Jews of Antioch they began sharing the Good News with them, with spectacular results: "a large number who believed turned to the Lord." In a way, all who believe "turn to the Lord", but the point here seems to be that all who believed the testimony of the Jewish believers from Jerusalem and turned to Him.

11:22 - THE REPORT. *"Then the report about them reached the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to travel as far as Antioch."* Any student of the Book of Acts should pay attention to the emphasis on the fact that believers often give reports. Jews in Jerusalem had already heard about Peter's visit with Cornelius when he arrived back in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas would report to the church in Antioch following their missionary journey. Paul, at the conclusion of his final missionary journey, reported to James (the half-brother of Jesus), who was the leader of the church in Jerusalem at the time. They did not have twenty-four news networks, with reporters, cameras, and microphones ready to dispatch to any place where there was a story. It took a bit longer for news to reach Jerusalem in those days, but the reports had to have been more factual than most televised reports one hears when any network reports on the ministry of the church today. Some get it right, but the news we get is usually filtered through individuals and networks who simply do not understand the ministry or the doctrines of the church. They speak with authority, but they often distort the truth.

On June 26, 2007, someone from Fox News reporting from South Carolina, explained to the audience that presidential candidates Rudy Giuliani and Mitt Romney would have problems with conservative Christians in that state. The reporter noted that Southern Baptists were the largest denomination in the south (in fact the SBC is the largest evangelical denomination in America). He had visited the headquarters for Southern Baptists in South Carolina and learned that Baptists would have a problem with Giuliani's stand on social issues, like homosexuality, abortion, and embryonic stem cell research. They, he reported, would have a problem with Romney because they do not recognize his Mormon church a true church. They call it a cult. Earlier in the year, reporters who announced that they were Christians were insisting that they viewed the Mormon church as just another Christian denomination. After all, that is what Romney told them. What he did not tell him is that every loyal Mormon teaches his family that the Mormon church is the only true church, yet it presents a very distorted image of the Jesus they claim to represent.

THEY SENT BARNABAS. When reports reached the saints in Jerusalem that Philip was

preaching to Samaritans and that Samaritans were being saved, they sent Peter and John to investigate and to offer help. When they heard that many Jews were turning to the Lord (Jesus) in Antioch, they had an ideal servant to send to investigate and assist them. Some of those Jews who left Jerusalem were “Cypriot and Cyrenian men, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Hellenists” (vs. 19). Barnabas, known as The Son of Encouragement, was a Cypriot, who may well have known some of these men. It is also significant that Barnabas was a Hellenistic Jew himself. MacArthur notes that

“Barnabas first appeared in chapter 4, when he sold some property to meet the needs of other believers. Through his influence, Paul was finally accepted by the Jerusalem church (Acts 9:27). He was a leading teacher in the church and a loving, gentle, generous man, in keeping with his name, which means “son of encouragement.” The choice of a representative was crucial. Sending a rigidly legalistic individual could have spelled disaster. Barnabas, however, had the qualifications needed for the job [MAC ARTHUR].

11:23 - SAW THE GRACE OF GOD. *“When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with a firm resolve of the heart...”* It did not take Barnabas long to determine that the reports were true. He immediately “saw the grace of God.” How does one see the grace of God? He saw evidence of the Grace of God in the lives and in the words of these new believers. The grace of God was reflected in the spread of the Gospel in Antioch and manifested in the lives of the new converts.

ENCOURAGED THEM. Barnabas, the “Son of Encouragement”, encouraged them all. Actually, the Greek shows continuous action - he continued to encourage them. He may have been known to some of them, but the Holy Spirit used him to encourage all of them to “remain true to the Lord with a firm resolve of the heart.” Barnabas would have encouraged them to remain true to the Lord morally, ethically, and spiritually, but there is more. Those who remain faithful to Him are the ones who do not compromise sound doctrine. Paul, in his second letter to the church at Corinth, addresses those who did not remain true to the Lord in doctrine: **“For if a person comes and preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you had not received, or a different gospel, which you had not accepted, you put up with it splendidly!”** (2 Cor 11:4, bold added by this writer).

11:24 - A GOOD MAN. *“(F)or he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith—and large numbers of people were added to the Lord.”* One writer states that, “The sense of the Greek word for ‘good’ indicates he was liberal-minded and not concerned with narrow Jewish sectarianism” [NCWB]. Another writer reminds us that “Luke wrote this description of Barnabas after the confrontation between Paul and Barnabas, recorded in 15:39. Since Luke was Paul’s traveling companion, this statement about Barnabas must have been Paul’s assessment as well” [BKC].

One often hears someone referred to as a good man or a good woman. Yet, the Bible says that no person is good.; only God is good. Only God is absolutely good, and only God is intrinsically good. Fallen man is not good. Paul will stress in Romans that there is none righteous, but when we believe in Jesus Christ, His righteousness is imputed unto him, and in the power of the Holy Spirit he lives a righteous life. Barnabas was “a good man” in the Lord, and in this context we are justified in calling a godly person a good man or a good woman.

FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. Barnabas had been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and he was filled with the Spirit. We need the daily filling of the Holy Spirit and those who repent of their sins and open their hearts to Him will be filled with the Holy Spirit “and faith”. What was the evidence and outcome of his being full of the Holy Spirit and faith? Did he speak in tongues, experience other phenomenal manifestations similar to what the one-hundred, twenty disciples in the upper room experienced on the Day of Pentecost? The outcome here is that “large numbers of people were added to the Lord.”

The average pastor may see many evangelistic programs, attend evangelistic conferences, and led a church to adopt any number of “outreach programs.” The late Dr. H. R. Herrington was rushing to catch up with his responsibilities on his church field so he could make it to an evangelism school in a nearby city. He said to me, “If we could give our people a compassion for lost people we would not have to attend all these meetings and try all these programs.” When one is filled with the Holy Spirit he will be filled with compassion for lost people. Jesus gave us His program in Matthew 28:19-20. The person who is filled with the Holy Spirit will reach out to lost people.

We must witness to lost people, but when we reach them we must disciple them so that they, too, may become effective witnesses. We must also teach them to be true to the Lord, to love one another, and to guard sound doctrine. Bill Pace shared his testimony with friends a few weeks before he returned from his mission work in China for his mother’s 97th birthday celebration. His testimony should be a challenge to any believer:

“My Testimony”
By Bill Pace (July, 2007)

My father and mother started going to church when I was about 3 years old. They took me to church every Sunday morning and evening. We also went on Wednesday evenings. I grew up in the church. About the age of 7 I went forward and was baptized. The reason I went forward was because my brother and a couple of friends went forward so I followed them.

