

PART TWO

VARIOUS MISSIONS



JOURNEYS

CHAPTER 4

Philip's Journeys*A. To the City of Samaria*
(Study 8:5-25)

Philip, one of the seven of Acts 6:3-6, is no longer needed to see about the Jerusalem Grecian widows' daily needs. He is one of the refugees who give up their Jerusalem homes and flee to other places. Because of the evangelistic work he is now beginning, he will be known as "Philip the evangelist" (Acts 21:8).

His first field of labor in this new role is the city of Samaria. King Omri of the Northern Kingdom purchased this great hill from a man Shemer and named the capital city he built on it after Shemer (I Kings 16:23,24). It remained an important city until destroyed by the Assyrians in 721 B.C. when the Northern Kingdom fell. Today when you visit the site of Samaria, the principal ruins you see belong to Herod the Great's construction (the city that Philip goes to).

Why is he going to Samaria when the Jews have no dealings with Samaritans (John 4:9)? And why no special call of Philip to go there and no baptism of the Holy Spirit on the Samaritans to convince Philip they are to be evangelized? Probably because of Jesus' two-day stop in Samaria (John 4), coupled with His commission-words in Acts 1:8.

It is interesting to note Luke's summary of Philip's preaching: he preaches "Christ" at Samaria (v. 5); the Samaritans believe Philip preaching "the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (v. 12); and he preaches "Jesus" to the Ethiopian (v. 35). All these are synonymous with preaching the gospel (Mark 16:15).

What a city-wide reception is given the gospel in

Samaria (v. 6)! The miracles he performs have much to do with their receiving him as a divine messenger (v. 6,7). This is God's purpose in giving His original messengers miracle-power (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3,4; Acts 14:3). Philip is the second person in Acts to perform miracles who is not an apostle, Stephen being the first. Want an easy way to remember where to find their miracle reports? Stephen is the first (Acts 6:8); Philip is the second (Acts 8:6). Philip's coming brings great joy to the city (v. 8), reminiscent of great revival meetings that once affected whole communities in our own land.

Time out to tell you about the sorcerer Simon (v. 9-13). He has "bewitched" (Greek means "astonished" or "amazed") them with his sorceries. He poses as "some great one", and from the least citizen to the greatest they fall for it. His sorceries convince them he is the "great power of God", and this spell has been over them for years.

But the miracles of Philip are the "great power of God", and they see the difference and listen to him. They believe and are baptized, the normal report in Acts for those accepting Christ. Preachers in Acts all respect Christ's plan in Mark 16:16. Mention is made that these being baptized are "men and women". Why not infants also as is regularly practiced in Roman Catholicism and in many large Protestant churches? Because the New Testament in no way teaches infant baptism.

And guess who is also baptized? Simon (v. 13)! Having fooled the people so long with his sorcery-tricks, he is amazed at the real miracles performed by Philip (v. 13).

Word of Philip's great success in Samaria reaches the apostles at Jerusalem (v. 14). God will soon call Philip away from Samaria to preach to the Ethiopian (later in the chapter). How can these converts carry on as followers of Christ with no leader, and the New

Testament not written as yet? The apostles Peter and John are dispatched to Samaria to impart the Holy Spirit (v. 14-16) in the measure needed in their situation. Let us realize these converts have all received the indwelling measure of the Holy Spirit when they were baptized as promised in Acts 2:38,39. It is important to note that when the Bible talks in other places about the Holy Spirit being "poured out" (Acts 2:17,18) or "shed forth" (Acts 2:33) or "came on" (Acts 19:6) or "fell on" people (Acts 10:44; Acts 11:15), it is always a miraculous outpouring. So when our present verse says, "As yet he was fallen upon none of them," it means they have not received the Holy Spirit in a miraculous measure. The reason they have not is that this Philip is not an apostle, and only apostles are recorded as conferring miraculous gifts. This is why Peter and John come from Jerusalem. Simon sees it is through the laying on of their hands that these powers are conferred. (Since Paul was an apostle, at no time was it necessary for other apostles to follow up his work and lay hands on certain ones--Paul did this himself, Acts 19:6.) As we shall see later, Peter passes through all places where Philip preaches, evidently following up his work in this necessary way (Acts 8:40; Acts 9:32ff).

It is Peter and John's conferring these spiritual gifts that presents a temptation to Simon. He who has been the "great one" for a long time again wants to be the superior person--the one who bestows the spiritual power. And he gets his wallet out and offers money for this power (v. 18,19). And from this act we have our word "simony", defined by Webster as "traffic in that which is sacred; specif., the crime of buying or selling ecclesiastical preferment." There is no temptation on Peter's part to accept the money. Instead he withers Simon with these shocking words: "Thy money perish with thee...Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter...Thy heart is not right in the sight of God...Repent therefore of this thy wicked-

ness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee...Thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity" (v. 20-23). Had Simon foreknown Peter's reaction, he would not be making this offer. He is greedy for power and supposes Peter will accept money. But the scheme breaks down because he does not understand that God's gifts are not to be purchased (v. 20) and that God's true servants cannot be "bought off".

Some teach that Simon was never converted (his case doesn't coincide with their "once saved always saved" teaching). But v. 13 shows he believes just as much as the others (note the word "also") and was baptized like the others. If one has smoked before conversion, that will be his temptation immediately after conversion. If he has been a drunkard, drinking will be an immediate temptation. Simon has been proud, and the desire to be the big one returns as a post-conversion temptation.

He is not told to be baptized. That has been done properly. A sinning Christian is to "repent" and "pray". He is to "confess" his sins to the One who is faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse him from all sin (I John 1:9). Suppose Simon does not repent, does not confess his sins to God, does not pray for forgiveness. He will be unforgiven, will continue in the gall of bitterness and iniquity's bondage, his heart will not be right with God, he will have no part in God's program, and he will perish. Why raise this question? Because many backsliders today do not repent and get right, and both they and we need to realize their condition before God.

Notice too that Peter does not disregard the condition Simon is in. He doesn't act as if all is well when it isn't. A preacher is to "rebuke" at times (II Tim. 4:2,3), and here is a time for it. Peter does so in compliance with God's will for a preacher and in respect to Simon's need. And how does Simon respond? Does he get offended at Peter's words? Does he clam

up in his shell? Does he say this is just Peter's view of things? No, he recognizes Peter's divine leadership, accepts his statement of his condition, and humbles himself, saying, "Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me" (v. 24). From this we conclude that Simon repents and prays. His long-range future, however, is different if we can believe the descriptions and identifications of some post-apostolic Christian writers. In the early times of the church there was some "Simon" who was an arch-enemy of the truth and one with whom Peter had a number of personal confrontations, a leader of an heretical group, and it may have been this Simon or some other Simon. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, among others, identify that Simon with this Simon of Samaria. If so, his case is an example of the church sometimes being hurt later by one whom it has converted only to have Satan overturn him to do a destructive work in the church. Church people usually are B.P.O.E. ("Best People On Earth"): however, some can be the "Biggest Problems on Earth".

V. 25 shows they stay in Samaria for a time and preach. This will strengthen them in the faith and faithfulness. This is referred to as "confirming" in Acts 14:22 and Acts 15:41. And on their way back to Jerusalem they preach in many Samaritan cities (v. 25), the first-time hearing for these cities unless some of the other Jerusalem refugees have been there first.

