

PART ONE

THE CHURCH

IN

JERUSALEM

CHAPTER 1

The Church is Established

I. Background

A. Luke Recounts Certain Pre-Ascension Events
(Study Acts 1:1-3)

The "former treatise" which the author has written to Theophilus (v. 1) is the book of Luke. The Gospel of Luke is well described as setting forth what "Jesus began both to do and teach until the day in which He was taken up" (v. 1,2), for that gospel account covers the life of Jesus clear to the day of His ascension (see Luke 24:50,51).

"Theophilus" means "lover of God". Some conjecture that "Theophilus" is not a real person but any "lover of God". But notice he is called "most excellent Theophilus" in Luke 1:3, which points not only to his being a person in real life but to being a government official. Note that the governor Felix is addressed as "most excellent Felix" in Acts 23:26 and 24:3.

The "commandments" Jesus gave His apostles before His ascension (v. 2) are the commandments of the Great Commission.

We are entirely indebted to v. 3 for information on how long Jesus was here on earth after His resurrection. "Forty days" is nearly six weeks and close to one-half of one of our calendar seasons. Those days were spent (1) demonstrating by a variety of reliable proofs to His apostles (and other witnesses most of whom are listed in I Cor. 15:5-7 that He is indeed alive from the dead, and (2) instructing them further concerning the coming kingdom.

QUESTIONS: 1. What was the "former treatise" Luke has written to Theophilus? 2. What does "Theophilus" mean? 3. What is meant by calling him "most excellent" Theophilus? 4. What "commandments" does Jesus give just before ascending? 5. How many days is it between the resurrection and the ascension? 6. What two things does Jesus do in those days?

B. Ascension Day
(Study Acts 1:4-11)

Though the apostles are from Galilee (v. 11), Jesus has told them not to return there but remain in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them (compare Luke 24:49). The Spirit's coming will be a fulfillment of what John the Baptist prophesied concerning Jesus' baptizing with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11).

Their question, "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (v. 6) shows that even after Jesus' having taught them more about the kingdom during those forty days, they still do not have everything straight about the kingdom. Their coming inspiration by the Spirit will take care of that, for they will speak thereafter as the Spirit inspires them and gives them utterance. The Spirit will finish teaching what they have not been able to comprehend while Jesus was with them (John 16:12,13).

V. 8 gives us the order of places they will preach. They are to begin in "Jerusalem". This will be according to both Isa. 2:2,3 and Luke 24:47. Then after the dispersion of the Jerusalem congregation (Acts 8:1) the gospel will go out into "Judea" (the district around Jerusalem) and north to "Samaria" (by Philip in Acts 8), and then to the "uttermost parts of the earth" (by Paul and others, Acts 13:46,47). Some have said v. 8 contains a miniature outline of the

whole book of Acts: (1) the gospel to Jerusalem--chapters 1-7; (2) the gospel to Judea and Samaria--chapters 8-12; and (3) the gospel to the uttermost part of the earth--chapters 13-28.

After thus speaking to the apostles as to where they are to bear witness of Him, He begins to arise bodily from the earth in a sight they will never forget. As He enters the cloud, they evidently expect Him to emerge again into view above it, for they keep looking up (v.9). Intently are their eyes and attention fixed on the cloud and the sky that they hardly notice the two angels (men in white apparel--compare Mark 16:5 and Matt. 28:5,6), who have taken their places near them. Simultaneously they speak and dramatically announce that Jesus will someday return just as they have seen Him go away. He has left in a cloud and will return in clouds (Rev. 1:7). That He is to return someday is not a new thought to the apostles, for Jesus Himself has spoken to them about it (John 14:2,3; Matt. 16:27; etc.).

QUESTIONS: 1. *Where are the apostles to go after Jesus' ascension?* 2. *What great experience does Jesus say they will have within a few days?* 3. *What question about the kingdom do they ask Jesus?* 4. *Where are they to begin preaching?* 5. *After what event will they preach out in Judea and Samaria?* 6. *Who will be the most responsible for carrying the gospel to far-distant places?* 7. *Give the miniature outline of the book of Acts that can be drawn from Acts 1:8.* 8. *In the ascension what receives Jesus out of their sight?* 9. *What do two angels dramatically announce?*

C. Apostles and Others Pray and "Wait"
(Study Acts 1:12-14)

If we had only Acts' account of the ascension, we would suppose Jesus has ascended from the very top of

the Mt. of Olives just east of Jerusalem, but Luke 24:50 says Jesus led them out "as far as Bethany", but the American Standard says He led them out "until they were over against Bethany", making it a little difficult to pin-point just what is meant. In his "Lands of the Bible" McGarvey has this interesting observation: "About half a mile southeast of the principal summit of the mount is a rounded knoll nearly of the same height...Bethany lies immediately under this knoll, on its eastern slope, and on top of the knoll the disciples would be 'as far as to Bethany' without being in it." He says, "This must have been the true site of the ascension." It would still be the Mount of Olives from which the disciples return to Jerusalem afterwards, and it would be "over against Bethany". A "sabbath day's journey" (v. 12) is what Jewish tradition allows a person to walk outside of Jerusalem on the sabbath and is fixed at 7/8 of a mile.

Jesus has told them in John 14:1 not to sorrow over His departure. They have now evidently come to realize the importance of His returning to heaven, for Luke 24:52 says they "returned to Jerusalem with great joy". Then, too, they have to be excited as they contemplate the fulfillment of His promise, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence" (v. 5).

The apostles' names are recorded four times: Luke 6:13-16 and Mark 3:13-19 (when He chose them); Matt. 10:1-7 (when He sent them out in pairs to preach); and here in v. 13. The Acts' list, of course, contains only eleven names, for Judas is no more.

Meeting together with the eleven for prayer are the faithful women who were at the cross (Matt. 27:55, 56) and who took spices to the tomb (Luke 23:55--24:1), also Jesus' mother (and this is the last time she is mentioned in the Bible), plus Jesus' brothers. We are utterly surprised to read of His brothers now being included among the closest followers of Jesus, for

only a few months before they were not believers in Him (John 7:3-5). Evidence points to Jesus father having been dead for several years. In Jewish culture the care of a widowed mother fell on the shoulders of her oldest son, which in Mary's family would have been Jesus. He has evidently taken care of her for quite some time but at the cross commits her to the care of the apostle John (John 19:26,27). Why does not the brother next to Jesus in age take care of her? Likely because their unbelief in Jesus has caused a rift between her and them. We are glad to learn that His brothers are now on the right track, but what has brought about their change? They believe in Jesus, and yet not one word has been preached on Pentecost to change them. The key to their change is the special resurrection appearance Jesus made to one of them--James (I Cor. 15:17), who later became an additional apostle (see Gal. 1:18,19).

So as this group "waits" for the coming of the Holy Spirit as Jesus has instructed them in Luke 24:49 and for the beginning of their preaching, they "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication."

QUESTIONS: 1. *The names of what mountain and what town are connected with Jesus' ascension?* 2. *What authority fixes a "sabbath day's journey"?* 3. *How far is a sabbath day's journey?* 4. *How many times does the New Testament list the apostles' names?* 5. *Why is Acts's list one name short?* 6. *What women, whose mother, and whose brothers meet with the apostles for prayer?* 7. *Which of these is it surprising to find in the group?* 8. *What has probably brought about their happy change?*

D. Judas's successor is Mattias
(Study Acts 1:15-26)

The number of these meeting together during the

ten days between the ascension and Pentecost has come to be around 120 (v. 15)--surely too many to crowd into the "upper room" mentioned in v. 13. But don't overlook Luke 24:53, which says they were "continually in the temple, praising and blessing God." Likely it is in one of the courts of the temple where "Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples" to secure a successor for Judas. Even though they pray over which of the two men should be chosen and then cast lots to determine the mind of God in the matter, the lot falling on Matthias (v.26), there are those who argue against the apostleship of Matthias because this is done before Peter is inspired on Pentecost. These claim that Paul is Judas's rightful successor. To us the whole case turns on whether God accepts Matthias or not. If he does, then Peter is acting under direction of God. If God does not accept Matthias, it will surely be evident to all when the Holy Spirit comes upon the apostles, for Matthias alone will have no cloven tongue like fire sitting on him, and he alone will not be speaking in tongues. Peter will not stand up with the "eleven" (v. 14) but with the "ten". In the absence of Matthias's apostolic credentials they will conclude that Judas's place is still vacant. Even as far into the book of Acts as the problem of the Grecian widows being neglected in the daily ministrations, Matthias is still one of the apostles, for Acts 6:3 says the "twelve" call the multitude together and lead in settling the matter.

Judas's successor is to be a witness with the other apostles of Jesus' resurrection (v. 22). Judas being gone before the actual witnessing begins, a successor is sought for him. But by the time the apostle James is martyred (Acts 12:1), no mention is made of there being any successor for him. By that time the witnessing concerning the resurrection is well established, so the apostles have no successors except in

the case of Judas.

It has been charged that Acts' description of Judas's end (v, k8) is contradictory of Matt. 27:5's saying he hanged himself. If you have been at Acel-dama, you can see how Judas could have hanged himself as Matthew records and at the same time these things reported in Acts have taken place also. Judas climbs a tree on the bluff overlooking the valley below. He hangs himself, and being an abandoned person nobody bothers to take his unwanted body down. His body decays day by day until ultimately something breaks (the tree limb or the rope or his neck-section), causing him to fall feet-first. Upon impact with the ground the bloated body drops off the bluff to the valley below. Upon impact there his deteriorated body bursts open, and his insides gush out. (Note: This implies that some time has passed since his death, for if a newly-dead body fell down headlong the insides would not gush out.)

We should not be surprised that they pray and cast lots to see which of the two qualified men will become an apostle (v. 26), for this means of determination was used during the Old Testament. Examples: which animal was to be the scapegoat on the day of Atonement (Lev. 16:8); the territory which each tribe was to receive (Acts 13:19); determining the guilty party (Josh. 7:14); determining God's choice for king (I Sam. 10:20,21); etc. In Old Testament times Prov. 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." But after the church began, we have no record of this practice being continued.

Judas "purchased a field" (v. 18) in the sense that it is money which he brought back to the chief priest that is used to make the purchase (Matt. 27: 3-7).

QUESTIONS: 1. Where do the 120 probably get together besides the upper room? 2. What argument(s) is advanced against Matthias being Judas's successor? 3. What are arguments for his being Judas's successor? 4. Why is a successor sought for Judas when later none is sought for James? 5. Show that Matthew's account of Judas's suicide and Acts's account of his miserable end are not contradictory. 6. Why are we not surprised that the apostles cast lots to determine the mind of the Lord concerning Judas's successor? 7. In what sense has Judas purchased that field?