My father became a deacon and I was even taken to these meetings and played with some of the other children while the meeting was going on. I thought when I get older and leave home I will not go to church. I was looking forward to that. Until I graduated from high school I was taken to Sunday school and morning service, Training Union and evening service every Sunday also to prayer meeting on Wednesday evenings.

After I left home I moved to Houston, Texas and lived there about 3 years and never went to church. I then moved to Dallas, Texas and lived there 9 years and never set foot in a Dallas church. When I would go back to visit my parents in Arkansas I would go to church with them and hardly hear a word the preacher said because my mind was on other things.

Easter was coming up on March 30th and my birthday is on March 31st. I would be 37 years old on the day after Easter. I got a call from my Father and Mother saying they were coming to visit me for Easter and my birthday. I thought oh no what will I do? They will want to go to church because it is Easter Sunday. I asked a friend that I worked with since I knew he was a Christian, where should I take them to Church? He said, Billy Graham is going to be at First Baptist Church this Sunday. I knew that would be great because they love Billy Graham.

I called First Baptist to check on it and the time of service. They said it will be at the Convention Center since there are so many people that will be coming. I thought that is good and I won't have to go to the church. I had been to the Convention Center many times.

We arrived there Easter morning and I was taking them to the escalator to go to the upper stands when a lady came up and said, follow me. She took us right down close only three rows from the front. Billy Graham could look me right in the eyes.

That is when the Lord spoke to me and said, this is your last chance. You have been wasting too many years. This is when I made a life change and accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior. My parents thought I was already a Christian since I went down and was baptized when I was seven.

The next week I went out and bought a Bible. I did not know the best kind so bought five different ones. I knew I needed to join a church but thought I did not want to join First Baptist because it is too large and I would never make friends there but the next Sunday I was there and the Lord showed me that is where He wanted me, I joined First Baptist and was baptized as a Christian this time.

I attended every service they had and **I said Lord none of my friends are Christians and I don't know how to tell them about You. What am I to do?** That same week I got a letter from First Baptist saying, we are starting the Way of Life training to teach you how to witness. Come and join us. I took the Way of Life training and that is another story but we went door to door witnessing and on my first outing a lady prayed to receive Christ. Later I worked with Here's Life Dallas and it was a wonderful ministry. Many people accepted Christ during this time. I was director of the phone center

and we had 22 phones with people from several different churches there from about 10 am to 10 pm answering the phones. I was there most of the time. We had billboards, TV and radio ads plus bumper stickers with "I Found It! You can find it too!" Each time there was an ad on TV every phone would light up with calls. We would tell the callers that we would bring a booklet about how to become a Christian. The one that talked with them will visit and witness to them. Many people were led to Christ. This exciting campaign lasted a month.

After it was over I was at the phone center by my self packing a few things. I knew it was a very successful ministry but was feeling a little disappointed because I was in the center the full time and did not get to go visiting. I said, Lord I know this was a success and I had a great part in it but I did not get to lead anyone to salvation my self. It wasn't 10 minutes later that the phone rang and a teenage girl was on the phone. She said, I called to get one of those books and no one came and I don't want to die and go to hell. I said, give me your address and I will be right there. When I got to the address there were three girls sitting under a tree. The one that called said this is my friend and my sister. I witnessed to them and they all three prayed to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. On my way back to the office I thanked my Father God for using me to lead these girls to salvation. He is a wonderful God that loves everyone and wants all to accept His Son Jesus as their Savior.

I had people to come up and ask me to tell them about Jesus. I was walking down the street close to the church and a man came up and said can you help me pray to God. I took him into a room and shared with him and he prayed to receive Christ. I asked him if he had a Bible and he said no. I got his address and said I will bring you one on Sunday. Sunday I prayed all the way there asking that he would be home where I could follow up with him. When I got to the address a young lady answered the door. I asked for him and she said I am his sister but he is not home. She invited me in and I told here I brought him a Bible. I shared with her and she prayed to receive Christ. On the way back home I thanked God for him not being home because I would have spent the full time with him and would not shared with her. We should leave it all in God's hands He knows what is best.

Father, I want to care about the whole world the way You do. Let my heart be moved by the millions who have yet to hear the Good News of Your love. I accept the Great Commission as my commission. Here am I, send me.

Now I am in China doing the Lord work and asking Him to use me in a mighty way. Lord God I want to love you with all my heart and want You to use me though I am so unworthy. Thank You that Jesus has paid the price for my sins.

I am your slave. Bill Pace
(Bold added by this writer)

11:25 - SEARCH FOR SAUL. *“Then he went to Tarsus to search for Saul...”* When the church grew to the point that he needed help, Barnabas, who was full of the Holy Spirit, was led of the Spirit to go to Tarsus to find Saul. Tarsus had probably been Saul’s headquarters for the past five or six years (since Barnabas and others put him on a ship in Caesarea bound for Tarsus). It is amazing that after all this time he would think of Saul of Tarsus. Or was it that the Holy Spirit reminded him of Saul? Barnabas had recognized Saul’s sincerity earlier and now he is convinced of his value to the spread of the Gospel. He had probably received reports of his work in Syria and Cilicia (Gal. 1:21), and was convinced that he would be an asset to the work at Antioch.

That must rank among the greatest additions to any staff in the history of the church. I was serving on the executive committee for the LifeWay Christian Resources board of trustees when we voted to approve the Presidential Search Committee’s recommendation of Thom Rainer as the next president to replace Jimmy Draper. I was on the executive committee when we approved Dr. Rainer’s recommendation to create a new position for an executive Vice President and name Tom Hellams as the Vice President. I was on the executive committee that approved Dr. Rainer’s recommendation to create a new Research Division and name Dr. Brad Waggoner as Vice President over that division. I was on the board when we created the Technology Division and named Tim Vineyard Vice President. I had an opportunity to speak for John Kramp and then speak to President Jimmy Draper about recommending my friend as Vice President over Church Resources. I know all of those leaders well enough to feel sure that they would agree that the decision Barnabas made to add Saul of Tarsus to his staff ranks higher than any they could imagine. Confirmation would come when Barnabas and Saul became Paul and Barnabas before they returned from the first great missionary journey.

11:26 - WHEN HE FOUND HIM. *“(A)nd when he found him he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers, and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”* It may have taken Barnabas some time finding Saul because he was busy with the Lord’s work. Characteristically, Luke does not go into such details. A logical question might be that since Saul had no “911 address”, and no cell phone, it would be a challenge to find one tent maker in a city of any size. Another possibility is that Barnabas had a general idea where Saul was. He may have heard from him. We be sure that Saul was not silent and he was not inactive. Some of the suffering to which he refers in 2 Corinthians 11 may have occurred during these years while was in Tarsus.