QUESTIONS: 1. Give background information on the city of Samaria. 2. Why is Philip willing to go to Samaria when normally the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans? 3. How does Luke summarize Philip's preaching at Samaria? 4. In what ways do Philip's miracles affect success in Samaria? 5. Tell about Simon before conversion? 6. What measure of the Holy

Spirit do Peter and John confer at Samaria? 7. Discuss Simon's financial offer to Peter and what came out of it.

B. To the Ethiopian
(Study Acts 8:26-39)

It seems to this writer that Philip's work in Samaria concludes with v. 13, but his call to leave and go south to teach the Ethiopian is not narrated until v. 26 so as to make no break between the sorcerer's conversion and his run-in with Peter and John. Having followed his case through v. 24 and the apostles' return-trip in v. 25, we are now back with Philip for his next mission.

The angelic call that Philip receives (v. 26) and the Spirit's telling him the man in the chariot is his next assignment (v. 29) are connected with his being an inspired New Testament prophet. Since Samaria is an estimated forty miles north of Jerusalem, God is calling Philip to head south even before the Ethiopian leaves Jerusalem. Providence looks down on the whereabouts of both and will have Philip's arrival at the Jerusalem-Gaza road at the precise moment the Ethiopian is riding by. Precision-timing must be one of God's specialties. Do not we who pray for His guidance and protection count on it?

Philip is eager to spread the gospel, so he does not insist on staying with his success at Samaria. Rather he is encouraged by his success there to go elsewhere--especially at the call of God (v. 26,27). It will make no difference to him that he is called away from a city to address a lone individual riding in a chariot nor that he is likely a black man from Ethiopia ("Ethiopia" means "burnt faces" and is the country just south of Egypt). Philip is God's man to go anywhere and to preach to any person or group. As such he is much easier to direct than Jonah. Others

might not be as willing to go to the hated Samaritans nor to this black man, but Philip shows no prejudice in spreading the gospel. This may be traceable to his being a Grecian Jew ("Philip" is a Greek name), a secondary-Jew in the eyes of the Hebrew Jews. His willingness to follow the Lord's decisions is also due to his being genuinely converted, for Saul of Tarsus (a "Hebrew of the Hebrews," Phil. 3:5) after his conversion became the great apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:7-9).

Since he has been to Jerusalem to worship (v. 27), the Ethiopian is either a Jew or a proselyte--both Jews and proselytes go to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 2:10). If he is a black Ethiopian, he is a proselyte. McGarvey favors his being a Jew, observing that "it was not uncommon for Jews born and reared in foreign lands to attain to eminent positions such as this man enjoyed and especially in the department of finance for which they have always possessed natural fitness."

McGarvey also observes, "His being a eunuch debarred him from the privilege of mingling in the Jewish congregation, or entering the Jewish court of the temple; but it did not debar him from the court of the Gentiles, in which men of all nations, clean or unclean, were at liberty to worship." The above was an outgrowth of Deut. 23:1.

In Samaria Philip carries the gospel to a duped people (deceived by Simon). Here he is carrying it to a prominent man who is in charge of a queen's treasure. (It was customary for eunuchs to be utilized where close association with a queen was involved--note II Kings 9:30-32.) "Candace" is not a woman's name but the title worn by the queens of Ethiopia like "Pharaoh" by the kings of Egypt.

A map will show that this man has come at least 600 miles from Ethiopia to Jerusalem and is now on his return trip home. Can we doubt the sincerity of this

man as he makes a 1,200 mile trip in a chariot to worship and is reading from his Old Testament as he rides home? God, who is not willing that any should perish (II Pet. 3:9) and who will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (I Tim. 2:4), is going to give this man a special opportunity to hear the gospel which he cannot hear at home. And we shall find that this honest seeker-after-God will respond to the riches of the gospel like the man in the parable who came upon treasure in the field and sold all he had to buy that field (Matt. 13:44). Let us join Philip and this man.

The Spirit tells him this is the prospect (v. 29). Philip runs to the chariot as the man is reading, and he asks him, "Understandest thou what thou readeest?" (v. 30). This is what we call the "approach" in personal work, and Philip has made a good approach by using a natural setting--asking him if he understands what he is reading. Frankly the man is having trouble with the passage and so is happy to invite the interested inquirer to have a ride and discuss the passage (v. 31).

There are two chapters in the Old Testament more than any others that predicted the crucifixion of Jesus (Psa. 22 and Isa. 53). The treasurer is reading the latter and wonders if the author Isaiah, who historically suffered a violent death under King Manasseh, was predicting his own calamity or that of somebody else (v. 32,33). It is good that he is not merely "reading his chapter for the day" but is really wanting to know the meaning of what he is reading. Since the Isa. 53:7,8 reading was pointing to the crucifixion, what an opportunity for Philip to begin at the same Scripture and preach unto him "Jesus" (v. 35)! We have no way of knowing just how far back in the story of Jesus Philip went, but we are sure nobody can ever receive a better presentation than the Ethiopian receives. And we know Philip carries the presentation

forward to Christ's giving the Great Commission because of the man's question about being baptized. And again the timing is perfect, for after learning what he must do to accept Jesus, they come upon a certain water, and when the prospect sees it he points to it and asks, "See, here is water: what doth hinder me to be baptized?" (v. 36). The "water" they come to depends on which route from Jerusalem to Gaza the eunuch is taking. Because of the word "desert" in v. 26 Boles thinks it is "probably the one by Hebron which went through the desert hills of southern Judea". Present Palestine guides concur with this as they show a large man-made storage pool beside the road from Jerusalem to Hebron as the traditional place of this baptism. McGarvey thinks it is the great paved Roman road between Jerusalem and Gaza. If so the "water" might be the brook in the valley of Elah, "a mountain stream which goes dry in the summer but flows with a strong current through the winter and the spring. Such streams always wear out pools here and there very suitable for baptizing. If the chariot had already crossed this stream when the eunuch requested baptism, there was another in the Philistine Plain, now called Wady el Hasy...a perennial stream and suitable for baptizing at any season of the year. It is not at all improbable, however, that the real place of their baptism was one of the many artificial pools with which the country abounded at that time and the ruins of which are found in every section. The rainless season of seven months, which is experienced there every year, made it necessary when the country was filled with people and flocks and herds to make extraordinary provision of water for stock and for irrigating the summer crops; and no country was ever so well supplied in this way as Judea" (McGarvey).

Here is a case of a non-Christian asking if he can be baptized, not the gospel worker pleading with the prospect to submit. Philip knows this is the man's

first hearing of the gospel and wants to be sure he really believes Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (v. 37). Ancient manuscripts differ concerning the last part of v. 37. A few include it, but most don't. If it was in Luke's original copy, it somehow got left out in some of the ancient hand-written copies, and if it was not in his original copy somebody somehow added it. Most translations omit it or carry it in the margin because many more ancient copies lack it than have it. Since Rom. 10:9,10; I Tim. 6:12; and II Tim. 2:19 teach the confession of faith as a part of one's salvation, its presence here merely reflects the practice of the church of taking a person's confession before baptizing him. As we read the text up to this statement and the text following it, we are sure the Ethiopian gave Philip some kind of assurance of his faith in Jesus whether Luke recorded it or not.