II. The Church is Established

A. *The Holy Spirit Comes upon the Apostles* (Study Acts 2:1-13)

Recall that Jesus has spoken considerably to the apostles about His sending the Holy Spirit to them (John 14:25,26; John 15:26,27; John 16:7-15). And just before He ascended, He spoke to them again about the matter (Acts 1:4,5,8). For the Spirit's coming they are waiting in Jerusalem.

At the last feast of the Jews (Passover) Jesus had been crucified. God chooses at their next Jewish feast (this Pentecost) to announce to the nation that Jesus whom they crucified God has raised from the dead. With this announcement and attendant preaching He will also begin the new covenant and the establishment of the church.

The "Day of Pentecost" appears first here in the New Testament (v. 1). Paul will again refer to it later on (Acts 20:16). "Pentecost" comes from the Greek word "fifty". During the Passover a special wave-offering of the first-fruits of their wheat and barley harvest was made on the day after the sabbath during that week. With that as Day-1 the Day of Pentecost is

Day-50 (Lev. 23:4-22). Since Day-1 is on the first day of the week, so will Day-50 be. Thus, the new covenant is going into effect on the first day of the week, and the church will come into existence on the first day of the week also. And you will recall that Jesus arose from the dead on the first day of the week (Mark 16:9). You can see why the first day of the week is the day on which Christians meet for the breaking of bread, preaching, and other things spiritual (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2).

For God to choose a time when Jews from every nation are in Jerusalem (v. 5) to begin the preaching of the gospel is surely wise. When they go home from Pentecost, they can carry the message back to their various places. This may be the way the church at Rome and in many other places came into existence (converts from Pentecost returning to their homes).

Some insist that the baptism of the Holy Spirit has come upon the 120 and not just the 12 apostles. They would like to open the door so that all believers receive the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit with tongues-speaking, etc. But the promises in John 14,15, 16 (cited above) and in Acts 1:4,5 as well as in Luke 24:49 are to the apostles. This will inspire them for making known the gospel truths that are now in our New Testament, and the tongues will prove to the world that the apostles are inspired of God. Tongues will be for a "sign" to the unbelievers (I Cor. 14:22) and they are one of the several "signs" of the apostles (II Cor. 12:12). There is actually no purpose to give this outpouring to the 120, for they are not to be inspired, and we will never hear of them again. Notice too that when Peter stands up to explain the outpouring, he stands up with the "eleven" (v. 14) and not with the 120.

The fact that these Galileans can speak in so many different languages catches the attention of the feast-attenders in Jerusalem (v. 7,8). Word spreads

throughout the city of its unusualness, and many thousands come together to see the phenomenon. This is exactly what God wants--a multitude to whom Peter can preach the resurrected Jesus. To get such a throng together all the apostles speak in tongues, but after the multitude has assembled Peter alone does the explaining and the preaching.

QUESTIONS: 1. At what feast has Jesus been crucified? 2. At what feast will His resurrection be proclaimed? 3. How do we know the Day of Pentecost is on the first day of the week? 4. Why do some people like to believe the 120 are baptized with the Holy Spirit? 5. How do we know it is the apostles and not the 120 who are baptized with the Holy Spirit? 6. What do the apostles do as a result of the baptism of the Holy Spirit that has confounded the Jews in Jerusalem? 7. Do all the 12 or only Peter do the preaching on Pentecost?

B. Peter Explains the Unusual Happening
(Study Acts 2:14-21)

Nobody has ever seen or heard such as is taking place in Jerusalem (presumably in one of the large courts of the temple). The sincere onlookers are "all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?" (v. 12) while the mockers ridiculously charge, "These men are full of new wine" (v. 13). Peter gets their attention and shows the wine-charge to be untrue (v. 15). The "third hour of the day" is 9:00 in the morning. Inspiration leads him to show that what they have seen is that which their own prophet Joel predicted (v. 16-21) in Joel 2:28-32. How thrilled they should be to realize they are actually beholding what one of their sacred writers had foreseen! Joel, a Jewish prophet writing to Jewish people,

said God would pour out His Holy Spirit in the "last days". Their nation had its beginning when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt (around 1500 B.C.). Their nation is going to be destroyed in A. D. 70 (only 40 years away). Indeed the Holy Spirit's outpouring is taking place in the "last days" of the Jewish nation!

The prediction in Joel involves the whole Christian dispensation (from the Day of Pentecost to the Day of Judgment--the "great and notable day of the Lord"). This is the beginning of its total fulfillment, for there are several things in the prediction that will come to pass later: the gift of prophecy on God's "handmaidens" (like Philip's daughters, Acts 21:9), the Spirit upon the Gentiles (the "all flesh" of v. 17 being taken as "Jewish" in the case of the apostles and "Gentile" in the case of Cornelius in Acts 10), and the "wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath" to take place before the coming of Christ. Luke 21:25-28 shows these signs will take place immediately prior to Christ's return--in fact, that is why they are called "signs". The same language in Isa. 13:1-19 (especially v. 10) and in Eze. 32:2-16 (especially v. 7,8) depict war and the fall of great nations. We expect the years immediately preceding Jesus' return to be characterized by political upheavals and war.

Joel's prediction also includes the most important item about the Age of the Spirit (the Christian dispensation)--it will be a time of salvation for all (Jew and Gentile included in his "whosoever") who will look to the Lord for it (v. 21). The same statement from Joel is also quoted by Paul in Rom. 10:13. The conversions in Acts become our divine explanation of what God meant by "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved". If it means calling Jesus "Lord", He would not have said what He did in Matt. 7:21. If it means a lost sinner praying for salvation, Saul of Tarsus surely would have fulfilled it in the

three days of fasting and prayer he did (Acts 9:9,10). But even after such praying Saul was still in his sins when God sent Ananias to him to complete his conversion obedience. He was told, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). To surrender to the Lord's requirements is itself a calling on the name of the Lord for one's salvation.

QUESTIONS: 1. *What do the mockers say about the tongues-speaking apostles?* 2. *How does Peter refute their charge?* 3. *What Old Testament prophet has predicted the baptism of the Holy Spirit?* 4. *In what sense is the A.D. 30 Day of Pentecost in the "last days"?* 5. *What in Joel's prophecy is yet to be fulfilled after Pentecost?* 6. *Show that more than mere prayer is involved in calling on the name of the Lord?*

C. Peter's Sermon
(Study Acts 2:22-36)

This will be the first message preached under the Great Commission. In the Commission Jesus has commanded them to preach the "gospel" (Mark 16:15), which means "good news". The gospel is the good news of salvation through Christ. Peter is the preacher on this occasion (the Jews' first opportunity to hear) even as he will be when the Gentiles have their first opportunity (Acts 15:7), using the "keys of the kingdom" according to Jesus' promise to him (Matt. 16:19).

Peter loses no time getting to the point of his message. After saying, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words," he comes directly to the Person he is preaching ("Jesus of Nazareth," v. 22). He was well known among them for over three years. And the Jews from the rest of the world who have not seen Him in person have heard much about Him, including what has happened to

Him at their most recent Passover.

Peter's first affirmation about Jesus is that He was approved by God by the miracles of God that He performed among them (v. 22). For "miracles and wonders and signs" some translations give "mighty works and wonders and signs". Indeed Jesus' miracles were (1) "mighty works" (works of great power), (2) "wonders" (in their effect on the onlookers), and (3) "signs" (credentials that God was with Him).

God foreordained that Jesus bear our sins (compare I Pet. 1:18-20), but Jews are guilty of having brought about His death (v. 23). But the One who submitted to death by their plot in order to be our atonement has not remained 'dead--God saw to that, for He resurrected Him (v. 24)! Death cannot hold in its grip Him who is "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25) and who has raised others (Jairus's daughter, the widow of Nain's son, and Lazarus). His hearers have probably already heard the lie being circulated by the paid-off Roman soldiers (that while they slept, the disciples came and stole the body from the tomb--Matt. 28:12,13). Now they hear what Peter says. And nobody comes forward to deny what Peter is proclaiming! The preaching of the resurrection first takes place here in the very city where it occurred and only a few days after it has transpired. If it can be successfully refuted, it will be refuted here.

Peter next refers (v. 25-29) to a psalm of David (Psa. 16:6-11) and shows it has been fulfilled in Jesus (the "Holy one" whose body did not suffer decay--did not "see corruption") and not in David whose sepulchre is still intact in Jerusalem as Peter preaches. That psalm did not refer to David, for his body did decay. But Jesus' body has not--God raised it on the third day after its death! Where the King James gives the word "hell" in v. 27 most versions give "hades". "Hades" is correct according to the Greek.

God promised David, "Thy throne shall be estab-

lished for ever" (II Sam. 7:16). Here on Pentecost Peter preaches that God has raised up the crucified Messiah to sit on David's throne (v. 30). It was prophesied that Christ would occupy that throne (Isa. 9: 6,7 and Luke 1:32). Christ's occupying the throne following His resurrection is borne out by the prophecy in Dan. 7:13,14 which foresaw the ascension (Christ returning on clouds to the Ancient of days--God) after which He is given "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." The earthly beginning of Christ's rule as God's sovereign with all authority begins here on Pentecost, and His kingdom is His church which He said He would build (Matt. 16:18,19).

Naturally Peter's hearers cannot see Jesus sitting at the right hand of God, but they can see the cloven tongues like fire, and they have heard the sound of a rushing mighty wind and the apostles speak in many languages. These are all visible and audible evidence of Christ's sending the Holy Spirit from the Father into their midst (v. 33) and who is saying through Peter, "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (v. 36). They are also told in v. 34,35 that Christ is fulfilling another prediction made by David: "The Lord (Jehovah) said unto my Lord (the Messiah), Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool" (Psa. 110: 1).

QUESTIONS: 1. What has Jesus said is to be preached? 2. What promise of Jesus to Peter explains why Peter is the preacher on Pentecost? 3. In what sense have Jesus' miracles been (1) mighty works, (2) wonders, and (3) signs? 4. Who comes forward with factual information to refute what Peter is preaching

about Jesus having risen from the dead? 5. What promise to David has God fulfilled in Jesus' resurrection? 6. Who does Peter say have crucified Jesus? 7. Jesus is to be on God's right hand until what happens?