A WHOLE YEAR. Saul of Tarsus served as an assistant to Barnabas for a whole year in Antioch, during which time they met with the church to worship and taught large numbers the essentials of the faith. I cannot imagine Paul preaching in a style that is popular among some today. I have concluded that the Lord did not call me to entertain the sheep, to traumatize the sheep, or to psychoanalyze the sheep. The Lord called me to feed His sheep. How do I do that? Through the

preaching of the Word of God and through the teaching of the Word of God. We preach and witness to lost people, praying that they will be saved. We preach expository sermons and teach believers so that they may grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). We teach people both for their own growth and for the edification of the church.

LARGE NUMBERS. This stresses the phenomenal growth of the church in the area as a result of the preaching and teaching of the Gospel (see vv. 21, 24, 26). Not only do we teach sound doctrines, we teach believers how to witness for Jesus Christ, and then seek to motivate them to be witnesses.

DISCIPLES. The word disciple has a two-fold meaning: (1) following, and (2) learning. Thence, a disciple was one who followed after another to learn from him.

CALLED CHRISTIANS. “(T)he disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” This name, Christians, “had its origin outside the Christian community. The Jewish enemies called them “Nazarenes” (24:5), but it was the heathen Romans of Antioch who first used the word ‘Christian.’ The term was merely descriptive in its first use; it means ‘of Christ,’ ‘belonging to Christ’ [NCWB]. Clarke believes they were given this name by Barnabas and Saul:

“It is evident they had the name Christians from CHRIST their master; as the Platonists and Pythagoreans had their name from their masters, Plato and Pythagoras. Now, as these had their name from those great masters because they attended their teaching, and credited their doctrines, so the disciples were called Christians because they took Christ for their teacher, crediting his doctrines, and following the rule of life laid down by him. It has been a question, by whom was this name given to the disciples? Some think they assumed it; others, that the inhabitants of Antioch gave it to them; and others, that it was given by Saul and Barnabas. This later opinion is favored by the Codex Bezae, which reads the 25th and 26th verses thus: And hearing that Saul was at Tarsus, he departed, seeking for him; and having found him, he besought him to come to Antioch; who, when they were come, assembled with the Church a whole year, and instructed a great number; and there they first called the disciples at Antioch Christians” [CLARKE].

Another possibility is that they were called Christians by non-believers because they talked about Christ. They insist that this name was not given to believers as a compliment but a term of derision - as in Christites. Regardless of who named them, or why the name was given, the name stuck, and believers have been wearing that name, both in humility and joy, ever since.

Famine Relief for Saints in Jerusalem

11:27 - SOME PROPHETS. “*In those days some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.*” “In those days” denotes the time when Barnabas and Saul were working together. This is

the first mention of Christian prophets. The title is given to Barnabas and others in 13:1. The word denotes one who interprets God's message, primarily as a forth-teller of the Word, but may sometimes be a fore-teller of the message of God. "These were inspired teachers who sometimes foretold future events. They were classed next to the apostles (1 Cor. 12:28, 29; Eph. 4:11) [NCWB]. MacArthur adds,

"The first Gentile church was not only sound in doctrine but also strong in love. **At this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch** bearing disturbing news. The term **prophet** refers not to an Old Testament figure such as Isaiah or John the Baptist but to the preachers of the New Testament (cf. 1 Cor. 14:32; Eph. 2:20) [MAC ARTHUR, bold added].

FROM JERUSALEM. I wonder why none of the commentaries I consulted expressed an opinion as to why these prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. Were they sent? Did they flee persecution? Did they go to Antioch seeking help for the saints in Jerusalem? Or did the Lord send them there to inform the church there about conditions in Jerusalem?

11:28 - AGABUS. *"Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine throughout the Roman world. This took place during the time of Claudius."* Agabus is mentioned again in 21:10-11. Here, he stood up and "prophesied **that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world.** Actually, a series of severe famines "struck various sections of the Roman Empire **during the reign of Emperor Claudius** (a.d. 41-54.) This same Claudius later expelled Jews from Rome (18:2) [BKC]. Walker adds,

"Regarding Palestine, the harvest seems to have failed largely in A. D. 45 and completely in A. D. 46. In the latter year a severe famine set in and continued for a time beyond that. Josephus tells of Queen Helena (mother of Izates, king of the province of Syria) who went to Jerusalem as a proselyte in A. D. 45 and stayed through the famine to distribute corn and figs which she imported for the purpose from Egypt and Cyprus" [WALKER].

11:29 - EACH OF THE DISCIPLES. *"So each of the disciples, according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers who lived in Judea."* Agabus was moved by the Spirit to prophesy that there would be a famine throughout the entire Roman world, and as soon as the disciples in Antioch heard the prophecy they were moved by the Holy Spirit to begin taking up an offering for the saints in Jerusalem who would most certainly suffer. Many had already been rejected by family, turned away by friends, ostracized and persecuted by society, and forced out of business. When the famine came those friends and family members were not going to help those who had followed Jesus. The Lord had someone else to help them - just as He previously had a man named Barnabas there who would sell all his property and lay the proceeds at the feet of the apostles so that food might be purchased for distribution among the widows and orphans. A spirit of love and compassion characterized those who were first called "Christians".

11:30 - SENDING IT. *“This they did, sending it to the elders by means of Barnabas and Saul.”* The “Christians” in Antioch wasted no time in gathering the free-will offering from the saints in Antioch for the saints in Jerusalem: Hellenistic Jews coming to the aid of Palestinian Jews (as well as a significant number of Hellenistic Jews. This was Saul’s second visit to Jerusalem after his conversion on the road to Damascus. The first had been after the disciples in Damascus had slipped him out of the city ahead of those who would have taken his life. They had lowered him through a window in the great wall in a basket.

Three years lapsed between his conversion and his first return to Jerusalem. He had worked with Barnabas one year before returning with this offering. If he had worked in and around Tarsus 5 or 6 years, that would mean that he had been converted A. D.35 or 36.

Chapter 12

James Becomes the First Apostle Martyred

12:1 - ABOUT THAT TIME. *“About that time King Herod cruelly attacked some who belonged to the church...”* This was about the time Barnabas and Saul were actively ministering and preaching in Antioch.