We are to confess our faith in Jesus before "men" (Matt. 10:32). Who is present besides Philip to hear the Ethiopian's confession? A man of his wealth and position is not likely to be traveling alone. There will be certain servants along one of whom is driving the chariot and to whom he gives the order to stop the chariot for the baptism (v. 38).

That baptism in this dispensation is "water" baptism, and that it is "immersion" could not be clearer than in the Ethiopian's case. "Water" is also mentioned in connection with Cornelius's baptism (Acts 10:47). And don't forget Heb. 10:22 ("bodies washed with pure water"). Since baptism is initiatory, "water" in John 3:5 refers to the act of baptism. And just as surely as men are to baptize (Matt. 28:19), it will be "water" baptism, for only Christ can baptize with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11). Philip and the treasurer both go down into the water and after the baptism come up out of it (v. 38,39), things they would not be doing if the candidate is being sprinkled or poured. Denominationalists belittle the necessity of baptism,

but conversion-reports throughout Acts always include it, and here the preacher is not taken away before the baptism has taken place.

The Spirit who said, "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot" (v. 29), now catches Philip away so the two men see each other no more. We are left to wonder why God so suddenly terminates their brief time together and in such a way that they are forbidden the normal courtesies of "goodbyes". Possibly in this way the Ethiopian realizes all the more that he has been blessed with a divinely-sent messenger, and the message brought to him is thus confirmed as of God. So the convert goes on his way rejoicing (v. 39), the same as the Philippian jailer after his baptism (Acts 16:33,34). We have no Biblical information as to God's provision for this man's future continuance and development in the Christian life, but we are confident that He who has begun a good work in him with His conversion will care for his case in the future (consider Phil. 1:6). Had the Spirit not caught Philip away, Philip might have felt responsible for teaching him to observe all things following baptism (Matt. 28:20). But by the Spirit's snatching Philip away and totally removing him from the future of the Ethiopian's case, it is no longer Philip's job to teach him his post-conversion responsibilities. Thus, Philip is free to begin evangelistic labors elsewhere, which he does in our next section of study.

QUESTIONS: 1. Discuss the divine timing of Philip's meeting with the Ethiopian. 2. Discuss the willingness of Philip to go anywhere and preach to anybody. 3. Discuss the possibility of the Ethiopian eunuch being either a Jew or a proselyte. 4. What indications do we have of his sincerity? 5. Begin with what the Ethiopian was reading and show Philip's procedure. 6. Discuss the "water" where he was baptized.

C. North To Caesarea
(Study Acts 8:40)

There is more than meets the eye in this single verse. Having been caught away from the eunuch, Philip finds himself at Azotus (the former ancient Philistine city Ashdod). Since we do not know just where Philip is snatched away from the eunuch, we cannot say how many miles this strange experience carries him to deposit him at Azotus. Beginning at Azotus he preaches his way up the coast, preaching in the cities of the maritime plain until he comes to Caesarea (check your map). We do not know what all these cities are, but likely Philip's preaching accounts for the "saints" at Lydda (Acts 9:32) as well as a certain "disciple" Tabitha at Joppa (Acts 9:36).

Caesarea is the capital of the country since the days of its builder (Herod the Great) and is on the Mediterranean coast. From this verse and from Acts 21:8 it appears Philip makes this great city his home and the center of his future evangelistic efforts.

QUESTIONS: 1. *What was Azotus called in the Old Testament?* 2. *What are some cities where Philip preaches in going north?* 3. *Where does Philip settle?*

CHAPTER 5

Saul's Journeys*A. To Damascus*
(Study Acts 9:1-22)

Having followed some of the preaching in various places that resulted from the persecution against the Jerusalem church after it was touched off by the stoning of Stephen, we now return to the Jewish official who consented to that stoning (Acts 22:20) and at whose feet the stoners laid their cloaks (Acts 7:58). What has he been doing since then? Surprised that Stephen's death does not end the church, Saul is stunned that these fleeing are making believers in many places. He is obsessed with the determination to fight Christianity with all within him. Listen to his own words in later life about his persecuting activities: "Many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities" (Acts 26:10,11). It is while he is persecuting them even to strange cities that he goes to the high priest at Jerusalem to get letters to the synagogue rulers at Damascus authorizing him to arrest any believers there and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished (v. 1,2).

It has been a trip of several days for Saul and his companions. As they near the great city of Damascus, long-time capital of Syria and still one of the world's oldest existing cities, something happens that not only changes this persecution-leader but the whole

fortunes of the church that he has been seeking to destroy. Never has there been such a turn-about in a person and the course of a life as we are about to witness. The church's greatest enemy is going to become the church's greatest preacher. His conversion and future service are so important that that number of apostles which has been so long fixed at twelve now gives way to make room for another apostle who will be called on to pen more books of the New Testament than all the original twelve apostles combined and whose work among the Gentiles will be the principal part of Christianity to survive the Mohammedan Conquest of the 600's and the Middle Ages and continue to this very day!

The whole change begins when God steps in by sending such a bright light that even though it is near noon it is much brighter than the noon-day sun (Acts 26:13). (From here on as we consider this important event, we will also use additional thoughts and explanations from Saul's own reports of it later in life as recorded in Acts 22:6-16 and Acts 26:13-19.)

As he and his companions fall to the ground in fright, Saul hears these words in Hebrew from somewhere: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (v. 5). Israel was God's Old Testament people, and whoever touched them touched the apple of God's eye (Zech. 2:8), so anybody persecuting the church, like Saul, is in reality persecuting Christ.

His response, "Who art thou, Lord?" (v. 5) shows he is bewildered as to just who spoke. The Greek word translated "Lord" signifies one with authority and is used variously in the New Testament (sometimes for God, sometimes for rulers, sometimes for masters, etc.). Saul's use of it here shows he is overpowered by and feels subject to whoever is speaking, and the very circumstances prevailing cause him to think it is some heavenly Being addressing him. How stunned he is when the answer comes, "I am Jesus ('Jesus of Naza-

reth,' Acts 22:8) whom thou persecutest" (v. 5). Saul has always lived conscientiously (Acts 23:1) even when persecuting those believing on Jesus (Acts 26:9,10). Now what is a conscientious person to do who learns he has been so mistaken and wrong? Jesus' words. "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks ('goad,' ASV), are significant (v. 5). As an ox found it better to obey his master than kick against his sharp goad, so Saul will find it hard to go against the goading of his own conscience now demanding that he make an about-face with reference to Jesus and his persecuting efforts or the goading that God is giving him by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit to show His displeasure with his persecuting course. As always before with Saul, conscience wins out, and Luke aptly describes his double feelings ("trembling" and "astonished") as he yieldingly asks, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (v. 6). We can understand his fear and also his astonishment that Jesus is actually the One God sent into the world to be the Messiah. Imagine the thoughts possessing his mind in these life-changing moments.

We are not told at precisely what moment Jesus appears to him, but that he is given a vision of Jesus is apparent from Acts 26:16; Acts 22:14; and I Cor. 9:1. What better instant for Jesus to manifest Himself visibly to Saul than when He says, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest!"