D. The Church's First Additions
(Study Acts 2:37-41)

The Holy Spirit has come to convict people (John 16:8). and He begins this work on this very day He has arrived: "They were pricked in their heart" (v. 37). He has convicted them through the preaching of Peter, for it is "when they heard this" that "they were pricked in their heart" (v. 37). The Word of God is called the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17), and it is "sharper than any two-edged sword" of man (Heb. 4:12).

When they realize the one killed under the direction of their Jewish leaders is actually the Messiah, oh, the bitterness of their anguish! Zech. 12:10 is a prophecy of Pentecost, and it includes their mourning: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." Is there anything that can be done by or for these guilty of such a heinous sin?

In deep contrition they cry out, "What shall we do?" (v. 37). Notice they cry out to the very apostles to whom Jesus previously said, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them" (John 20:23). What will their answers be? And notice the man who answered their question (Peter) is the very apostle to whom Jesus promised the keys of the kingdom (Matt. 16:19). Notice too they are in the very city where Jesus said

human repentance and divine remission of sins through the blood of Christ should be preached first (Luke 24:47). All these considerations make it important for all who wish to be saved according to the Bible to know and to regard the inspired answer: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you" (v. 38). It is actually a double command to these convicted believers: "Repent and be baptized." And it carries a double promise: "Remission of sins, and...the gift of the Holy Spirit." And the divine plan is for "every one" to obey! There isn't a plan for one person or group and then another plan for another person or group. There is a law of physical birth by which people are born into this life, and there is a law of spiritual birth by which people are born spiritually (John 3:5-7). The converts here were born again according to Jesus' teachings to Nicodemus in the John 3 passage.

Taking a closer look at Peter's answer, he does not command them to believe, for it is evident they already believe, or they would not be crying out as they are. Repentance is where "self" is crucified, and this is necessary if we would follow Jesus (Luke 9:23). This repentance God demands of all persons everywhere (Acts 17:30); all must do this or perish (Luke 13:3); and this hands the reins of one's life over to Christ so that thereafter a person can say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). Baptism is the "water" mentioned in John 3:5 ("born of water and of the Spirit") which is necessary for entering God's kingdom (John 3:5). The very meaning of the Greek word "baptizo" is "immersion" (burial), and that meaning is borne out by various passages of Scripture (John 3:23; Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12; Acts 8:38,39; Matt. 3:16). The Bible teaches immersion and immersion only. It is the "one baptism" of Eph. 4:5. And it is "for" or "in order to" the remission of sins. Yet Fundamentalist churches of our day generally discount the necessity

of baptism for one's salvation, but how can they do so in view of so many plain-as-day Scriptures (see Mark 16:16; I Pet. 3:20,21; Acts 22:16; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-5,17,18; Acts 2:38)?

The promised "gift of the Holy Spirit" in v. 38 is the indwelling measure of the Spirit that produces the "fruit of the Spirit" enumerated in Gal. 5:22,23 rather than miraculous works like the apostles were doing through their baptismal measure. In promising them the help of the Spirit God knows they have need of this help for the Christian life as much as they need the remission of sins. When Peter says the promise is even for all who are "afar off" (v. 39), he is referring to the Gentiles (Eph. 2:11,13). Even though inspired to say what he is saying, it is evident from a study of Acts 10 that even he does not grasp the meaning of this part of his statement.

Those who cry out asking what to do but stir Peter's heart to tell them more about Jesus ("testify"--v. 40) and to "exhort" them to be saved--to make a decision to be obedient to Jesus (v. 40). Preachers are still to do two things in their messages: (1) present gospel truths, and (2) urge people to be obedient. What an example for preachers and teachers! One can present gospel facts without urging an acceptance, or he can be strong on the appeal but short on the facts they need as a foundation for their acceptance.

What a beginning response--3,000 baptized (v. 41)! And they are baptized the "same day"--not sometime in the future. Baptism is a part of accepting Christ and of being saved, so it is not something to delay. The jailer was baptized the "same hour of the night" that he made his decision (Acts 16:33). Since there is no living stream anywhere near Jerusalem, they had to be baptized in one or more of the pools in Jerusalem. Here is your answer as to whether it is all right to be baptized in a baptistery (a man-made pool), or whether one must be baptized in running

water (as some people argue).

QUESTIONS: 1. How does the Spirit convict people on Pentecost? 2. What Old Testament prophet predicted the contrition of some who have helped kill Jesus? 3. What two things does Peter command them to do? 4. What two blessings are promised if they obey? 5. Prove that all must do the same thing in accepting Christ. 6. What is crucified in repentance? 7. What is the meaning of the Greek word "baptizo"? 8. What are some Bible passages showing the necessity of baptism? 9. What two things that Peter does are preachers still to do? 10. How many are baptized on Pentecost? 11. Where are they evidently baptized?

III. Life in the Early Church

A. Its Faithfulness to God (Study Acts 2:42)

What is the first thing affirmed of the first members of the church? "They continued steadfastly!" Jesus' teaching in John 15:4-8 shows it to be as imperative to abide in Christ as to accept Him. More accept Christ (make the start) than continue in Him (finish the race). Many Scriptures show the importance of continuing in the Christian life (Luke 14:28-35; I. Cor. 15:58; Gal. 6:9; Col. 1:21-23; Heb. 3:14; Heb. 10:38,39; II Pet. 2:20-22; Rev. 2:10).

Four things are specifically mentioned in which they steadfastly continue. Can any church rightfully claim to be a New Testament church that does not continue steadfastly in these same four things today?

The "apostles' doctrine" is the teaching the apostles gave which is now found in the New Testament. New Testament teaching determines the faith of the church. We are to preach the same message (II Tim. 4:2). If we preach a different message, we are under a curse (Gal. 1:8,9).

Concerning "fellowship" there has been considerable indefiniteness as to what is meant by it in our verse. The Greek word is "koinonia" and is related to the Greek word "koinonos" (partner), which signifies "relationship". Both words come from the Greek word "koinos" (common). Your writer's own studied conclusion on "koinonia" is that the church is a fellowship in which those who accept Christ are brothers (sons of the same heavenly Father), partners in the same great Cause, members of the same body of Christ. As such they have many things in "common": "like precious faith" (II Pet. 1:1); the "same rule" by which to walk (Phil. 2:16); like-mindedness (Phil. 2:2); salvation (Jude 3); etc. Being a part of the same spiritual family the participants lovingly care about one another so that if "one member suffer, all the members suffer with it," and on the other hand if "one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (I Cor. 12:26). This accounts for the word "koinonia" being used in II Cor. 8:4 and other places for financial help to needy brethren. Since they were partners in spreading the gospel, "koinonia" shows up in Gal. 2:9 and Phil. 1:4,5 (compare Phil. 4:15-18). But don't conclude that this "fellowship" was only social--just between brethren. It was deeper than that--it was a fellowship with God also (I John 1:3,7 and I Cor. 1:9). To continue steadfastly, then, in the "fellowship" in our present verse is to be an active part of the newly-formed church in all of its worship and work!

The "breaking of bread" is the Lord's supper instituted by Jesus at the most recent Passover (Matt. 26:26-29). The early Christians came together on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7). Paul gives some important material on the importance of correctly partaking of the Lord's supper in I Cor. 11:23-34.

The "prayers" are also a very important part of the life of the early church and remains such to this day.

QUESTIONS: 1. How do the early members of the church continue? 2. Cite at least 2 passages of Scripture showing the necessity of continuing in the Christian life. 3. What is meant by the "apostles' doctrine"? 4. What is meant by the "fellowship"? 5. What is meant by the "breaking of bread"? 6. What is the fourth thing in which they continue?

B. Apostolic Miracles
(Study Acts 2:43)

Notice it is the "apostles" (not the other members) who work miracles, for they alone have received the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit. This is not their first experience, though, at working miracles, for when Jesus sent them out in Matt. 10:1 He gave them miracle-power. Mark 6:13 shows they used it.

What is the purpose of these apostolic miracles? Remember that the message they are preaching, which will later become our written New Testament, is a brand new message from God. It is being revealed and delivered to the world through them. How can the people know they are not making up this message? Because God bears them witness with "signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit" (Heb. 2:3,4); "Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (Acts 14:3); "They went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20).

And what is the result of these many miracles? "Fear came upon every soul" (v. 43).

QUESTIONS: 1. Who is said to be performing miracles? 2. When had they performed miracles before? 3. Explain why God gives them miracle-power.

C. The Unselfishness of the Early Converts
(Study Acts 2:44,45)

Periodically through the centuries there have been religious groups that have forfeited private-ownership and have practiced community-of-goods. How many of us would do this if this were the will of God revealed in the New Testament? All should be willing to do anything that is the revealed will of God. Since this seems not to have been practiced anywhere else in the times of the apostles, since it is not taught elsewhere in the New Testament, and since other passages reflect private-ownership (like Acts 11:28,29; I Cor. 16:2; I Tim. 6:1,2; I Tim. 6:17), we are left to sensible conjecture as to why this is being done in Jerusalem at this time.

There is a situation prevailing that probably explains it. Doubtless some (maybe many) of the new converts are from places far away from Jerusalem. Those living in Jerusalem will continue to have the personal teaching of the apostles, but if these converts from foreign countries depart to their homes with no further access to apostolic teaching, how can they carry on for Christ? Their case dictates that they remain in Jerusalem for a time to become grounded in and further informed concerning being followers of Jesus Christ. But how can they do this without more money than they have brought with them? The unselfish love of the Jerusalem brethren responds to their need! This will be mentioned again in Acts 4,5. In so doing they show what Christians are to do under similar conditions. If Christians are called on to lay down their lives for one another (I John 3:16), surely they are to give up some (or even all) their earthly possessions to feed, clothe, etc. fellow-Christians in dire need. Let us not fail in this test of our Christianity if such an occasion presents itself. Consider I John 3:16,17.

QUESTIONS: 1. Cite 2 New Testament passages reflecting private ownership. 2. What is a plausible setting for the Jerusalem church members selling their possessions and giving to those among them? 3. If a similar condition prevailed today, should we do likewise?

D. Daily Happiness and Victories
(Study Acts 2:46,47)

Each day finds them assembling in one of the courts of the temple (no doubt for more teaching by the apostles). We can be sure these new converts do not absent themselves from these special daily meetings. We refer to them as "special", for in apostolic times the congregations normally came together on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2). But there is a need for congregations to have "special" services in addition to their regular Lord's day meetings, and when a church does have revival services, evangelistic meetings, rallies, or any such special service the members should be present just as these Jerusalem members were. They are an example for us.