KING HEROD. Herod’s persecution and his death, recorded here, took place before the great famine prophesied by Agabus while he was visiting Antioch. It is easy to mix up the Herods of the New Testament. This one was the grandson of Herod the Great and the son of Aristobulus, two prominent kings whose reigns we cover in the story of the birth of Jesus, the flight to Egypt, and the return, not to Bethlehem, but to Nazareth. He was the nephew of Herod Antipas who ordered the execution of John the Baptist. This Herod was born about A. D. 10, and sent to Rome where he was reared. His friendship with Caligula caused him to be thrown into prison, but when Caligula became emperor he was rewarded with the title king and given the provinces or tetrarches of Philip and Lysanius (Luke 3:1), and later on, Galilee and Perea. Claudius added Judea and Samaria, so after A. D 41, he ruled over all the territory which had been under his infamous grandfather, Herod the Great. King Agrippa I held sway over all Palestine for a while.

Herod reigned “proved to be a strong supporter of Judaism and sought to maintain friendly relations with the religious leaders” [NCWB]. To show his support for Jewish leaders, “Herod cruelly attacked some who belonged to the church...” It seems there is nothing so cruel as religious persecution. It is very important to add that there is a reason for that. In the first place, “religion” is not synonymous with “Christian”. It is disturbing to Fox News and hear various anchors and reporters refer to themselves, or others, as “religious” or “spiritual”, but avoid the name Jesus or the title Christ. Religion has to do with man’s attempt to appease an angry God to avoid destruction, or to try to get the attention of a benevolent god in order to gain his favor. In Christianity, no one “finds

God". Jesus came to seek and save the lost and the individual can only respond to the One God Who gave His Son to die for him or her on the Cross. Christianity has to do with God's revelation of His redemptive love through creation, through His work within the individual, and through His Word, all under the active ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Christianity is of God. Religion is of the devil, who can fire up individuals to commit acts of uncontrolled rage and fill the streets with fanatical mobs whose rage will not abate until it runs its course, or the individuals are exhausted. We see pictures of this in Islamic countries on a regular basis. The hatred, fanatical demonstrations, violence, and murder we witness in Palestine against Israel is but one example.

Herod's persecution of the church appealed, not to wild-eyed fanatics in the street, but to dignified, pious religious leaders whose positions and whose lives depended upon their controlling all things religious in Judea. They wanted this new "Way" stopped before it attracted the attention of Rome and placed them at risk. These are the ones whose plots and plans had led to the death of Jesus. Herod is doing their work and being honored for doing so.

12:2 - KILLED JAMES. *"(A)nd he killed James, John's brother, with the sword."* This is James the son of Zebedee, the brother of John. The two had been nicknamed The Sons of Thunder. James was one of the chief apostles and we can be sure he was active in the church and that his leadership had attracted the attention of Herod. After he first chapter, he is not mentioned prior to this in Acts.

Just as there is no perfect human being, there was no perfect apostle. The Bible was not written to make heroes of individuals, or we would not read about Abraham's lies or David's darkest days. Mark (10:35-40) records a scene which paints an ugly picture, first of James and John, and then of the rest of the apostles.

"Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached Him and said, "Teacher, we want You to do something for us if we ask You"

"What do you want Me to do for you?" He asked them.

They answered Him, "Allow us to sit at Your right and at Your left in Your glory."

But Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup I drink or to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

"We are able," they told Him.

Jesus said to them, "**You will drink the cup I drink**, and you will be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with. But to sit at My right or left is not Mine to give; instead, it is for those it has been prepared for." When the [other] 10 [disciples] heard this, they began to be indignant with James and John. (Mark 10:35-41, bold

added).

James would be the first apostle to die for Jesus. One might wonder why God would let this happen. After all, James had walked with Jesus for three years. He, with his brother John and Simon Peter made up the inner circle of the apostles. He had been trained to be a leader in the Christian movement, but now he becomes the first of the apostles to be martyred for his Lord. John would be the last. Jesus had foretold their martyrdom, just as He had told Peter how he would die for Him (John 21:18). The modern day preacher, whether pastor, evangelist, missionary, or denominational worker, should pay attention to the words of Jesus that followed the reaction of the other apostles to the request by James and John. God did not call these apostles to focus their eyes on a higher position, more money, or a legacy. He redirected their focus on total surrender to Him.

The previous persecutions (as many as six) had been at the hands of religious leaders. This new one, in A. D. 44, was through the state. Stephen is listed as the first Christian martyr, and that is true unless we consider John the Baptist whose death was ordered by Herod Antipas (Mark 6:14-29). The sword was a political mode of execution, considered disgraceful by the Jews. The account of the martyrdom of James is brief, but well in keeping with Luke's style and method.

NOTE: See APPENDIX I at the end of this volume for others who were martyred for their faith.

12:3 - WHEN HE SAW. *“When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter too, during the days of Unleavened Bread.”* It paid to please the Jews, and Herod played up to the leaders and posed as a devout adherent to their faith. He was the king, but he knew only too well the importance of being popular with these leaders. Many rulers had been sabotaged by them, including Pilate. Ever political, Herod saw that the execution of James pleased the Jewish leaders, so he “proceeded to arrest Peter too.”

UNLEAVENED BREAD. The festival of Passover lasted seven days, during which time no leavened bread was allowed in a Jewish home. “During the days of Unleavened Bread” fixes the time of the year in which Peter was arrested. In other words, this was a time when there would be a lot of people in Jerusalem and the arrest of Peter would attract a lot of attention to Herod, and assure the support of the religious leaders for his administration, which would have played well with Rome.

12:4 - PUT HIM IN PRISON. *“After the arrest, he put him in prison and assigned four squads of four soldiers each to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover.”* This was the third time Peter had been in prison. Herod may well have been reminded of Peter's earlier escape (5:19-24), and he was taking no chances. He had him thrown into prison, assigned four squads of guards to keep him there. This “Probably this means two were chained to Peter, one on each side and two were standing guard outside (cf. vv. 6, 10). The four squads probably were each on guard for six hours each” [BKC]. John MacArthur adds a fitting commentary here:

Solomon well expressed the hopelessness of fighting God when he wrote, “There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the Lord” (Prov.

21:30). Though sinful men often hail those who fight against God as wise, in reality they are fools. True wisdom lies in being on God's side.

History is strewn with the wreckage of the broken lives of those foolish enough to fight God. The nineteenth-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche despised Christianity as the religion of weaklings. Fighting God eventually pushed him over the brink, and he spent the last several years of his life insane.

Novelist Sinclair Lewis, winner of the 1930 Nobel Prize for literature, also thought he could fight God. His novel *Elmer Gantry* mocked Christianity. Its leading character was an evangelist who was also an alcoholic and an unceasing fornicator. Lewis's fight against God cost him his sobriety, and he died a hopeless alcoholic in a clinic near Rome.