All the group sees the light, but only Saul sees Jesus. All hear a sound, but only Saul hears a message. (In v. 7 I would translate the Greek "phonane" "sound" instead of "voice"--it can be translated either, but "sound" keeps this verse from being in conflict with Acts 22:9). Or as McGarvey observes, "It is common among all classes of men to say, 'I did not hear,' when they mean they did not hear the words spoken through they did hear the sound of the speaker's voice." We say, "I didn't hear you," when we mean, "I

didn't understand what you said."

To become an apostle it is necessary for Saul to see the Christ and be personally called by Him (Acts 22:14,15), which explains why those with him do not see Jesus (v. 7) and do not hear what He says to Saul (Acts 22:9). Their seeing the bright light and hearing the sound (v. 7), though, are necessary to keep them from thinking Saul has "gone off his rocker" in inexplicable behavior. They know something has happened.

Keep in mind we are studying two matters in this event: (1) Saul's becoming a Christian, and (2) his becoming an apostle. It is important not to confuse the elements involved in his becoming a Christian with those involved in his becoming an apostle. Christ's appearance to him "as of one born out of due time" (I Cor. 15:8) is thus explained to him by Jesus Himself: "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:16-18).

What is Saul's response going to be to all this? He does not kick against the goad but in all honesty and submission asks, "Lord" (and this time he well understands whom he is addressing by this designation), "what wilt thou have me to do?" (v. 6). Augustine said in the 300's that the conversion of Saul is the answer to Stephen's prayer. You can be sure that other persecuted disciples have prayed for Saul too, but did their faith really envision what all is happening?

You expect God to tell Saul what he is to do, but ever since the Great Commission that responsibility is committed to human beings, so Saul is told to go into

Damascus, and there it will be told him what to do (v. 6). The gospel is to be borne in "earthen" vessels (II Cor. 4:7). Saul himself is to become such a "vessel" (Acts 9:15). Saul rises from the ground, and since he (their leader) is blind (Acts 22:11), his companions lead him into the city (v. 8) to the house of a man by the name of Judas on Straight Street (v. 11). Here we are left to wonderment as to Saul's companions, their departure from Saul, and their report upon their return to Jerusalem.

At this time Saul has no knowledge of whether his blindness is permanent or temporary nor who will come to tell him what to do. That which is dominating his whole being is remorse over his persecuting career. He is so broken and undone that he refuses either to eat or drink (v. 9) and can only cry out to God in prayer (v. 11). No doubt his prayers of contrition are asking God over and over to forgive him. He is doing what is natural under the circumstances--not something God has told him to do. People who use his case as an example of a lost sinner praying for forgiveness should note that his praying is completely voluntary, his own response to his guilt (while he waits and waits), and his prayers do not acquire forgiveness (see Acts 22:16). God can send His messenger immediately, but psychologically Saul needs to "fry in his own fat" for a while so he will never forget what he has done and how merciful God is to forgive him. And he doesn't forget, for he frequently refers to this later on (to Jerusalem, Acts 22:3-16; to Agrippa, Acts 26:9-19; to the Corinthians, I Cor. 15:9,10; and to Timothy, I Tim. 1:13-16). So it is three days of agony of soul before God sends His messenger of mercy (v. 9).

In a vision God appears to a Damascus disciple Ananias, a man of excellent report among the Jews--Acts 22:12 (v. 10). He instructs Ananias to go to the praying Saul (v. 11), assuring him He has given Saul a vision of a man by his very name coming to him, laying

his hand on him, and restoring his sight (v. 12). Ananias's reply in v. 13,14 not only shows his hesitancy to go but that the Damascus disciples are aware of Saul's trip to their city to persecute them. Ananias can hardly believe his ears when he hears the Lord say, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before" three groups: "the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (v. 15). Saul will become the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13), spending much of his ministry among them (Acts 15:12). He will preach to kings when he is arraigned before them (Acts 24:10-21; Acts 24:24-26; Acts 26:2-29). And we will see him in many synagogues of the Jews (Acts 13:5; Acts 13:14ff; Acts 14:1; Acts 17:17; Acts 18:4; Acts 19:8).

The first intimation that Saul himself will be greatly persecuted as he preaches the gospel is found in the Lord's final words to Ananias: "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (v. 16). That Saul did so suffer unbelievable sufferings during his ministry is found in such reports as I Cor. 4:9-13; II Cor. 6:4,5,8-10; II Cor. 11:23-28. Acts records some of these incidents: Acts 13:45,50; Acts 14:5,6; Acts 14:19; Acts 16:19-24; Acts 19:23-32; Acts 21:27-32; Acts 22:22-24.

With the Lord's further explanation Ananias feels more sure as he makes his way to the designated house. The waiting Saul is glad for his coming. Ananias tells him he has come for two purposes: (1) that he might receive his sight (Oh, what good news!); and (2) that he might receive the Holy Spirit. Each is connected with something Ananias does for Saul: his sight is restored through the imposition of his hands (v. 12,17,18); in his baptism Saul receives the same indwelling Holy Spirit that others have received (Acts 2:38,39). (Note--We are not told just where or when Saul receives the apostolic measure of the Holy Spirit that imparts inspiration and miraculous power to him.)

Let us pause as we see him who is merely designed as a "certain disciple" (v. 10) baptizing Saul to observe that any disciple of the Lord may perform a baptism--not merely those who have been ordained to the ministry as in denominational circles. May Christians teach others? Yes. Then they may also baptize, for those who teach others may also baptize them (see Matt. 28:19).

Because Ananias addresses Saul as "Brother Saul" (v. 17), some use this as supposed proof that Saul is already a Christian. But when Peter addressed his Jewish hearers on Pentecost as "Men and brethren" (Acts 2:29), were they already converted to Jesus? No, they were his Jewish brethren just as Saul is Ananias's Jewish brother. Notice other similar instances: Acts 3:17; Acts 7:2; Acts 15:26,38.

Now notice Ananias's words to Saul concerning his coming apostleship: "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard" (Acts 22:14,15). And notice his words concerning the forgiveness of his sins--that which Saul wanted so much: "Why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Numerous passages connect believers' baptism with the remission of past sins (Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38; Acts 2:41; Rom. 6:3-5; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12; Heb. 10:22; I Pet. 3:20,21), but the setting of Acts 22:16 makes it one of the most unanswerable by those who wish to deny baptism's place in a convert's salvation. Saul has believed, repented, has even fasted and prayed, yet he is still unforgiven prior to being baptized. Baptism is the final matter in New Testament conversion.

Following his baptism Saul eats for the first time since his Damascus-Road experience (v. 19).

Through Ananias the new convert is made welcome among the Damascus disciples. We can be sure they give great praise to God for the unexpected conversion of their chief enemy. Not only is he with them, but he boldly enters the Damascus synagogues and preaches Jesus (v. 20). Since the persecution against the disciples emanated from Jerusalem with Saul as its leader, he really is in no immediate danger in so preaching. Later it will be different. His present hearers are all amazed at the change that has come over him (v. 21). Saul's preaching activities only make him stronger in his belief in Jesus, and his powerful message makes more disciples for Jesus (v. 22).