"Breaking of bread," a term for a regular meal (Luke 24:28-31,35), here in v. 42 refers to the Lord's supper. In the book of Acts when the setting is religious (like in Troas where they came together on the Lord's day for that very purpose--Acts 20:7), it is the Lord's supper. But in v. 46 they leave the assembly and go to their houses for the "breaking of bread" (their regular meals). Joy and happiness blessed them whether they are in the temple together or at their homes afterwards. They attribute their happiness to God, for they praise Him (v. 47). They are also well respected by their fellow-Jews of Jerusalem (v. 47). As a result the Lord is adding to their number additional converts on a daily basis (v. 47).

V. 41 uses the word "added". Who did the adding? "The Lord." We can be sure He adds only those believers who repent and are baptized. Their names are written in heaven (Heb. 12:23). The importance of this will be seen on the day of judgment (Rev. 20:15; Rev. 21:27).

Such is the victorious beginning of our Christianity in the very city where they have publicly crucified Jesus only a few weeks ago. Yes, this is the "beginning". Jesus has so spoken of it in Luke 24:47, and Peter will later speak of it in the same way (Acts 11:15).

QUESTIONS: 1. *Were these daily meetings the regular practice of the early church or special meetings?* 2. *In what 2 ways is "breaking of bread" used in the Bible?* 3. *How is it used in this section?* 4. *Whom does the Lord add to the church?*

CHAPTER 2

Opposition Begins

I. The Cause

A. A Lame Man is Healed
(Study Acts 3:1-11)

These two former fishermen on the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 4:18-24) and the first apostles to view Christ's empty tomb (John 20:1-10) have now become very prominent in the early days of Christianity. Together Peter and John go to the temple at the Jewish afternoon "hour of prayer" (v. 1). Incense is burned in the temple two times a day--morning and evening (Exo. 30:78). As the priest is in the Holy Place doing this, people congregate without in one of the temple courts for prayer (Luke 1:10). The "ninth hour" is 3:00 in the afternoon--the evening incense time.

As they are about to enter the temple gate called "Beautiful", a grown man crippled from birth, is daily brought to beg alms from those entering the temple. Routinely he sought alms of the two men. As the preachers stop they ask the crippled man to look at them. The man is sure from this request that he is about to receive a sizable gift only to be told of their low financial condition (v. 6). Yet Peter presents him with something far more valuable than any alms that any rich man can give him: an immediate, complete, totally-unexpected healing of his body (v. 6,7)! Imagine the man's unprecedented happiness as he leaps and walks for the first time in his life (v. 8). How grateful he is as he enters the temple with Peter and John, praising God! The people recognize him and are

curious as to how he is now well. His gratitude toward Peter and John is displayed by his holding on to them as the people gather to see him (v. 11).

QUESTIONS: 1. *What time of day is the Jewish hour of prayer?* 2. *What does a priest do in the temple at the same time?* 3. *What does the lame man think when Peter first speaks to him?* 4. *Where does the man go upon being healed?*

B. Peter's Sermon Resulting from the Miracle
(Study Acts 3:12-26)

On Pentecost the speaking in tongues assembled a great multitude for preaching. This unusual miracle on a publicly-known lame beggar affords Peter an audience also.

At the outset he disclaims any inherent power or holiness in themselves as the source of the man's healing (v. 12). He tells them their great God (the God of their fathers) who glorified His Son Jesus whom they have rejected and crucified has brought about this miracle. And by what means has God executed the wonder? By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth! Peter uses this occasion also to show again their utter mistreatment of Jesus. He said: (1) you delivered Him to Pilate; (2) you denied Him when Pilate insisted on releasing Him; (3) you preferred a wicked murderer Barabbas to the holy and just Jesus; and (4) you killed the Prince (or Author) of life. These charges are even more definite than those made on Pentecost. And again he preaches the resurrection of Jesus as an act of God in contrast to their killing Him (v. 15).

The importance of believing in Jesus is asserted in v. 16, which is the point of all Peter's preaching. The purpose of this miracle is to give Peter a basis for being heard and believed.

Several times the Bible indicates the Jews did not really realize what they were doing when they executed Jesus (v. 17; I Cor. 2:8; Luke 23:34). Yes, they knew they were killing Him, and they knew He claimed to be God's Son, but they didn't believe Him. Like Saul of Tarsus they did it "ignorantly in unbelief" (I Tim. 1:13).

Numerous Old Testament prophecies predicted the sufferings of Christ, the two most elaborate being Psa. 22 and Isa. 53. Other New Testament passages affirming the sufferings of Christ were predicted by the prophets: Luke 24:44-46 and I Pet. 1:10,11.

In the command, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted" (v. 19), Peter is merely varying his expression from his "repent, and be baptized" in Acts 2:38 just as any preacher may do from one invitation service to another. We can be sure he is preaching the same gospel, and those who respond are obedient in the same way. Those who respond will not only have their sins "blotted out" but will get in on the "times of refreshing" that will come from God (the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, spiritual victories, etc. here and that will climax in the greatest of all "times of refreshing" that "shall come from the presence of the Lord"--Christ's coming) (v. 20), who will remain in heaven throughout this age when the gospel is being preached to get mankind restored to God (v. 21). Isaiah is among the greatest of the prophets to foretell the gospel age (v. 21). Consider these from his book: Isa. 2:2-4; Isa. 35:1-10; Isa. 40:9-11; Isa. 60:1-5; etc.).

Peter's Jewish hearers professedly respect Moses. Peter now tells them this "restitution of all things" is to be brought about by One whom Moses said in Deut. 18:15-18 God would raise up and who would be like him--a law-giving prophet whom the people are to hear and obey (v. 22,23). Not only Moses but Samuel and all their Old Testament prophets likewise foretold the

coming of Jesus and the beginning of the church (v. 24). Truly then Peter can say to his hearers, "Ye are the children of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham (in Gen. 22:18; Gen. 26:4; Gen. 28:14), And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed" (v. 25). Jesus is that "seed" (Gal. 3:16).

Peter's great words on this occasion climax in v. 26 with his telling them (1) God has raised up His Son Jesus; (2) He has sent Him to bless them in turning them away from their iniquities (conversion); and (3) Before being sent to anybody else, Jesus has been sent "first" to them, Peter's Jewish hearers (compare Rom. 1:16).

QUESTIONS: 1. *What is the first thing Peter makes clear about the healing?* 2. *Show that the charges Peter makes in this message to be more definite than his charges on Pentecost.* 3. *What 2 Old Testament chapters have predicted much about Christ's sufferings?* 4. *Compare Peter's command here with his command on Pentecost and comment on them.* 5. *Comment on "times of refreshing".* 6. *Show that Moses predicted the coming of Jesus as a law-giving prophet.* 7. *What is Peter's final thought in this message?*

II. Opposed by Jewish Leaders

A. *Peter and John are Arrested* (Study Acts 4:1-4)

We usually think, "Do good, and everybody will praise you for it." That is not always the case as Peter and John find out from healing the lame man and preaching Jesus.

What in their preaching grieves the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees? Their preaching through Jesus the resurrection from the dead

(v. 2) for two reasons: (1) the apostles are saying God raised Jesus after the Jews were partners to His crucifixion; and (2) the priesthood and temple are under their control, and they do not believe in a resurrection of anybody (Acts 23:8). Being in charge of the temple they will stand for this preaching no longer. They interrupt their message, arrest them, and put them in jail until a hearing the next morning (v. 1, 3).

In reporting their disbelief the author Luke is careful to report the contrasting belief of many others--about five thousand (v. 4), which is two thousand more than his last reported number (Acts 2:41).

QUESTIONS: 1. *What in the preaching has grieved the temple-leaders and why?* 2. *How opposed are the leaders to Peter and John's preaching?* 3. *About how many believers are mentioned?*

B. Peter's Words to the Authorities
(Study Acts 4:5-12)

Only a few weeks ago Jesus appeared before this same Jewish tribunal, so the apostles find themselves also before Annas and Caiaphas. Will the apostles receive a more just hearing than Jesus did? The Sanhedrin customarily sat in a semi-circle with the accused "in the midst" (v. 7).

It is a little difficult to determine just why they ask the apostles to inform them concerning the power and name by which they have healed the lame man. The council knows they are representatives of Jesus. Probably to obtain a verbal charge against them. Do they hope Peter will bend again under pressure as he did the night of Jesus' trial (Matt. 26:69-75)? Or if he doesn't, will they get rid of the apostles as they did Jesus? What will the apostles answer?

Jesus told them such times would come upon them, and He has made adequate arrangements to carry them through: "Beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils...When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matt. 10:17-20). Christ has kept His promise, for v. 8 says, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said..."

Why are they hauled into court? They should not be. Peter is not amiss when he reminds them it is for "the good deed done to the impotent man" and especially "by what means he is made whole" (v. 9). And he has no inclination toward denying Jesus this time but says it is "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead...doth this man stand here before you whole" (v. 10). Three speeches by Peter to the Jews so far in Acts, and three times he has affirmed that God has raised Jesus whom they crucified (Acts 2:36; Acts 3:14,15; here). He even tells them in v. 11 that the exaltation of Jesus after their rejection of Him was divinely prophesied in Psa. 118:22 ("The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner"). And speaking of the name of Jesus Peter boldly affirms, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (v. 12). Then He is the only way to God (compare John 14:6 and I Tim. 2:5)! Human morality cannot save; denominational affiliation cannot; lodge performance cannot. Nothing but Christ can save. That is what Peter proclaims!

QUESTIONS: 1. *Why are some of the council-members the same as when Jesus appeared before the council?*
2. *What promise of Jesus about the Holy Spirit is fulfilled on this occasion?* 3. *What great statement does Peter make about the name of Jesus and salvation?*

C. The Leaders' Decision
(Study Acts 4:13-22)

As the leaders sit and listen to Peter's words, they are struck with their boldness as arrested persons thus fearlessly speaking to them especially since Peter and John are from the masses of common people and not from the elite (v. 13). Jesus, their crucified Master, had not been educated in the Jews' rabbinical schools, and He feared not their council. The same spirit is found in these apostles, and the council attributes their boldness to the One whom they had been with (v. 13).

A factor in the apostles' boldness besides the Holy Spirit within them is the healed man standing with them--the well known lame beggar now healed! This fact proves to be a real problem to the rulers doing anything to the apostles (v. 13) as we shall see in coming verses.