Another Nobel-Prize-winning author, Ernest Hemingway, considered himself living proof that one could successfully fight God. He boasted of fighting in revolutions, tumbling women, and leading a life of sin without apparent consequences. His sins eventually found him out, however, and he put a shotgun to his head and killed himself. Fighting God cost him his life.

In biblical times, just as in our own, there were those who tried vainly to battle God. Many of them were kings or other rulers, whose immense earthly power deceived them into thinking they could successfully oppose heaven. In reality, they and their kingdoms "are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust. All the nations are as nothing before Him, they are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless" (Isa. 40:15, 17) [MAC ARTHUR].

INTENDING. This was a great political opportunity and Herod meant to take full advantage of it. He was "intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover", revealing his fake piety. He knew how the Jewish leaders skirted the Passover with their murderous machination and conspiracy at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus.

12:5 - PRAYER WAS MADE. "So Peter was kept in prison, but prayer was being made earnestly to God for him by the church." This was one thing neither Herod nor the religious leaders had yet grasped. Jesus had prophesied such suffering, but He had also told His disciples to pray, believing, and their prayers would be answered. In this case, we see that the sovereign will of God is not thwarted when the faith of His followers falters during trying times. Peter was in prison, but the saints were praying. Dr. Eddleman wrote that this points to the "basic principles of efficacious praying:

a) It must begin, and begin spontaneously as disciples asked Christ, 'Lord, teach us to pray.' It is not, 'Lord, teach us how to pray. One learns to pray by praying;

- b) **‘Earnestly’** points to the fervor and sense of burden with which they prayed;
- c) **‘By the church’** points to the most propitious people by whom, and most appropriate context in which prayer can be made: those called out by God to represent Him before the world;
- d) **‘To God’** points to the only One to whom prayer should be directed, even though it is in the name of (meaning for the sake of) His Son;
- e) **‘For him’** is (the) specific object for praying, not some causes marked by fluidity” [HLE: 161-162, bold added by his writer].

There are saints who are suffering around the world, when millions of Christians who have never suffered for the Lord go on about their business (and pleasure) with hardly a thought to those persecuted saints. What we see here is an awesome power released through the faith and prayers of God’s people. That power has never diminished. Think of the power unleashed when a New Testament church prays earnestly for that which is consistent with the will and purpose of God.

Peter Is Delivered from Prison

12:6 - ON THE NIGHT. *“On the night before Herod was to bring him out [for execution] , Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, while the sentries in front of the door guarded the prison.”* Luke, as we have come to expect, provides in the briefest statements the historical context in which an even occurred. It was the night before Herod had planned to bring him out of prison to have him executed. Everyone knew that, unless it was Simon Peter, who was sleeping between two soldiers, to whom he was chained. There were also two sentries at the door to the prison. Herod was not going to be denied his show! **“Peter was so trusting the Lord that he was sound asleep the night before his trial** (cf. 1 Peter 2:23; 5:7). He did not fear for his life because Christ had said he would live to an old age (John 21:18) [BKC].

12:7 - ANGEL OF THE LORD. *“Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. Striking Peter on the side, he woke him up and said, “Quick, get up!” Then the chains fell off his wrists.”* We have the same wording in Luke 2:9 when the angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to the shepherds. It is interesting how many times the Lord acts “suddenly” or quickly. The “angel of the Lord” distinguishes this heavenly guest from any apparition, as well as from satanic angels.

A LIGHT. This probably occurred between 3:00 A.M. and 6:00 A.M., between the changing of the guards. How fitting that there should be a light from the Light of the World. The angel of the Lord appears suddenly, but once he arrives on the scene there is not sense of the rush associated with panic. Peter was to obey immediately, but he was not to panic.

STRIKING PETER. This emphasizes the fact that Peter was sound asleep. He is not in a state of panic, but resting in his faith in the providence and sovereignty of God.

QUICK, GET UP! When one first sees this, he might well think that the angel is telling Peter it is time to flee for his life, but the angel is there to save his life. Peter must obey quickly, but at no time does the angel lose control of the situation. The instant he stood up the chains with which he was bound to the guard on either side fell from his wrists.

12:8 - GET DRESSED. *“Get dressed,’ the angel told him, ‘and put on your sandals.’ And he did so. ‘Wrap your cloak around you,’ he told him, ‘and follow me.”* It is significant that the angel did not whisper, “Grab your robe and run for your life!” Even under these circumstances, he tells Peter to get dressed. He was not to waste time, but he had time to get dressed. He would tie his undergarment (girdle) first, and when he had done so the angel told him to put on his sandals. After that he was told to put on his cloak, or outer robe. The angel is in complete control and Peter was doing his part when he obeyed him without question.

Just how much power or authority did this angel have? Just as much as he needed. Recall the death angel that moved through Egypt on that first Passover and you begin to get the picture. Recall the angel the Lord sent through the camp of Sennacherib in 701 B.C., when 185,000 Assyrian soldiers were left dead, and you understand that this angel was in complete control.

FOLLOW ME. This is the same command Jesus gave his initial disciples and it means “keep on following me.” The angel is moving Peter quickly out of the prison, but this does not imply tense haste as though they were being pursued. It is interesting to observe how precise the instructions from the angel were.

12:9 - WENT OUT. *“So he went out and followed, and he did not know that what took place through the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.”* Just as he obeyed in getting dressed, he obeyed when he was told to follow the angel out of the prison. However, “he did not know whether what he was experiencing was real or another vision. Robertson wrote:

“Peter had had a vision in Joppa (Acts 10:10) which Luke describes as an “ecstasy,” but here is objective fact, at least Luke thought so and makes that distinction. Peter will soon know whether he is still in the cell or not as we find out that a dream is only a dream when we wake up” [ATR].

One commentary states that “He really didn’t expect to be delivered from these circumstances” [NCWB], but is more likely that he did not expect to be delivered in this manner. As noted above Jesus had told him that he would be led to his execution at an old age (John 21:18). That does mean that he could not have been confused as to whether or not this was real or another vision.

12:10 - THEY WENT OUT. *“After they passed the benign and second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened to them by itself. They went outside and passed*

one street, and immediately the angel left him.” Luke is describing the supernatural in a natural way here. There were two gates and inner gate where prisoners could be controlled inside the prison, and an outside gate, the iron gate, that led from the prison out into the city. This is a sufficient reminder of the promise Jesus had made that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His church.

IMMEDIATELY THE ANGEL LEFT HIM. His work was over, so he left Peter “immediately.” God again acts immediately, or suddenly. Peter would know where to go and what to do now.