QUESTIONS: 1. *When the stoning of Stephen and the scattering of the Jerusalem church do not accomplish all that Saul desires, what does he do next?* 2. *How bright is the light that he sees near Damascus?* 3. *What question of Saul shows he is ready to submit to Jesus?* 4. *What 2 possible solutions are there as to whether the men who are with Saul hear or do not hear the voice?* 5. *Why does Christ not personally tell Saul what to do but has Ananias tell him?* 6. *Why is Saul's praying not a Scriptural example of an alien sinner praying for salvation?* 7. *For what 2 purposes has Ananias come to Saul, and what 2 things does he do to bring these about?* 8. *Why is Saul in no immediate danger in preaching Jesus at Damascus?*

B. To Arabia
(not mentioned in Acts)

There is a time-break between v. 22 and v. 23 due to Saul's being in Arabia as mentioned in Gal. 1:17. Neither Gal. or any other Scripture gives us any detailed information about his trip to or stay in Ara-

bia nor to which part of that sizable country he goes. To conjecture that he goes there to meditate or to figure out his theology, as some say, seems to this writer to be at odds with his restless spirit to preach, and such also seems to discount his inspiration.

QUESTIONS: 1. *What epistle of Paul mentions his going to Arabia?* 2. *What do some say is his purpose in going to Arabia?* 3. *What does he probably do there?*

C. Return to Damascus
(Study Acts 9:23-25)

Gal. 1:17 shows that after his trip to Arabia, he returns to Damascus. Though Acts 9 mentions nothing about Arabia, it allows for it by showing the event in v. 23-25 to be some time after the report in v. 22.

Upon his return to Damascus we have only one aspect of his visit recorded; an organized effort to arrest him. Combining Saul's own account of it in II Cor. 11:32,33 with our Acts 9 account we find his trouble originates with the Jews whose intention it is to kill him (v. 25). Saul learns of their lying in wait (v. 24). To complicate matters they have secured the help of the governor and his garrison of soldiers who watch every gate day and night to see he does not get out (v. 24; II Cor. 11:32). But in the darkness of night through the help of his Christian brethren he climbs through a window in the wall and is lowered in a basket by rope to the ground below and to safety. The above is only the first of many such close-calls with death he will have in the future (II Cor. 1:8-10; II Cor. 11:23-28).

QUESTIONS: 1. *What group in Damascus wants to kill Saul?* 2. *Who assists them in their attempt?* 3. *How does he escape?*

*D. Back to Jerusalem for the First
Time since Conversion
(Study Acts 9:26-30)*

It appears from Gal. 1:18 that it has been three years since his conversion--also that his chief purpose in coming to Jerusalem at this time is to see Peter. In anticipation we might say, "What a meeting that will be of these two great apostles!" But Saul runs into a new trouble upon arrival: the disciples at Jerusalem are afraid of him and do not want to receive him, not believing he is really one of them (v. 26). Their reaction is to be expected. If any word has gotten back to them about the change that has come over Saul, they have not believed it. They fear he is like the wooden horse at Troy--wanting to get on the inside only to arrest them. Many people would be offended if they wished to be identified with a congregation that would not receive them. But Saul understands their fears and appreciates Barnabas's effort in his behalf (v. 27). Remember Barnabas from Acts 4:36,37? We will see even more of this important man in future chapters. But how Barnabas knows about Saul's change when the others don't we are not informed. It is interesting to note that God does not reveal to the apostles the genuineness of Saul, which He can do, but utilizes Barnabas to inform them. Even divine power is not needlessly expended--if something can be done naturally, why should God do it miraculously? Human hands could roll away the stone from Lazarus's tomb, so it was not done miraculously (John 11:39,41). Human hands could loose Lazarus's graveclothes, so no miracle was

performed to do it (John 11:44). But human hands could not raise Lazarus from the dead--miracle-power did that (John 11:45)! Divine power takes over where human power ends ("Man's extremity is God's opportunity"), but it does not do for us what we are able to do for ourselves.

When v. 27 says Barnabas brings Saul to the "apostles", the Gal. account shows that there are only two apostles whom Saul gets to see on this trip--Peter and James the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:18,19). Where the other apostles are at this time or why Saul does not see them if they are in Jerusalem is not explained.

It is good to note that Barnabas's mediation is accepted so that Saul is now one of them (v. 28).

QUESTIONS: 1. *How long is it between his conversion and his first trip back to Jerusalem?* 2. *What is the Jerusalem church's attitude toward his wanting to be identified with it?* 3. *Who solves the problem?* 4. *What apostles does Saul get to see on this trip?*

E. To Tarsus
(Study Acts 9:30,31)

But Saul's stay in Jerusalem is brief--only fifteen days (Gal. 1:18). Likely he would stay longer, but in his speaking boldly in the name of Jesus and his disputing with the Grecian Jews his stay is shortened for he learns of their intent to kill him. It is while he is in the temple praying that God speaks to him in a trance, "Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me...Depart" (Acts 22:17-21). The Jerusalem brethren realizing the imminent danger he is in hurry him out of Jerusalem for his native Tarsus (v. 29,30).

His abbreviated stay in Jerusalem and vicinity has not allowed him opportunity to preach in the Judean congregations outside of Jerusalem, for later he wrote that he "was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea...they had only heard, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me" (Gal. 1:22, 23).

Here Acts takes its leave of Saul in order to cover some other important matters before returning to his case in Acts 11:25. Acts 9:31 is a great summarizing verse concerning church matters at this time: "Then had the churches rest" (from persecution) "throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria" (the three divisions of Palestine, "and were edified" (the Greek word is from the construction business--to build up a house and is used here spiritually as it is used several times in Paul's own writings: I Cor. 8:1; I Cor. 10:23; I Thess. 5:11), "and walking in the fear of the Lord" (reverence for the God who could do what no human being could do: turn Saul around from the determined persecutor he has been to the zealous proclaimer he is), "and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost" (the way all this has been accomplished brings even more than physical peace to them--it brings a divine comfort and assurance that God is with them and will continue to be), "were multiplied" (it is a time of great evangelistic expansion and numerical growth). Before leaving this great transitional verse DeWalt observes, "We have felt all the time that while we were following the labors of Philip, Peter and John, and Saul that there were many others preaching the word, and no doubt the events of their lives were just as interesting as were those of the men discussed."

QUESTIONS: 1. *How long is Saul's stay in Jerusalem?* 2. *Why does he leave so soon?* 3. *Where does he*

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go? 4. From what did the Palestine churches have rest? 5. What does "edify" mean?

CHAPTER 6

Peter's Journeys*A. To Lydda*
(Study Acts 9:32-35)

It appears that wherever Philip goes with the gospel, Peter follows up to impart spiritual gifts (see earlier comments on Acts 8:14-17). Since the name "Christians" has not yet been given and won't be until Acts 11:26, Luke refers to them here (v. 32) as "saints" (referring to the holy character of their lives). Paul frequently calls Christians "saints" (Rom. 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25; I Cor. 14:33; 16:1,15; etc.). Lydda was called "Lod" in the Old Testament (I Chron. 8:12). Since Lod is in the proximity of present-day Tel Aviv, Israel's principal airport is called Lod International Airport.