Rather than continue with the embarrassing situation in which the rulers find themselves, they decide to confer privately before proceeding (v. 14). The hypocrisy of these leaders who used false witnesses against Jesus (Matt. 26:29) is evident (v. 15). Since they cannot deny the miracle, why should they do anything to the apostles? Because they are bent on putting a halt to the spread of Christianity (v. 17). Rather than doing anything to them, they decide to release them under threat not to preach any more about Jesus (v. 17). When Peter and John are again brought before them and threatened, immediately the leaders can see these bold men are not going to be intimidated by their threat. Peter shows that to hearken to them means to disobey God, which they refuse to do. As true witnesses they will continue to affirm what they have seen and heard about Jesus (v. 19,20). It is the conviction, the honesty, and the courage of these apostolic preachers, transplanted into the early Christ-

ians, that will give Christianity its unstoppable power here in its beginning tests, and we today should not settle for convictionless preaching and unconsecrated members if we expect to please God and see Christianity triumph!

Before leaving the account of the healed man, Luke tells us he is over forty years of age (v. 22), making the miracle even more remarkable.

QUESTIONS: 1. *What is there about Peter and John that causes the leaders to marvel?* 2. *What in this event proves the dishonesty of these leaders?* 3. *How do these leaders know these men are not going to regard their threat?* 4. *How old is the man healed by Peter?*

D. Their Report and Prayer
(Study Acts 4:23-31)

Where do Peter and John go after being released? "To their own company" (Greek: "To their own ones") (v. 23). Christians are not only joined to Christ (Rom. 7:4) as members of the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:27) but are also members of one another (Rom. 12:5). "Blest be the tie that binds!" And what do they do when back with their brothers and sisters? "Reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them" (v. 23). And then they go to God in prayer (v. 24ff). Their leaders having been threatened by men, it is comforting to know they can call on God who is so great! Their prayer begins with these words: "Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is." Their being opposed by human rulers reminds them of the words of Psa. 2:1,2 (v. 25,26). You can see in v. 27 the early church's view of who were involved in crucifying Jesus: "Herod, and Pontius Pilate" (for not releasing Him when admittedly innocent), "Gentiles" (the Roman

soldiery who actually executed Him), and "the people of Israel" (their rulers who hated Him, arrested Him, condemned Him, and kept endless pressure on Pilate until he yielded to their demands to crucify Him).

God willed that Jesus die for our sins (v. 28), and He allowed it to be done at the hands of men, who did it of their own volition, in order to provide an unparalleled example of His love for mankind in even seeking to be merciful to His Son's crucifiers (Acts 2:36-38; compare Luke 23:34).

In the face of the leaders' threatenings, for what do they pray? For more diplomacy or for more courage? The latter (v. 29). And they ask God to stand by them with more miracles (v. 30). The earth-tremor along with each of them being filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 31) brings great assurance to them that God is indeed with them and is hearing their prayers. To Christians it is "if God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). And God answers their prayer for courage, for "they spake the word of God with boldness" (v. 31). They are true soldiers of Christ, being brave when the going is rough.

QUESTIONS: 1. Where do Peter and John go upon being released? 2. With what words do they begin their prayer? 3. For what do they ask? 4. What evidence do we have that God has answered their prayers?

E. The Church Marches On
(Study Acts 4:32-37)

No, the church is not going to be stopped by human opposition. Persecution but strengthens the devotion of its members. "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul," and this is fully shown by those who have possessions sharing with those who have needs (v. 32). As long as the church has a strong faith in God and a great love for one a-

nother, Satan cannot stop its ongoing. Expect Satan to chisel away at the church's faith and at the members' love for one another. In Ananias and Sapphira's case (coming up) will be his first successful attempt. No wonder then that I John 3:23 says, "This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment."

As wonderful as the fellowship of the church is, let us realize it does not exist merely for its own spiritual enjoyment. It must continue preaching the gospel to the unsaved outsiders. Still dedicated to its proclamation, still undaunted by the leaders' threats, and now more fully emboldened by God's answering their prayer, "with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (the very doctrine that grieved the opposition--see Acts 4:1,2), for God was truly with them (v. 33).

V. 34,35 give us more details about their sharing-program. Nobody lacks because the better-to-do sell what they have (lands or houses) and bring the sale-money to the apostles for distribution according to the others' needs. They are willing to do this because there is a need (see I John 3:17) and because they consider themselves stewards and not owners of what they have (v. 32). Truly they are fulfilling Matt. 6:20,21 and Gal. 6:10.

V. 36,37 introduce us to an important figure later in the book of Acts--Barnabas. At this time he is "Josès" but will later be called "Barnabas" ("son of consolation" or maybe "son of exhortation") by the apostles, a name very befitting this good man. Since he is from the isle of Cyprus, the possession which he sells is likely there. In that case he makes a special trip there to sell it and returns to Jerusalem with the money. His action ending chapter 4 is set in striking contrast to that of Ananias and Sapphira in the opening of chapter 5.

QUESTIONS: 1. In their benevolent program each has given as he has been, and each has received as he has had 2. What forbidden doctrine do they continue to preach? 3. What was Barnabas's name originally? 4. What island is his home? 5. What great thing does he do?

CHAPTER 3

Additional Problems Arise*A. Ananias and Sapphira's Hypocrisy*
(Study Acts 5:1-11)

In order to be in step with what others in the church are doing, this couple sells a possession, but instead of bringing the full amount they keep back a part of it (v. 1,2). They have probably gotten a good price for it and think they can get away with keeping a little of it. In order to fool the others though, they must bring most of it. Actually their wrong is not in keeping back some of it (Peter recognizes their right in the matter--v. 4) but in lying about it--representing that it is the full amount. The role of Satan (the tempter) is pointed out (v. 3). Other times that Satan's role is similarly pointed out: Judas (John 13:2,27) and David (I Chron. 21:1). We note too that since theirs is a religious act (giving), Ananias is lying to God and not merely to man (v. 4). The last words Ananias hears on this earth are these: "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God," for with his hearing these words he falls down dead before Peter (v. 6). This is not a heart attack but a miracle, for the same will happen to his wife when she comes in (v. 10). Most of the Bible's miracles are blessings to those on whom they are performed (miracles of healing, resurrections, etc.), but this is a miracle of judgment and destruction (like Elijah's calling down fire on the wicked king's captains and their soldiers--see II Kings 1:9-12).

We might wonder why all who through the centuries have misrepresented their giving have not dropped dead. Many times the first infraction of a dispensation or after a law is proclaimed finds God visiting

an open judgment on the violater as a warning to all later cases: thus Achan was stoned (Josh. 7:24-26); Nadab and Abihu were devoured by fire (Lev. 10:1,2); the earth swallowed Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. 16:27-33); fire consumed the two hundred fifty men who should not have been burning incense (Num. 16:35); etc.

We might wonder at the liberty taken to bury a dead man without even notifying his relatives. Commentaries generally by-pass this very obvious question. Since Ananias was a divine-judgment case of death, they treat his dead body just like Israel did Achan's (Josh. 7:25,26) and Absalom's (II Sam. 18:17).

Three hours later Sapphira comes in (v. 7). She may be looking for Ananias or may be coming to share in the praise received because of their sale and gift. Peter gives her an opportunity to tell the truth, but she shares in the lie (v. 8). She too is told of their sin against God's Spirit, and the last words she hears on this earth are: "Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out" (v. 9). And they do (v. 10).

We can understand the fear that comes on the other members as well as on outsiders as a consequence (v. 11). Such judgments cause people to "hear and fear" (Deut. 21:18-21) and to be reluctant to follow the example of such victims (Deut. 13:11).

QUESTIONS: 1. *Why do you think Ananias and Sapphira sell their possession?* 2. *What is their actual sin?* 3. *What are the last words Ananias hears?* 4. *Why have not all who have misrepresented their giving dropped dead?* 5. *What are the last words Sapphira hears?*

B. All the Apostles are Arrested
(Study Acts 5:12-42)

Such mighty miracles being performed by the a-

postles (v. 12) cause people to magnify them as a very special group that no man dares join (v. 12,13). The church has lost two members in Ananias and Sapphira (hypocritical members), but their number is more than replaced, for "believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (v. 14). When word gets out that even the shadow of Peter passing over the bodies of the sick in the streets brings healing, people begin to bring their sick from surrounding cities.

This is too much for the envious, spiteful high priest (Caiaphas) and his fellow Sadducees, whose word not to speak to anybody in the name of Jesus (Acts 4: 17,18) has been totally disregarded. They arrest all the apostles and put them in jail (v. 18). But it does them no good, for an angel releases them and tells them to go to the temple and preach (v. 19,20).

Unaware of the angel's action the high priest calls the council together the next morning and sends to the prison for the apostles (v. 21). The officers startle the council by returning with the message, "The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within" (v. 22, 23). The council members' puzzled remarks to one another are interrupted by one coming in reporting that the apostles are in the temple preaching to the people (v. 24,25).

We would think the leaders would call it "quits" by this time. But no, they send the captain and his officers to bring them--but without the use of force. And why no force? "They feared the people, lest they should be stoned" (v. 26). You think they will refrain because of fearing God. But remember they are Sadducees and do not believe in any hereafter (Acts 23: 8)--consequently do not believe in any judgment or any hell. They are not concerned about right and wrong. They are unprincipled. The only fear they are concerned about is what the people might do to them. (v. 26).

It is evident that Peter and John do not fear them (see Matt. 10:27,28) but have continued in the course they said they would (see Acts 4:18-20). When faced with the charge of disregarding their command not to teach in the name of Jesus, they are again bold in their reply: "We ought to obey God rather than man." The "fear of man" brings no "snare" to them (see Prov. 29:25). "The righteous are bold as a lion" (Prov. 28:1). And they go on to implicate further the leaders in guilt (v. 20), to glorify Jesus (v. 31), and to declare their own apostolic place in this divine program (v. 32). And how is this received by the leaders? "They were cut to the heart (compare Heb. 4:12), and took counsel to slay them" (v. 33). All that keeps the council from doing to the apostles what they did to Jesus is the advice of the famous teacher Gamaliel, the same Gamaliel who had been Saul of Tarsus's teacher (Acts 22:3).

Gamaliel asks to speak to the council in private where he warns them about killing the apostles, for if they are sent of God the council will be fighting against God (v. 39). He also assured them on the basis of other attempted leaders among Jewish segments (Theudas and Judas of Galilee--v. 36,37) that if the apostles have instigated this movement themselves it will soon run its course and fail (v. 38). His advice is the voice of one who has not made up his mind whether this work is of God or of man. The caution he shows is evidence that the transpirings have made inroads in his mind that have not been made in the minds of the others. (Note: Had Gamaliel known Christianity to be a humanly originated movement and not of God, his advice would and should have been different).