SPECIAL NOTE: The angel left Peter; **God did not leave him!** God sent an angel to deliver him from prison because He had something far better in mind for Peter. Jesus had told His disciples that it would be better for Him to go back to the Father so He could send the Holy Spirit, who would indwell and empower His followers.

For many years, Americans were entertained by a television program *Touched By an Angel*, a clean show that allowed Christians to be entertained without fear of profanity, vulgarity, nudity, or immorality. That was the up-side of the program. The down-side was that many Christians missed the fact that these angels were not biblical angels, but New Age angels. They often quoted from the Bible, mentioned biblical concepts and principles, and talked of God. They did not, however, talk about Jesus Christ! They may have included him innocuously in a nativity scene, but they made it a point to “hide” Jesus from the public, lest they offend.

Everywhere you went, you found stores selling little toy angels, pictures of angels, statues of angels. Angels became very popular, as even Christians collected them. When there were rumors that the network might cancel the program, Christians called, sent e-mail messages, and wrote letters trying to persuade them to keep *Touched By an Angel* on the air. I watched the reruns many time, mainly because I was trying to avoid the filth the networks call entertainment. Sadly, a lot of church members agreed with them.

God withdrew His angel, but He did not withdraw Himself from Simon Peter. He had something for better for him. He had given him the Holy Spirit to convict people of sin, convince them of the righteousness available to them in Jesus Christ, to empower them, guide them, and enlighten them. Today, the same Holy Spirit who supernaturally inspired every Word of Scripture in ancient times, and supernaturally preserved the it through the centuries, fills the hearts and minds of believers so as to supernaturally enlighten them.

Lost people can learn Bible stories: people, dates and events. Lost people cannot understand the truth of the Word of God because the deeper truths of the Word of God are only spiritually discerned. Angels are real, and they serve at the will and command of God - but it is not the role of any angel to convict people of sin, draw them to the Cross, teach them the Word, show them how to make and application of its truth, or sanctify them - which is God’s way of conforming all believers to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29).

Angels are real. Of that I have no doubt whatsoever. Have I ever seen one? No. Does that bother me? Not in the least. If it served the Lord's purpose to send an angel to help me, I would be deeply humbled. Am I missing anything? No. I have something far better than an angel who has been sent to perform a special service or ministry. I have the Holy Spirit who guides me and empowers me every moment of every day.

12:11 - PETER CAME TO HIMSELF. *“Then Peter came to himself and said, ‘Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel and rescued me from Herod’s grasp and from all that the Jewish people expected.’”* He is on his own. He must make the next decision now that the angel has departed from him. It was at this point that he became fully conscious of the fact that the Lord really had sent an angel to deliver him from Herod. It was not a vision. Not only would Herod be surprised, the Jewish leaders would be disappointed. Without doubt, the great number of Jews gathered for Passover were anticipating the drama the next day.

RESCUED ME. The word, rescued (delivered) is used in 7:34 of the deliverance from Egypt. Someone has noted that Peter now experiences a new Passover - after the Pascal feast.

12:12 - THE HOUSE OF MARY. *“When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many had assembled and were praying.”* Peter, now awake and conscious of his divine deliverance, sets out for the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Luke distinguishes this Mary from others who shared the very popular name. There are six Marys mentioned in the New Testament: (1) Mary the mother of Jesus, (2) Mary of Bethany, (3) Mary Magdalene, (4) Mary the mother of James and Joses, (5) Mary the wife of Cleopas, and (6) Mary the mother of John Mark.

Apparently, this was the logical place to go. It may have been in her home where the one hundred-twenty has met as they waited for Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Her house “was quite large and had served as a meeting place for Jerusalem Christians. Mary must also have been known for her faith and courage to allow such a meeting under threat of persecution. It was natural that Peter would go to her house” [NCWB]. John Mark may have been mentioned to distinguish this Mary from other Marys, but Luke may well have been introducing a young man who would be remembered until the Lord returns. The Lord had plans for him and to help prepare him, he placed him in the company of his cousin Barnabas, Paul, and Peter. Who could have imagined at this time that this young man would be one of the Gospel writers?

PRAYING. Many of the saints had gathered together in Mary's home to pray for Peter. The word “assembled” stresses commitment. This is intentional praying. They came together to pray for Simon Peter. Christians pray, thanking God for their food, for a night's rest, for a safe trip, for guidance, and for wisdom to make the right decision. Sometimes, there is such thing as desperation praying, when believers have no other place to go but to the Lord. This was one of those times when they had exhausted their options. No political connections would help them. No amount of money would set Peter free. Yet, God had plans for him. They came together, not with doubt that says there is nothing left to do, but with faith that says, this is what we must do.

12:13 - HE KNOCKED. *“He knocked at the door in the gateway, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer.”* The saints were inside praying for Peter as he approached “the door in the gateway” and knocked. A servant named Rhoda answered the knock and what happened next will be remembered both humorously, and joyfully until the Lord returns.

12:14 - SHE RECOGNIZED. *“She recognized Peter’s voice, and because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gateway.”* The saints were praying for Peter, but when she recognized his voice, she became so excited that she forgot to open the gate. Instead, she ran back to announce that he was standing at the gateway.

12:15 - SHE INSISTED. *“You’re crazy!” they told her. But she kept insisting that it was true. Then they said, ‘It’s his angel!’* Their response surprises readers today as much as Rhoda’s action. There is no way we can know how many sermons and Sunday School lessons have focused on their response. They were praying fervently for his release, but when their prayers were answered they couldn’t believe it. “You’re crazy!”, they said.

Are we superior to those early saints who were caught up in an intense persecution? The opposite may in fact be the case. We can reasonably explain their reaction in two ways: (1) the answer came sooner than they expected it, and (2) the answer was more spectacular and dramatic than they expected. In fact, it was supernatural. Do we always pray anticipating the supernatural? Stephen Olford taught, “Faith is not believing God can do it, faith is believing God will do it.” I walked through the same line with Stephen Olford when he received his ThD degree and I received the D.Min. For some reason, it was not me but Stephen Olford they asked to address those attending a “colloquy” for all students who were graduating that year. I discovered why Dr. Robert Gee Witty, President of Luther Rice Universtiy, wanted us to hear this mighty man of God.

Stephen Olford was the son of a British missionary and his American wife who were serving in Africa when he was a youth. Olford told about the time the family was being guided through the jungles of Africa by native guides and assisted by native bearers, when they came to a river where they were to replenish their water supply. The river was dry and during the night the natives slipped away, taking all the water with them. He said that he knew all the symptoms of one who dies of thirst. His lips were cracked, his tongue was swollen, and he couldn’t talk. He was dying, along with his parents and his brother. At one point, according to Dr. Olford, his father stepped out from under a tree and looked up toward the sky and prayed, “Oh, Lord God, I know you didn’t bring us out here into this jungle for us to die like this.” Then, looking to the sky, he said, “In the name of Jesus, I command you to form clouds and send rain.” Within ten minutes, Olford testified, they were collecting rainwater in every pot and pan they had with them. “Faith is not believing God can do it, faith is believing God will do it.”