To a paralytic who has been bedfast for eight years Peter says, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole" (compare Acts 5:6): "arise, and make thy bed" (v. 34). Both surprised and excited over the fortunate blessing that has instantly come to him, he gets up a well man (v. 34)! These Jews of the maritime plain have only heard of the miracles of Jesus, for we have no record of Jesus ever being down in this section. As a result of this miracle many at Lydda and up and down the Sharon Valley turn to the Lord (v. 35).

QUESTIONS: 1. *What is implied by the designation "saints"?* 2. *What was Lydda called in the Old Testament?* 3. *How many years has Aeneas been bedfast?*

B. To Joppa
(Study Acts 9:36-43)

A little over ten miles from Lydda is the seaport town Joppa on the Mediterranean. Jerusalem being an inland city Joppa is its seaport-contact with the world to the west. Solomon had the logs for his temple floated down the coast from Lebanon to Joppa (II Chron. 2:16). After the Babylonian Captivity when they were rebuilding the temple, they did the same (Ezra 3:7). Between these two incidents Joppa was where Jonah boarded the ship for his ill-fated voyage (Jon. 1:3). Being in the Sharon Valley these in Joppa have also heard of Peter's healing Aeneas. There are disciples at Joppa (probably from the preaching of Philip---see Acts 8:40). When one of them (Tabitha in Hebrew, Dorcas in Greek) dies, instead of burying her they wash her body and lay it in an upper chamber while sending to Lydda for Peter (v. 36-38). Peter doesn't hesitate to return to Joppa with them (v. 39). Upon his arrival he meets the dear friends of Dorcas--weeping widows who want him to know what a wonderful woman she has been--and they show him the various garments she has made for the needy (v. 39, compare v. 36).

Reminiscent of what Jesus did when He went in to raise Jairus's daughter (Matt. 9:25), Peter is alone with the dead body. De Welt comments, "What a beautiful scene is portrayed for us. Peter first kneels down and prays the prayer of faith, and then turning to the body he spoke but two words ('Tabitha, arise'). Once again life flowed into the body, the eyes were opened. Seeing Peter in the room she sat up. Without a word Peter gave her his hand, and she stood up. Then came the glad call for the saints and the widows. What unspeakable joy there must have been in that upper chamber on that memorable day!" (v. 41,41). And word of this spreads throughout the city and causes many to turn to the Lord here too (v. 42).

For the time that Peter remains in Joppa, he is put up at the home of a tanner by the name of Simon (v. 43) whose house is next to the sea (Acts 10:6). A tanner was one who preserved skins and made leather from them. "Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary" observes that among the Jews a tanner was considered operating a ceremonially unclean business (probably because of his handling that which was dead), so his operation had to be outside of town. We do not know how long the "many days" are that Peter is here, but on one of these days he has an experience that has to do with the gospel first being preached to Gentiles.

QUESTIONS: 1. *What were some Old Testament events connected with Joppa?* 2. *What kind of person has Dorcas been?* 3. *Where is Peter residing in Joppa?*

C. To Caesarea
(Study Acts 10:1--11:1)

Up the coast about thirty miles is a Roman centurion stationed at Caesarea. A "centurion" is a military officer in charge of one hundred soldiers. Caesarea is the capital of Palestine and has been since the days of Herod the Great who built it 25-13 B.C. For sometime now the Jews have had exclusive rights to the gospel, which is God's plan (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:16; Acts 3:25,26). But the time has come when God wants the gospel sent to Gentiles as well. The apostle who was promised the keys of the kingdom in Matt. 16:19 and who did the preaching to the Jews on Christianity's opening day (Acts 2:14ff) is also to be the first to preach to Gentiles (Acts 15:7). God has likewise chosen the first Gentile to be given the opportunity to hear it--this Roman centurion Cornelius stationed at Caesarea. His soldiers are Italians. We

are surprised to find a Roman military man described as "devout", "one that feared God with all his house," a man generous with "alms" to the poor, and a man of continual prayer (10:2). Though he is not a Jew nor a proselyte to Judaism, he is one of those Gentiles who, though they have not the law of Moses themselves, yet through contact with the Jews "do by nature the things contained in the law" (Rom. 2:14). That his religious qualities have come to him through the Jews is evident from his praying at the Jews' afternoon hour of prayer (compare 10:3,30 and 3:1).

Cornelius is understandably startled when the angel appears and calls him by name (v. 3,4). Cornelius's alms and prayers have erected a "memorial" for him before God (v. 4) so that God's decision to make him the first Gentile convert is based on it. He is told to send for Peter "who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved" (Acts 11:14). Cornelius's case is proof that it takes religious sincerity plus the gospel to be saved. Religious sincerity cannot be better than in Cornelius, yet he is not saved apart from the gospel. Nor is he offended by the angel's message.

The centurion loses no time obeying but dispatches a devout soldier and two household servants to Joppa (v. 7,8). We are not told where they spend the night, but it is the next day around noon as they near Joppa that Peter has gone up to Simon's housetop (their roofs are flat and are used for various things--like drying flax, Josh. 2:6) to pray while the meal is being prepared (v. 9). In his hunger he sees in a divine vision a great sheet let down from heaven by its four corners, and it is filled with all kinds of living creatures (v. 10-12). Peter is startled by the voice that says, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat" (v. 13). Why would a divine voice tell him to kill and eat animals that are forbidden by the law of Moses to be eaten? (See Lev. 11). Is the command given to test Pe-

ter's obedience when he is physically hungry enough to be tempted to eat anything? It is obvious from Peter's answer ("Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean," v. 14) that inspiration has not yet revealed to the apostles that the law of Moses has passed away. Christ had intimated that all meats were to be "purged" or made clean (Mark 7:19). Now for the first time (here to Peter on the housetop) He declares that all meats are "clean" and allowable for men to eat (v. 15), and He uses this as an object lesson, as well as other matters in this rapidly developing event, to teach Peter he should now call no man common or unclean (v. 28)--not even Gentiles.

When v. 16 says, "This was done thrice," it makes the matter unforgettable and impressive. Then Peter watches as the sheet full of animals goes away into heaven (v. 16), leaving him in a state of bewilderment as to just what is really meant by the vision. But its lesson will begin to unfold with things about to take place (v. 17).

Just as God had the timing just right in the case of Philip and the Ethiopian, so does He in this event. Cornelius's men have just arrived and are inquiring at Simon's door for Peter when the Spirit says to Peter, "Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them" (v. 17-20). When he goes down, meets the men, and hears their story, he can see God is calling him to go with them to preach to their Gentile master in Caesarea (v. 21,22). After lodging them for the night, he departs with them and takes with him certain Jewish brethren from Joppa--six brethren altogether (11:12). These brethren are taken along as witnesses, for he is aware that his actions will be called in question--and they will be (11:1-3).

Before arriving at Cornelius's house let us inform you that Simon's ancient house by the sea has

been preserved and is respected alike by Christians and Moslems--a very interesting place to visit.