They yield to his counsel, but in releasing them the council gives them a beating and further charges them not to speak in the name of Jesus (v. 40). As the apostles depart, they rejoice to be able to suffer for Jesus. Jesus had taught another reason to rejoice over

persecution: "Great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:10-12). They fulfill what Peter later wrote: "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed" (I Pet. 4:16).

Nor does this persecution stop their spreading the gospel: "They ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ"--"daily in the temple, and in every house" (v. 42). Jesus must be preached if people are to accept Him. Evangelism is a "daily" matter. This preaching must be done to the masses in public places (like their "temple") and in the homes of the unsaved. Compare Acts 20:20.

QUESTIONS: 1. Has the church lost or gained numbers over the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira? 2. What is said about Peter's shadow? 3. Why do the leaders arrest the apostles? 4. How do the apostles get out of jail? 5. Why does the council bring the apostles without the use of force? 6. What saves the apostles from the wrath of the council? 7. In what 2 places do the apostles continue teaching and preaching?

C. The Grecian-Widow Problem (Study Acts 6:1-7)

Christ intends for the church to grow like a grain of mustard seed (Matt. 13:31,32) and to spread like leaven in meal (Matt. 13:33). On Pentecost there are three thousand additions (Acts 2:41), and day by day the Lord continues to add to that number (Acts 2:47). By Acts 4:4 the number has grown to five thousand. Following the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira "believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:14). And now Acts 6:1 speaks of the number of the disciples multiplying! The gospel-leaven is working even in Jerusalem.

We are not told why the Grecian widows are neglected in the daily ministration of food (v. 1).

Likely it is not intentional. These are not Gentiles but Jews. Grecian Jews are Jews born and brought up outside of Palestine and who, as a result, have Greek as their native tongue. (All Jews dispersed throughout the world were "Grecian" Jews. Such Jews were found in almost every city where Paul preached.) The Hebrew Jews are Jews who are natives of Palestine, and they feel superior to those Jews residing in other lands.

Rather than letting the negligence continue and the murmuring become worse, the apostles set an example of getting things settled before they proceed further. Many matters are wisely handled by leadership alone, but in this case the apostles involve the membership in the solution. Rather than the apostles adding overseeing the daily distribution to their present responsibilities, which would curtail their preaching work, they call on the membership to select an ample number of men to care for the matter. The fact that seven men will be needed indicates just how sizeable the Jerusalem congregation is.

The men selected are to be of "honest report" (v. 3), for they will be administering the money of the church. They are also to be men of "wisdom", for they will have judgments to make from case to case. And they are to be men "full of the Holy Spirit", really godly men who will in no way become involved affectionately with the widows. With such men in charge the apostles can continue to give themselves "continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (v. 4). The apostles' time is to be devoted to two things: prayer to God and ministering the Word to people. This is their time-consuming labor. They don't just pray (like monks isolated in a monastery), but they preach also (they are people-involved). On the other hand they don't just preach, trusting their own wisdom and ability but spend much time praying for God to help them and use them. All of us need to heed Prov. 3:5:

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding."

It is not difficult to solve problems when people want them solved. Both the apostles and the membership see the justness of the Grecians' complaint and do not reprimand them for their charge but set out to right their wrong. The proposed solution by the apostles pleases the whole multitude (v. 5), and they choose seven good men for the task. All seven have Greek names--the membership goes full distance to provide acceptable leadership for the project. Greeks looking out for Grecian widows! To add to the first name in the list the fact that Stephen is a man "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (v. 5) shows that he is especially qualified and is probably the one put in charge of the Grecian distribution program. We will hear more about him later as well as the next man in the list (Philip). We know nothing more of the other five than what is mentioned here.

The question of whether these seven are deacons is often discussed and yet not easily settled. Able scholars can be found on both sides of the question. Since the question is not directly discussed in the setting, possibly no one should be absolutely dogmatic about the matter. Your writer's studies incline him toward the position that they are a committee of seven to take care of a particular matter while the need prevails. The committee members might have been selected by the leaders (as is customary with a committee) but which in this case was referred to the people themselves, resulting in the happy selections reported above. The three qualifications required here are significantly fewer than those in the deacon-qualification list in I Tim. 3:8-13. If they are deacons, is their only work to take care of a special segment of widows rather than the other work of deacons too? The chief argument advanced for their being deacons is found in v. 2, where the apostles say it is not right

for them to leave the Word of God to serve (Greek: "diakonein") tables. This of itself does not prove the point, for that verbal (infinitive) comes from the verb "diakoneo" which is commonly used of many who were not deacons. It is usually translated "ministered". For instance angels "ministered" to Jesus (Matt. 4:11). Peter's mother-in-law "ministered" to Jesus and the apostles (Matt. 8:15). Jesus came to "minister" and give His life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). These few examples are merely a sample of many such cited in any Greek Concordance, proving that these seven cannot be said to be deacons simply on the basis that they are going to serve ("diakonein") tables. Check this if you have references works to do so.

Now comes the actual setting these men apart to their work. The apostles approve their qualifications, then solemnly pray and lay their hands on them. In the light of Acts 6:8 (Stephen) and of Acts 8:6 (Philip) this imposition of apostolic hands has evidently imparted miraculous powers to them also, as we shall see.

Does this arrangement settle the Grecian-widow problem? Does the congregation survive this problem? And does the church now go marching on? V. 7 answers with three definite statements: (1) the Word of God increases (more are willing to listen to the preaching of the apostles); (2) the number of disciples in Jerusalem multiplies greatly (more people are convinced that Christianity is right); and (3) even many of the Jewish priests become obedient to the faith (the priests are Sadducees, and that sect does not believe in any resurrection; hence, the preaching of the resurrected Christ is indeed making significant inroads into this very party that has been desperately trying to stop it--see Acts 3:1-3; 5:17,18,24-28,40). Every so often there is a verse or two in Luke's writings in Acts in which a great summary of matters is made. Such is v. 7 along with 2:46,47; 9:31; 11:26--to list a few. They make great memory verses.

QUESTIONS: 1. Who are Grecian Jews? 2. How many men will it take to care for the Grecian widows? 3. What qualifications are these men to have? 4. In what 2 things will the apostles busy themselves? 5. What favors the men selected not being deacons? 6. Why does the Greek word for "serve" being "diakonein" not prove they are deacons? 7. How are these men set apart for their work?

D. Stephen is Stoned
(Study Acts 6:8--8:4)

Stephen is here said to be performing miracles among the people, and from what follows we can see he is doing more than serving tables--or maybe the daily-ministration has passed. If the former is the case, we observe the rule that when people consecrate themselves to serving God, they are not content to do only what they started out to do, but their service to the Lord grows and takes on additional aspects. It is probable too that by this time those who have stayed over in Jerusalem following Pentecost have received enough teaching to return to their many far-scattered homes so that the "seven" (thus they are referred to in Acts 21) are no longer needed in that role. This section follows Stephen. Chapter 8 will follow Philip. We have nothing extra concerning the other five men.

Both Stephen and Philip are credited with performing miracles (Acts 6:8 for Stephen and Acts 8:6 for Philip). They are the first other than apostles to work miracles since Christ's ascension. Since the laying on of apostles' hands brings miraculous power (II Tim. 1:6; Acts 8:18; Acts 19:6), these two men likely received their power when the apostles' hands were laid on them in Acts 6:6.

In commenting on v. 1 about the Grecian Jews (Jews born and brought up outside of Palestine), we explained that the native-born Jews of Jerusalem and

Palestine felt superior to Grecian Jews. Such Grecian Jews, men of different places listed in v. 9, have a synagogue of their own in Jerusalem. Stephen himself, as we have noticed from his Greek name, is Grecian and may have been identified with their synagogue before his acceptance of Christ. They do not agree with his alignment with the followers of Jesus. They involve him in a dispute (v. 9). Can't you hear them get louder and louder as he tries to persuade them concerning Jesus and as they defend their leaders' action in condemning and crucifying Jesus? It is some dispute, for when Jews dispute, they dispute--especially in Palestine! Though it is one man against several, they cannot resist the wisdom and Spirit by which Stephen speaks (v. 10)--just as Jesus had promised: "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist" (Luke 21:15).

What will Stephen's opponents do since they find themselves the losers in the dispute? Believe? If they have good and honest hearts, the Word will bring forth fruit in their lives (Luke 8:15), but since they are "disputing" the case is different. When people dispute, their goal is to prove the other person wrong. When they don't succeed, they do not give in and join the side that is right.

Stephen's opponents are so defeated and enraged they are determined to get rid of him. And in order to do so they stoop to the same dishonesty Jezebel employed to get Naboth condemned (I Kings 21:13) and the council used to condemn Jesus (Matt. 26:59-61). Their procedure: (1) They secure men (probably with bribe-money) to circulate this report among the people: "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God" (v. 11). (2) This stirs up the people against Stephen who will then side with Stephen's enemies (v. 12). (3) The elders and scribes arrest him and bring him to the council that has already shown its prejudice against Christianity (Acts 4:16-18) (v.

12). (4) False witnesses (probably the same ones mentioned in v. 11) inform the council that "this man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law," and they go on to say, "We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us" (v. 13,14).

At this point our text interrupts the court proceedings to tell us that all who were in the courtroom "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel" (v. 15). His case is either similar to that of Moses ("The children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone," Exo. 34:35) or that he looked "angelic" to them. I personally question the latter, for people see nothing good or beautiful about a person whom they hate--and would he appear that way to all of them at the same time? This reasoning leaves us with the other probability: God miraculously made an angelic radiance come into his face. But does this deter his enemies? No, it but further demonstrates how determined hatred can be in disregarding truth that is against its personal ends. Disregarding the look, the high priest gets back to the charge made against Stephen. He asks, "Are these things so?" (7:1).

Instead of giving the high priest a simple "yes" or "no" answer, Stephen goes into a lengthy recitation of Jewish history beginning back when God first communicated with Abraham to leave Ur and go to a land He would show him (v. 2-50). We might marvel at the council's patience with such a detailed and seemingly irrelevant answer except that as Jews they are fond of hearing their own history recited (see other instances of such recitations: Josh. 24:1-13, Psa. 105:8-45; Neh. 9:4-38, Acts 13:16-39, and others), and they are likely curious as to what he is leading up to (we shall find that out later).