12:16 - KEPT ON KNOCKING. *“Peter, however, kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astounded.”* When Peter kept on knocking, they went to check and

found him at the door. Luke, who may well have heard some of those people tell of the experience, writes that they were astounded. Certain word characterized the early church movement, words like suddenly, immediately, joyfully. Now we can add the word “astounded”,

12:17 - MOTIONING TO THEM. *“Motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he explained to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. ‘Report these things to James and the brothers,’ he said. Then he departed and went to a different place.”* Luke gives us the basic history in a nutshell. The people were astounded, desiring to know what had happened. Peter silenced them by raising his hand to get their attention. Then he explained how the Lord had delivered him from prison. The most natural thing for Peter to do upon his release was to go to the home of Mary and tell them what had happened. The second thing was to tell them to go report to “James and the brothers.”

REPORT THESE THINGS TO JAMES. There was a new leader on the scene. If we move from this occasion when the word was given to report to James, and move to the end of Paul’s Third Missionary Journey, at which time he reported to James one wonders how many times various people coming into Jerusalem reported to James. For that matter, one wonders how many times people came to him with reports on the condition of the saints, the actions of the Sanhedrin, and other things that might impact the church. This James, the half-brother of Jesus, is not to be confused with James, the son of Zebedee, brother of John, the Beloved Disciple, who had just been martyred. He was the half-brother of Jesus, and he was becoming the leader of the church in Jerusalem. His leadership was crucial during these times, as history is rushing them toward the destruction of the Temple in A. D. 70. The apostles would be moving out into the missions fields of the world.

12:18 - GREAT COMMOTION. *“At daylight, there was a great commotion among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter.”* Peter’s deliverance from prison, as previously noted, must have been during the 3:00 - 6:00 A. M. watch. This means that by the time he reached the home of Mary where the saints were praying and then sent word to James, it was not long before daylight. There would have been a great commotion at the prison when the guards came to and found that their prisoner gone, the chains were still hanging from their wrists. Those at the iron gate would have been frightened because such failure on their part could lead to their execution.

12:19 - SEARCHED AND DID NOT FIND. *“After Herod had searched and did not find him, he interrogated the guards and ordered their execution. Then Herod went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.”* The guards searched for Peter, and then Herod had others search for him, but to no avail. Then, he interrogated the guards who had lost the prisoner, and then ordered their execution. “Herod no doubt justified such harshness by reasoning that guards whose prisoners escape are irresponsible and unreliable. Yet Herod lost 16 guards by his actions (cf.v. 4). **Herod** then left **Judea** to stay for **a while** in **Caesarea**, the capital of the Roman province of Judea, from which Roman governors governed the nation” [BKC]. Any time we wonder how much danger a guard or soldier faced when his performance was questioned by a commander or king in those days all we have to do is look at this verse. Herod had 16

men killed because of Peter's escape.

Someone has marveled that Agrippa could have hardly imagined that three hundred years later Roman Emperor Constantine would give some soldiers the choice of being baptized or being beheaded and place Christianity on the way to becoming the state religion. It would not take that long for Christianity to become a dominant influence in some places, including the Island of Briton, according to Dr. William R. Cooper, *AFTER THE FLOOD*, New Wine Press, Chichester, England, 1995). Dr. Cooper cites ancient reports that Christianity took roots in remote parts of that Island that Rome never completely conquered.

Herod's Shocking Death

12:20 - VERY ANGRY. *"He had been very angry with the Tyrians and Sidonians. Together they presented themselves before him, and having won over Blastus, who was in charge of the king's bedroom, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food from the king's country."* Apparently several months had passed since Peter's deliverance from prison (12:6-19).

We are not given the reason, but Herod had become "very angry with the Tyrians and Sidonians" (people of Tyre and Sidon). "Technically, those cities fell outside Herod's jurisdiction, "but since Old Testament times **their country** had been **fed** by the region ruled by Herod (cf1 Kings 5:11; Ezra 3:7; Ezek. 27:17)" [MAC ARTHUR]. Realizing the danger of having incurred the wrath of Herod, the people first "won over Blastus, who was in charge of the king's bedroom", and then presented themselves before him, after having they were asking for peace.

12:21 - AN APPOINTED DAY. *"So on an appointed day, dressed in royal robes and seated on the throne, Herod delivered a public address to them."* MacArthur offers an explanation of the circumstances:

"Herod agreed to terms, but to further demonstrate his prowess, he subjected the ambassadors from the two cities to a spectacle. **On an appointed day** (according to the Jewish historian Josephus the occasion was a feast in honor of Herod's patron, the Roman Emperor Claudius), **Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them.** They met in the amphitheater built by Agrippa's grandfather, Herod the Great. Josephus describes the scene: "[Herod] put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner" (*Antiquities* XIX, vii, 2) [MAC ARTHUR].

12:22 - THE POPULACE. *“The populace began to shout, ‘It’s the voice of a god and not of a man!’”* The populace had gathered before Herod. “Overwhelmed by his splendor (or, more likely, seeking to flatter him), **the people kept crying out, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’** Josephus notes that Herod “did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery” (*Antiquities* XIX, vii, 2) [MAC ARTHUR].

12:23 - AT ONCE AN ANGEL. *“At once an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give the glory to God, and he became infected with worms and died.”*

“God’s response was swift. **Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.** Dr. Jean Sloat Morton comments,

‘The phrase “eaten of worms,” in Greek is *skolakobrotos*. The root word *skolax* means **“a specific head structure of a tapeworm.”** Since the word *scolex* (plural *scolices*) is applied to the head of tapeworms, Herod’s death was almost certainly due to the rupture of a cyst formed by a tapeworm. There are several kinds of tapeworms, but one of the most common ones found in sheep-growing countries is the dog tape, *Echinococcus granulosus*. The heaviest infections come from areas where sheep and cattle are raised. Sheep and cattle serve as intermediate hosts for the parasite. The dog eats the infected meat, then man gets the eggs from the dog, usually by fecal contamination of hair.