Cornelius knows about how long it will take for his men to get to Joppa and back, so he, along with certain friends and kinsmen whom he has called together for the occasion, is waiting for Peter and them (v. 24). When he first meets Peter, he bows down before him to worship him (v. 25). This is the very thing the wise men did when they came to the Christ-child (Matt. 2:11) and was what Satan wanted Jesus to do in the temptation (Matt. 4:9). Similarly Peter himself earlier fell at Jesus' knees and addressed Him as "Lord" (Luke 5:8). Peter is no pope (as the Romanists claim), and being a man he corrects Cornelius's well-meaning action by refusing to be worshiped (v. 26) even as the angel did the action of the apostle John in Rev. 22:8, 9. It is obvious from v. 27 that Cornelius's home is no small house, for the foregoing has transpired at the door while the group is in another portion of the building.

Who will speak first in the presence of the group? Peter or Cornelius? The Jew Peter, realizing that his keeping company with and entering the home of one of another nation is contrary to Jewish religious custom, speaks first and states that God has shown him he is to call no man common or unclean (v. 28,29).

Cornelius's reply, in addition to the obvious, contains several items worthy of remark. (1) Their way of referring to time is seen in his saying, "Four days ago" I was told to send for you. Day 1 would be when he dispatches his men to Joppa (10:7); day 2 would be when they arrive at Simon's house (10:9); day 3 is when they leave for Caesarea (10:23,24); and day 4 is when they arrive at Cornelius's place (10:24). We would say, "Three days ago," while they say, "Four." This helps us understand how Jesus said that in three days He would rise again when He was buried late Friday afternoon and resurrected early Sunday morning,

the time-interval being not quite two full days. (2) He mentions he was "fasting" as well as praying. And consider the double connection of "prayer" with this Biblical event: it is while Cornelius is praying at Caesarea that the angel appears to him, and it is while Peter is praying at Joppa that God calls him to go to Cornelius. (3) Cornelius speaks of a "man... in bright clothing" in describing the angel (10:3). For the same, see Mark 16:5 and Matt. 28:5. Such makes us comfortable in saying the two men in white apparel at the ascension (Acts 1:10) were angels. (4) Cornelius's statement, "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God" (v. 33), should be the attitude of everyone who attends church, and all who preach should preach all things that are commanded them of God!

Continuing to see the leading of God in this whole matter Peter hesitates not to say, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons," meaning that "in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" regardless of whether Jew or Gentile (v. 34,35). No Jew had ever said this or even thought it prior to this statement by Peter. It was implied by the "whosoever" in Joel 2:32 and quoted by Peter on Pentecost (Acts 2:21) even though neither Joel nor Peter understood it when they spoke it. It is Rom. 10:11,12 that applies a similar "whosoever" of Isa. 28:16 to mean either Jew or Gentile.

In v. 36 Peter begins his actual message for their responsible reception or rejection. He tells them of God's sending a message of peace by Jesus Christ (v. 36), the good news of how man can now be reconciled to God (II Cor. 5:18,19) and also how Jew and Gentile can be at peace through Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:11-19). While Jesus was sent unto the children of Israel in His earthly ministry (Matt. 15:24), He is "Lord of all" now ("There is no difference between the Jews and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich

unto all that call upon him," (Rom. 10:12). "Judea and Galilee" (v. 37) were the two Jewish sections where Jesus conducted His ministry, and it all began after John the Baptist had prepared the people for His coming (v. 37). The opening words of v. 37, "That word, I say, ye know," show these Gentiles knew about the earthly ministry of Jesus though obviously they were not participants in nor recipients during it.

Peter proceeds to declare three things God has done for Jesus: (1) He anointed Him with the Holy Spirit (v. 38,39); (2) He raised Him from the dead (v. 40-42); and (3) He appointed Him to be the final judge of all men (v. 42), going on to point out that He is the fulfillment of the prophets, and that whoever accepts Him will receive the remission of sins (v. 43). Let us consider what Peter says about each of the above.

The anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit took place at His baptism (Matt. 3:16). Heb. 1:9 refers to this divine anointing under the figure of "oil of gladness", and Jesus Himself claimed to be anointed with the Spirit in fulfillment of Isa. 61:1,2 (Luke 4:17-21). Jesus is the "Christ", and in Greek "Christ" means "anointed". This anointing brought "power" that exhibited itself in His miracles (v. 38). Satan has "oppressed" mankind with many maladies through the sin he brought into the world, and Jesus was sent to destroy this and every other work of the devil (I John 3:8). For instance, the poor bent woman of Luke 13:11-16 whom Satan had "bound" for eighteen years Jesus "loosed" when He healed her. Jesus used His miracle-power for the "good" (v. 38) of many people. In v. 39 Peter affirms he himself was one of the witnesses of Jesus' miracles in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem.

Peter's mention of "Jerusalem" is his transition between Jesus' ministry years and His crucifixion (v. 39), for Jerusalem is where the crucifixion took place. Peter uses a strong description of their bru-

tality when he says, "Whom they slew and hanged on a tree." Stephen called them "murderers" (Acts 7:52).

Peter feels good to tell a new audience that Jesus was raised from the dead the third day, and he goes on to inform them that Jesus did not appear to people indiscriminately nor to crowds here and there but to "witnesses chosen before of God", especially to His closest followers (v. 40,41). This coincides with the eleven accounts of His resurrection appearances: to Mary Magdalene first (Mark 16:9), to the other women who went to the tomb (Matt. 28:8,9), to Peter himself (I Cor. 15:4), to the two men of Emmaus (Luke 24:13-31), to the apostles except Thomas and the two Emmaus men (John 20:19,20; Luke 24:33-36), to five hundred brethren (I Cor. 15:6), to James (I Cor. 15:7), to all the apostles including Thomas (John 20:26-28), to seven apostles at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-14), to the apostles on a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20), and to the apostles in Jerusalem (Luke 24:50,51).

The resurrected Jesus, Peter tells his attentive audience, commanded them to preach (referring to the Great Commission) and to testify that He is the God-ordained judge of everybody: those still living (the "quick") and those whose lives are over (the "dead"). Paul later wrote that Christ is to do this judging of "the quick and the dead" (II Tim. 4:1). While everyone is to give an account to "God" (Rom. 14:12), the world will be doing this when it appears "before the judgment seat of Christ" (II Cor. 5:10), for God is going to judge the world through His Son (Acts 10:42; Acts 17:31; John 5:22).

Peter's reference to the "prophets" who foretold Christ's coming (v. 43) indicates that Cornelius has some knowledge of the Jewish Old Testament, and the "whosoever" who believes on Christ and thereby receives the remission of sins (v. 43) certainly includes Gentiles like Cornelius, for it is upon Peter's

saying this that the Holy Spirit instantly falls on him and on all in Peter's listening audience (v. 44) to the astonishment of those who have come with Peter (v. 45). This is the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:15,16), the same measure the apostles themselves received on Pentecost (Acts 11:15). And just as the apostles praised God in their tongues-utterance (Acts 2:11), so do these "magnify God" in theirs (v. 46). Because v. 45 and Acts 2:38 both call the baptismal measure and the indwelling gift of Acts 2:38 the gift of the Holy Spirit, don't equate the two gifts as the same. Every measure of the Holy Spirit given to man has been referred to by the term "gift" (baptismal measure: Acts 10:45; miraculous gifts: I Cor. 12:8-10; and indwelling: Acts 2:38), but each measure is different.