He addresses them in v. 2 as "men" (the council members are all male), as "brethren" (Jewish followers

of Christ never disowned their physical ties with their Jewish people: Acts 2:29; Acts 3:17; Acts 9:17; etc.), and as "fathers" (the council members were the leaders of the nation).

Occasionally the New Testament (by inspiration) includes some information about Old Testament events not recorded in the Old Testament itself. Reece in his commentary on Acts lists a number of them: Enoch's prophecy (Jude 12); the names of the Egyptian magicians (II Tim. 3:8); the hope that sustained Abraham as he went to offer Isaac (Heb. 11:19); Moses' acknowledgment of fear at Mt. Sinai (Heb. 12:21); Moses' motive for leaving the court of Pharaoh (Heb. 11:24-26); and the prayer of Elijah (Jas. 5:17). Added to this list is the first thing Stephen mentions here: that even before God called Abraham to leave Haran and proceed into Canaan He had appeared to him at Ur (v. 1-4). While Gen. recognizes that Abraham first lived in Ur of Chaldea (Gen. 11:31), it does not record God's call that Stephen mentions. Abraham's call was to leave his country (a test of his obedience), to leave his kindred (they were idolatrous--Josh. 24:2), and to go to a land He would show him (a test of his faith--Heb. 11:8). Gen. 12:1-3 does record Abraham's call to leave Haran. He was 75 at the time and took his nephew Lot with him into Canaan (Gen. 12:4,5).

Abraham merely sojourned in Canaan. He did not own any of the land (v. 5) except the Cave of Machpelah which he bought as a burial place (Gen. 23:1-20). (Please see comments on v. 16 also.) As he sojourned in various places in the land, he realized that someday it would all belong to his offspring, God having promised it to his descendants even before he had any children (v. 5). This promise is in Gen. 15:2-7,18-21. That very night God gave him a vision of things to come referred to by Stephen's words in v. 6, 7 (see Gen. 15:12-16).

Many years of history are boiled down in v. 8.

The covenant of circumcision was instituted in Gen. 17:9-12. The Old Testament people of God began with Abraham. God took one of Abraham's descendants--Isaac. Then He took only one of Isaac's--Jacob. Then He was ready to take all of one man's descendants as His people--Jacob's descendants. You can see why the names "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" are frequently linked together (Exo. 3:6; Exo. 6:8; Deut. 9:27; Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28; and many other instances). Stephen aptly calls Jacob's twelve sons "patriarchs" for the descendants of each of these sons became one of the twelve tribes of Israel following the Exodus.

Then in v. 9 Stephen comes to Joseph's brothers selling him (Gen. 37:12-28) because of "envy" (Gen. 37:2-11 gives a background of their feelings against Joseph). Most translations give "jealousy" instead of the King James' "envy". Down into Egypt he was taken (Gen. 39:1). The blessing of God was with him (v. 9) to help him overcome his sorrows and to get him released from the jail into which he had been unrighteously cast (Gen. 39:21--41:9).

Stephen recalls to his listeners the two trips to Egypt by Joseph's brothers and his being made known to them (v. 11,12). The details are found in Gen. 42:1--45:8. Joseph then sent for his father and all Jacob's offspring to move into Egypt (v. 14). When Gen. 46:27 says the total number of Israelites dwelling in Egypt was 70, we are surprised when we hear Stephen say 75. If he is quoting the Hebrew for Gen. 46:27, he will say 70. Since he is quoting the Greek translation commonly in use among his hearers, it says 75. Inspiration has him utilizing the Greek Septuagint rather than stop to argue the point. Jacob was 130 when he went to Egypt (Gen. 47:9). He spent the last seventeen years of his life there, dying at the age of 147 (Gen. 47:28). Before dying he requested to be buried in the Cave of Machpelah where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Leah were already entombed (Gen. 49:29-

31), making it one of the most famous tombs in the world. You may visit that famous place today at Hebron though you are not admitted to the tomb-chamber itself. Gen. 50:1,2 sounds as if Joseph had him mummified. If so, his mummy is probably in the tomb-chamber even yet, which the Arabs, who control it, neither enter nor allow anybody else to.

A random reading of v. 15,16 might lead one to think Jacob was buried in Sychem (Shechem), which would pose a problem since Gen. 49 says he was buried in the cave of Machpelah at Hebron. The Greek clears up the problem. In Greek "our fathers" (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, etc.) is nominative plural, making it the subject of a new clause with the verb "died" understood. The "and" before "our fathers" shows it to be a compound sentence whose meaning is: Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, and our fathers died and were carried over into Sychem (Shechem) and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought...

As previously stated, Stephen's sermon contains a number of inspired details not recorded in the Old Testament. V. 16 contains two: (1) Gen. tells that when Jacob died, his body was carried to Hebron and buried (Gen. 50:13). Joseph charged the Israelites to take his body with them when they would leave Egypt (Gen. 50:24,25), and they did (Exo. 13:19; Josh. 24:32). But the Old Testament drops the coverage there. But Stephen shows that each of the other sons of Jacob received the same loving treatment. All of them were entombed at the same place as Joseph, according to Stephen. (2) Gen. 33:19 and Josh. 24:32 credit Jacob with purchasing that piece of ground at Shechem from the sons of Hamor. Stephen says Abraham purchased it. Abraham likely purchased it when he early lived at Shechem (in Gen. 12). The rest of his life he spent in the south. Then came the life of Isaac. Then the early life of Jacob. With no family residing in the Shechem area all those years to keep Abraham's possession in-

tact, it became lost to the family, and Jacob had to repurchase it in order to have it. He probably wanted it because it had once belonged to his grandfather. He gave it to Joseph and his offspring (Josh. 24:32; compare John 4:5). Joseph's forgiving attitude toward his brothers lived on in his offspring's attitude, permitting the rest of Israel to bury their fathers there. Joseph's famous sepulchre is about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from Jacob's Well, which comports with John 4:56.

"The time of the promise" to Abraham that drew near (v. 17) was the end of four hundred years in Egypt (Gen. 15:13,14). For a vivid statement of how the Israelites multiplied in Egypt (v. 17) see Exo. 1:7.

The new king who arose who knew not Joseph (v. 18) was likely the king of a new dynasty of kings-- a new regime that took over Egypt. When a new power takes over a country, that power does not regard the heroes in a former regime. An historian Manetho, living in the Inter-Testament Period (the period between our Old and New Testaments), divided Egyptian history into the different dynasties that ruled it. The Hyksos kings (sometimes called the Shepherd kings) had ruled Egypt for sometime. They were Asiatic in origin and were Semitic, thus feeling a kinship with the Israelites. The next dynasty that regarded not Joseph was a native Egyptian dynasty.

Stephen recalls in v. 19 the hardships brought on their forefathers by the new ruling set-up in Egypt, hardships that had been envisioned by Abraham (Gen. 15:13). Particularly does he recall the law against the male babies (Exo. 1:15-22). He recounts in v. 20, 21 the well known history of their great leader Moses who was born in those dark days and hidden as long as he could be and who was rescued from his floating basket by Pharaoh's daughter (Exo. 2:1-10; Heb. 11:25).

When you study into ancient Egyptian culture, two things really stand out: (1) their wisdom in being able to construct their pyramids, temples, obelisks,

etc.; and (2) the wealth and treasure they amassed. V. 22 shows Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and Stephen's statement that he was "mighty in words and deeds" does not approve Moses' alibi, "I am not eloquent...I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Exo. 4:10). Heb. 11:24-26 speaks of his forsaking the riches and treasures of Egypt, the circumstances of which Stephen next narrates (v. 23-29). Compare Exo. 2:11-15. Stephen's statement in v. 25 gives us an insight into Moses' thinking not previously revealed. God later called him to do what he had earlier attempted on his own. His previous failure probably explains one of the reasons he was reluctant to attempt it again even when divinely called to the project (Exo. 3:10--4:17).

The two sons he fathered in Midian (v. 29) were Gershom and Eliezer, and his wife was Zipporah (Exo. 18:2,3).

What a different life Moses had for the next forty years as he was out of the green Nile Valley and out of the Egyptian palace leading the life of a simple shepherd in the Mt. Sinai region! This was the middle forty years of his life. His last forty years were spent as Israel's leader.

Stephen mentions in v. 30,31 that day when the routine of Moses' shepherd life was interrupted by the strangeness of a desert bush on fire and yet not being consumed. We can imagine the terror that possessed him as he heard the voice of God speaking to him out of the very bush he was curiously approaching (v. 32). With the words, "I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," the silence of the centuries was broken, and God took up with Moses where He had left off with the Hebrew patriarchs. Jesus referred to God's utterance at the burning bush in showing the Sadducees that the departed yet live following physical death (Matt. 22:31, 32). Two men in the Bible were told to take off their

shoes because of the sacredness of the occasions: Moses (v. 33) and Joshua (Josh. 5:15). With Moses' shoes off, what does God say or do? He said, "I have seen... I have heard...and am come down" to do something about it--referring to the condition of Moses' people in Egypt (v. 34). That was all well and good until God said, "Come, I will send thee into Egypt"--the last place Moses wanted or ever expected to go!

Stephen's abbreviated account passes over Moses' trying to get out of going (Exo. 3:11--4:20). And he briefs down the periods of the plagues on Egypt and the Exodus itself into only one verse (v. 36), but he does not overlook Moses' statement in Deut. 18:15, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear" (v. 37), which Peter shows in Acts 3:20-26 applies to Jesus.

Moses is the "he" of v. 38 who Stephen says was in the "church" (congregation of Israel) in the wilderness who received the "lively oracles" ("living oracles," ASV). An "oracle" is a divine utterance. God's oracles are "living". God speaks to us through His Word even though it was written many centuries ago (I Pet. 1:24,25; Matt. 24:35; Heb. 4:12). The "lively oracles" Stephen is referring to is the law given through Moses to their fathers.

Stephen mentions the "angel" who spoke to Moses at the giving of the law. This may have been the angel who accompanied them all those years in the wilderness (Isa. 63:9). Several times does the New Testament connect angels with the giving of the law (Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2).