‘The disease is characterized by the formation of cysts, generally on the right lobe of the liver; these may extend down into the abdominal cavity. The rupture of such a cyst may release as many as two million scolices. The developing worms inside of the cysts are called scolices, because the anterior region constitutes the major part of development at this stage. *When the cyst ruptures, the entrance of cellular debris along with the scolices may cause sudden death.’*

“The use of the word *scolex* is not limited to this reference about Herod; the term also appears in Mark 9:44. A literal translation of the phrase in Mark 9:44 would read, “where their scolex dieth not.” This usage is very interesting because the tapeworm keeps propagating itself. Each section of the worm is a self-contained unit which has both male and female parts. The posterior part matures and forms hundreds of worm eggs. The word *scolex* in this text portrays a biological description of permanence which the text demands for the comparison. (*Science in the Bible* [Chicago: Moody, 1978], 261–62).

“According to Josephus, Herod lingered on for five days, in terrible pain. Amid all his pomp and majesty, he suffered an ignominious and shameful death. So ended the reign and life of the man who had dared to touch two of God’s apostles. His crime for which he was executed (a.d. 44) was that **he did not give God the glory**, the very crime for which all the unregenerate

who reject God will be condemned (Rom. 1:18–23) [MAC ARTHUR, bold italics added by this writer].

NOTE - WHY DOESN'T GOD DO SOMETHING LIKE THIS TODAY? Why should He have to do it? If you read this passage that should be sufficient. People constantly asked Jesus to give them a sign. He did, and what did they do? They demanded another and bigger sign. That is a characteristic of fallen human nature. You do not need a miracle a day to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the only Savior He offers to anyone. He has given us His Son, He has affirmed Him over and over. Therefore, we are responsible for our response and there will be no excuses.

12:24 - GOD'S MESSAGE FLOURISHED. *“Then God's message flourished and multiplied.”* At first, they were adding, now they are multiplying! Here, rather than stating that the believer's flourished and multiplied, Luke tells us that **the Gospel flourished and multiplied** (see also, 6:7; 13:49; 19:20). “In spite of opposition and persecution the Lord sovereignly prospered the work of His church. With this progress report Luke brought another section of his work to a conclusion (cf. 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31). From Antioch the gospel message was now ready to go to Asia Minor” [BKC].

12:25 - BARNABAS AND SAUL. *“And Barnabas and Saul returned to Jerusalem after they had completed their relief mission, on which they took John Mark.”* The NASB has “from Jerusalem.” The NCWB carries the note that “Some early manuscripts read “to Jerusalem” instead of “from Jerusalem.” In order to fit this in the Acts narrative thus far, this could be rendered, “Barnabas and Saul returned, having fulfilled their service in Jerusalem.” After accomplishing their mission in Jerusalem, they returned to Antioch (13:1)” [NCWB].

NOTE: This ends the first major section of Acts. For further study, see Volume in THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK series.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

This verse by verse study from Acts is a part of what I call THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK. It is not a formal commentary, complete with chapter notes and end notes and bibliography. References are noted within the body, with some coming from numerous individual commentaries (listed, for example, as [HLE: 132] - for H. Leo Eddleman, A Practical and Exegetical Commentary on Acts). Others are from electronic Bible Libraries and include:

1. QUICKVERSE -

The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament Edition: Second

Copyright: Copyright 1983, SP Publications, Inc. All rights reserved Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1997, Parsons Technology, Inc. **MacArthur's New Testament Commentary:** Acts 1-12; Copyright © 1994 by The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1997, Parsons Technology, Inc.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament: Copyright 1983, SP Publications, Inc. All rights reserved Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1997, Parsons Technology, Inc.

Various Study Bible Notes, such as The Believer's Study Bible.

2. THE BIBLE NAVIGATOR, LifeWay Christian Resources, Nashville, TN.

Adam Clarke's Commentary

Barnes' Notes on the New Testament

Holman Bible Dictionary

Robertson, A. T., Word Pictures in the New Testament

APPENDIX I

FATE OF EARLY SAINTS, INCLUDING THE APOSTLES

(NOTE: I am depending on ancient traditions for the following examples of early church martyrs who took up their cross and followed Jesus, knowing what the cost might be.)

1. Stephen, one of the seven elected to serve, stoned in Jerusalem to launch a massive persecution, led by Saul of Tarsus , Acts 8:57ff.
- 2) James, the brother of John, was martyred in A. D. 44, Acts 12:2.
- 3) Philip of Bethsaida was a martyr. According to tradition, Philip, who was the first to be called a disciple, served faithfully in Upper Asia and suffered martyrdom at Heliopolis in Phrygia. He was scourged, thrown into prison, and then crucified in A. D. 54.
- 4) Matthew wrote his Gospel account in Hebrew and it was later translated into Greek by James the Less. He worked in Parthia and Ethiopia until he was slain with a halberd in Nadabah in A.

D. 60.

5) There was James the Less. At the age of 94 he was beaten and stoned by the Jews. Finally, he had his brains bashed out with a fuller's club.

6) Matthais was stoned at Jerusalem and beheaded.

7) Andrew preached in Asiatic nations and was crucified at Edessa on an X-shaped cross.

8) Mark was dragged to pieces in Alexandria before a pagan idol.

9) Peter was crucified up-side down in Rome. According to tradition, he stated that he did not deserve to die in the same manner as his Lord and asked to be crucified up-side down.

10) Jude was crucified in Odessa in A. D. 72.

11) Bartholomew translated the Gospel of Matthew into the language of India. He was beaten and crucified by idolaters.

12) Thomas preached in Parthia, where the pagan priests raged against him. He was thrust through with a sword.

13) Luke is supposed to have been hanged on an olive tree by idolatrous priests in Greece.

14) Simon Zelotes preached in Mauritania, Africa, and even in Britain where he was crucified in A. D. 74.

15) John, the beloved disciple of the Lord, lived many years beyond the other apostles, working for a long time in and around Ephesus. According to some reports, he founded the churches of Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Thyatira. That tradition may have come from the fact that these were six of the seven churches that received letters from the Lord in the Revelation.

John was inspired to write the Fourth Gospel, the Three Epistles of John, and the Revelation. According to tradition, he was sent to Rome where he was sentenced to be thrown into a caldron of boiling oil, but somehow escaped that end and returned to Ephesus. Eventually, he was sent into exile on the Isle of Patmos to try to silence him. While on Patmos, Jesus gave him the Revelation, which was then sent to the churches listed in the Revelation. Copies would have been made, and then the original would be sent on to other churches to encourage them during their trials.

According to some traditions, John was the only Apostle to escape a violent death. Others believe he was thrown alive into the caldron of boiling oil. What we do know is that John, was probably the youngest apostle, outlived all the others and taught Christian leaders for many years. Well into the Second Century, disciples of John were giving testimonies about what he taught

them.