Stephen mentions their fathers' disobedience to their leader Moses (v. 39). This manifested itself frequently during those forty years beginning as early as their golden-calf blunder while he was in the mountain receiving the law (v. 40,41). The forty days God detained Moses in the mountain were too long for Is-

rael to retain its composure. In their idle restlessness they concluded that Moses would not return to them, and he had been their contact with the invisible God of their fathers and their leader up to this time. According to Stephen they decided to return to Egypt (a fact not reported in Exo. 32). When they said, "Make us gods," in Exo. 32:1, the Hebrew says, "Make us Elohim," a Hebrew word used 32 times in the first chapter of Gen. to refer to "god" and many other times throughout the Old Testament in the same way while only occasionally to refer to idol substitutes for the true God (like Exo. 34:15-17 where "Elohim" is 5 times translated "gods" or "god"). To this author it is possible that Israel was saying to Aaron, "Make us a likeness of Elohim to go before us." They linked the "Elohim" which they made with "Elohim" who had brought them out of Egypt (Exo. 32:4: "These be thy Elohim, O Israel, which brought thee up out of...Egypt"). Israel was happy with the form of a calf made of gold for they were accustomed to the worship of bulls in Egypt. Reece observes that "to go before us" would be like the pagan's practice of "carrying their idols in the forefront of their army's marching columns".

This beginning of idolatry plagued Israel, especially during the Judges Period (Judg. 2:8-19), but from Samuel to David it was subdued only to recur in Solomon's latter years (I Kings 11:1-8). From that time forth it was a part of their national life until the North fell to the Assyrians in 721 B.C. and the South went into Babylonian Captivity in 586 B.C. This idolatry in various forms (v. 43) nullified the acceptability of their sacrifices (v. 42). "Moloch" was an Ammonite god. "Remphan" was another heathen deity worshiped by Israel but not absolutely identifiable at this time. All twelve Minor Prophet books (Hosea through Malachi) were brief enough to all be written on one scroll. Hence, v. 42,43 though a quotation from Amos 5:25-27 is said to be "written in book of the prophets". The Amos quotation actually warns the

Northern Kingdom of their being carried "beyond Damascus" (Amos 5:27), and it was, for Assyria was "beyond Damascus". Stephen brings the punishment for idolatry up to date by saying "beyond Babylon", where the Southern Kingdom had later been carried. A play on words: "Ye took up (or carried) the tabernacle of Moloch...I will carry you away beyond Babylon."

In contrast to the "tabernacle of Moloch" Stephen mentions the true "tabernacle" which Moses was directed to make according to God's divine pattern (v. 44). This they brought into Canaan under Joshua. Both here and in Heb. 4:8 the King James puts "Jesus" for the Old Testament Joshua. "Jesus" and "Joshua" are the same name in two different languages--"Jesus" in Greek and "Joshua" in Hebrew. Most translations properly use "Joshua". It was not until the days of King David (v. 45,46) that anybody seriously considered replacing the portable tabernacle with a permanent structure (temple) (see I Chron. 17:1-4,11,12), and not until Solomon was a temple built to replace it (v. 47). I Kings 5,6 tell of Solomon's construction.

The accusation against Stephen is that he has spoken blasphemous words against the temple and the law (6:13), and that he has reportedly said, "Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered." He has already spoken of God's calling Moses and giving the law to him, and in so doing he brought in Moses' prediction of another law-giving prophet like himself whom God would raise up. He has just shown his great respect for the building of the temple and now goes on to affirm that God does not dwell in temples made by human hands (v. 48), and he quotes their great prophet Isaiah's book where God said, "Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?" (v. 49,50--a quotation of Isa. 66:1,2). In Athens while in sight of

their many religious temples Paul went one step further, for after reaffirming that God does not dwell in temples made by hands he went on to say He is not worshiped by man's artistic designs and structures. The great cathedral-builders of the Middle Ages must have missed both Stephen's and Paul's statements!

Stephen's enemies do not like what they are hearing about the temple, and their rebellious response is evident to him. So without continuing his thoughts he abruptly charges them with being "stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears," always resisting God's Spirit just as their fathers did who would not listen to the prophets but killed them, inspired men who foretold the coming of the Just One whom they themselves had murdered (v. 51,52). When he says they have received the law but have not kept it, they show that his description of them is accurate for they "gnash" on him with their teeth. In hatred and rage, like vicious animals about to attack their victim, they grind their teeth together, and it is evident that they are about to kill him. But God is not deserting Stephen in this hour. The special mention of the "Holy Spirit" at this time (v.55) blesses Stephen in two ways: gives him that inner peace that passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7) so that death has no fear for him and enables him to look into heaven where he beholds Jesus who is watching what His faithful witness is undergoing! Instead of Jesus' usual "sitting at the right hand of God" (Heb. 1:3; Heb. 12:2; etc.) He is "standing" at God's right hand, thus honoring the first Christian martyr. The vision is so glorious Stephen cannot keep it to himself, but his persecutors do not want to hear any more. They drown out his beautiful words with hateful words of their own, stop their ears, lay hold on him, and take him out the city gate that today bears his name because of this event (the gate on Jerusalem's east wall just north of the temple area), and there they stone him. It was customary to

stone (or execute) criminals outside the town or city (I Kings 21:13; Luke 4:29; Heb. 13:12). It is thought to have been based on Lev. 24:14.

As they began throwing stones at him, Stephen prays that the Lord will take his spirit (v. 59). He addresses his request to Jesus because he beholds Him at God's right hand (v. 56). Still having strength to be heard, he kneels down and with a loud voice prays, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (v. 60), thus fulfilling Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:44) and emulating the example of Jesus when He Himself was being crucified (Luke 23:34). These are Stephen's last words, and the curtain drops on a career that was faithful though brief.

Death is here called a "sleep" (v. 60) as it is in numerous other passages (John 11:11-14; Luke 8:52, 53; I Cor. 15:6,51). It is the body that has died (not the spirit--notice Jas. 2:26), and it is the part that has been in the grave that will be wakened (Dan. 12:2).

We note that Saul, at whose feet Stephen's stoners laid their outer garments as they stone him (v. 58), is here called a "young man" (v. 58)--he is probably around forty. This is concluded by blending bits of information found in several passages. In Acts 26:10 he says he gave his "voice" against those being put to death. In Greek the meaning is that he cast his vote to have them killed, indicating he was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. That he was young to be so high in the Jewish regime is borne out by Gal. 1:14: I "profited ('advanced,' ASV) in the Jews' religion above many my equals ('my own age,' ASV) in my own nation." He surely would have to be around forty to be so high in his nation and surely not much more than that still to be called a "young man".

The dying Stephen has no way of knowing Saul will later become an apostle and be the most effective campaigner for Jesus and the church during the apostolic age. Some think Stephen's prayer, so much like Jesus'

on the cross (Luke 23:34) and an example of what Jesus taught (Matt. 5:44), may be one of the factors ultimately bringing about the change in Saul. In later years Paul remorsefully recalls his part in Stephen's tragic death (Acts 22:20).

What an introduction to the prominent Jew Paul! After saying the witnesses laid their clothes at his feet while they proceeded to stone Stephen, 8:1 says he was definitely "consenting to his death", and he did it in all good conscience (Acts 23:1; Acts 26:9-11), fulfilling Jesus' prediction to His apostles, "The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (John 16:2). To Saul persecuting the church is a manifestation of his religious zeal (Phil. 3:6).

Prior to the death of Stephen the church's enemies had only told them not to teach or preach in Jesus' name and had threatened them and beaten them for disregarding their order. But Stephen's death opens a real door of persecution against the first congregation of the church, and it becomes necessary for its members to flee from Jerusalem in order to save their lives (v. 1). "Judea and Samaria" are particularly mentioned as places to which they escaped. Judea was the district around Jerusalem. Samaria lay just to the north of Judea (between it and Galilee). Both of these districts will receive the gospel through these refugees, as we shall see later.

It remains somewhat a secret why the apostles do not flee from Jerusalem, and how they can survive there when the others cannot. We can mostly ask questions and make conjectures about the matter. The Jewish authorities may fear doing anything to the apostles on the basis of four things: (1) their power to heal a man lame from birth; (2) the report of the immediate deaths of Ananias and Sapphira in the presence of Peter; (3) the apostles' miraculous escape from their prison (Acts 5:17,25); and (4) they may still be

afraid of being stoned by the people if they do anything to the apostles (Acts 5:26). Or God may have told the apostles to remain in Jerusalem, and He will take care of them. They need to re-establish the church in Jerusalem, and from later references to it (Acts 11:22; Acts 15:4; etc.) we see they do. Also it seems it is God's will they remain in Jerusalem so that as congregations are established in various places they can go forth to lay hands on their local leaders and impart the gift of inspiration and confirming powers (an example: Acts 8:14,15,18,19).

Stephen is greatly lamented (v. 2) because he is well known (Acts 6:5-8) and because of the circumstances of his death. Those so close they have sold their lands and possessions so each can be cared for physically surely lament when one of their number dies such a violent, undeserved death.

To young Saul of Tarsus Stephen's death is just the beginning. He is determined to blot out the new religion that has been established among his people and which he is convinced is false. And he makes havoc of the church by going into the homes of the members and "haling" ("dragging," ASV) them to prison. In later years as a Christian himself he gives his own version of this erroneous chapter of his life (Acts 26:9:11; Acts 22:4,5). But instead of blotting out the church this violent persecution only spreads the church, for "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (v. 4). We would not say God has willed that His faithful preacher be murdered, but He definitely uses it to see the church move out into the next fields of evangelism--sending the gospel to Judea and Samaria (notice Acts 1:8).

Why do the early church members flee from their homes rather than deny their faith? Because they truly believe in Jesus, because they love Him, because to deny Him before men means He will deny them before the Father in heaven (Matt. 10:33). This first congregation is setting an example that will be followed by

successive generations of Christians when the Roman emperors will do all within their power to destroy Christianity only to find that persecution can never prevail against the church.

QUESTIONS: 1. Who were the first 2 men not apostles to perform miracles in Acts? 2. Why can't Stephen's opposers resist his wisdom? 3. What lie do they tell about Stephen? 4. Comment on Stephen's face being like the face of an angel. 5. With what Old Testament person does Stephen begin his message? 6. Why does Stephen call his hearers "brethren" when they are not followers of Christ? 7. Name 3 facts of Old Testament history in Stephen's sermon that are not recorded in the Old Testament. 8. Narrate the various information Stephen gives about Moses. 9. What personal charge does Stephen bring against his hearers? 10. What does "gnash" with their teeth mean? 11. What does Stephen see as he looks into heaven? 12. What is Stephen's dying prayer? 13. What is Saul of Tarsus's part in this event? 14. What happens to the Jerusalem congregation following Stephen's death? 15. How can the apostles stay in Jerusalem when others can't? 16. What does Saul now busy himself doing?