The baptismal descent of the Spirit upon these Gentiles is the final convincing point for Peter. For him to forbid these the privilege of becoming members of the church would be to "resist God" (Acts 11:15-17). But are the six Jewish brethren who are with him also convinced? Evidently, for when he asks them, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? (v. 47), there appears to be no opposition. Peter therefore "commanded them to be baptized in the name of (by the authority of) the Lord" (v. 48).

And thus comes to a termination this series of divine workings to have the gospel preached to the first Gentile!

When visiting the spectacular ruins of this once great city (capital of Palestine, home of Philip the evangelist and his family, place of Paul's two-year imprisonment and appearances before Felix and Festus and Agrippa, and other events in Acts as well as the home of Eusebius to whom we are indebted for preserving church history information from the death of the apostles to the time of Constantine), the one thought

about this city that stirs your writer above all others is that here is where we Gentiles were first given the opportunity to come into the family of God through the gospel!

After their baptism Cornelius and his friends do not want Peter to leave immediately but to remain with them a few days (v. 48). It is while he remains at Caesarea and before he gets back to Jerusalem that word reaches the apostles and brethren in Judea as to what he has done (Acts 11:1). Oh, how fast news travels when people think somebody has done something wrong! And yet the facts that would vindicate Peter do not accompany the report.

QUESTIONS: 1. Who is a centurion? 2. How is Cornelius described? 3. What is Cornelius told to do? 4. Tell of Peter's housetop experience. 5. Who all await Peter's arrival at Caesarea? 6. What does Cornelius do wrong when welcoming Peter? 7. What are some of the things in Peter's message? 8. What measure of the Holy Spirit comes on Cornelius and those with him? 9. What does this do for Peter and those with him?

D. To Jerusalem
(Study Acts 11:2-18)

Since they do not understand the divine workings at both Caesarea and Joppa that have been involved, Peter's colleagues at Jerusalem are both concerned and critical. The six brethren from Joppa accompany him to Jerusalem (v. 12). When they arrive, the apostles and brethren contend with Peter (v. 2): "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them" (v. 3). But upon his rehearsal of the whole matter (v. 4-17), they come to the same conclusion as

he. In fact they not only hold their peace but glorify God saying, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (v. 18).

Before leaving this section let us note several things. In v. 15 Peter has to go clear back to Pentecost (here called the "beginning") to find a parallel to the Holy Spirit baptism on Cornelius, another indication that the Holy Spirit baptism was not a common occurrence. We notice too that Peter is concerned about not resisting God (v. 17). The other apostles also are to be credited with letting God have His way. But not all who are religious will set aside their prejudices, their own ideas, their transitional religion, etc. when they learn the will of God. In fact the above are so strong and so precious to many people that they will not learn the will of God because of them. So they live in a state of resisting God whether they realize it or not. Some use Cornelius's case to argue that people receive the Holy Spirit before baptism. That is not what Peter himself preached (see Acts 2:38). Cornelius's case is a special case, and the Holy Spirit's coming on him is not the usual indwelling gift of the Spirit but a special sign to Peter and the other Jews that God is now willing to accept the Gentiles.

QUESTIONS: 1. *What do the other apostles think about Peter's having gone to Gentiles?* 2. *Who accompanies Peter to Jerusalem?* 3. *What do the apostles think after Peter rehearses everything to them?*

CHAPTER 7

Journeys of Barnabas and Saul

A. Barnabas's Trip to Antioch
(Study Acts 11:19-24)

Now that the conversion of Saul and its early-years' aftermath are out of the way (Acts 9:1-31), and Peter's journey that led to the conversion of the first Gentiles is adequately reported (Acts 9:32--11:18), Acts now returns to the developments growing out of the dispersion of the Jerusalem church (see Acts 8:1-4).

We have followed Philip's work after the dispersion as he went to Samaria (Acts 8:5-13), next to the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-39), and then up the Mediterranean coast to Caesarea (Acts 8:40). We now learn that other fleeing disciples went "as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch," and as they went they preached the Word to "none but...Jews" (v. 19). "Phenice" is short for "Phoenicia", the country along the Mediterranean coast to the north and west of Palestine. Tyre is one of its famous cities, and Paul will later stop several days with "disciples" here (Acts 21:3-5). The church at Tyre is likely traceable to the efforts of these refugees. "Cyprus" is an island in the Mediterranean. Barnabas being from Cyprus (Acts 4:36), it is reasonable to think he helped bring the gospel to this island. "Antioch" is the great city much to the north of Palestine which under the Romans has replaced Damascus as capital of Syria. This is the city which will become so prominently connected with Christianity

that it will actually replace Jerusalem as the center of Christian influence. What we are being told is that after Stephen's death, not only does Christianity spread throughout Judea, Samaria, and Galilee (Acts 9: 31) but that it also is carried by various ones as far as Cyprus and Phoenicia and Antioch. If Stephen were permitted to look down from heaven upon the evangelistic activities growing out of his stoning, he would see he did not die in vain!

Since v. 19 says they preached to "Jews only", the "Grecians" mentioned in v. 20 as later receiving the gospel were not Grecian Jews like those in Acts 6: 1. Antioch is therefore the first congregation mentioned as having both Jews and Gentiles in its membership. It is men from Cyprus (the island) and from Cyrene (a city in northern Africa, the home of Simon of Cyrene who was made to carry the cross for Jesus--Mark 15:21) who first bring the gospel to the Greek population of Antioch. Word has evidently reached Cyprus and Cyrene of Peter's going to the Gentiles, for they would not be preaching to Greeks at Antioch. And the same report must have reached the church at Antioch, or it would not be receiving Gentiles into its membership. The "hand of the Lord" being with them (v. 21) indicates His blessing, thus accounting for the great number who believe and turn to Christ (God giving the increase--I Cor. 3:6).

As the Jerusalem church hears of the spread of the gospel to the north, it dispatches faithful Barnabas to visit the new congregations "as far as Antioch" (v. 22). We have no record of his stops before Antioch, but they are implied in the language of v. 22. How impressed he is and overwhelmed with joy as he sees the great congregation that has been assembled through preaching and conversion (v. 23)! His original name was Joses, but exhortation is so characteristic of him that the apostles have surnamed him "Barnabas", which means "son of consolation" (or, as other ver-

sions render it, "son of exhortation") (Acts 4:36). As he sees this great group of recent converts, he exhorts all of them to be faithful to Christ with "purpose of heart" (v. 23), an expression indicating they are not merely to be "joiners" and "go-alongers" but people who really know what they are doing and why. Christ bids all His followers to "abide" in Him (John 15:4), and unless we do we will never weather the storms nor be faithful to death (Rev. 2:10) necessary to being saved--the initial purpose of accepting Christ. And only as they remain faithful and become fruitful can the church at Antioch become the great, strong congregation Christ wills for each of His congregations to be. Just as Stephen was described as a man "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 6:5), so Barnabas is said to be "full of the Holy Ghost and of faith", to which has been added, "He was a good man" (v. 24). We are taught to be "filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18), for it is by being filled with God's Spirit that we bear the fruit mentioned in Gal. 5:22-23, put to death the sinful deeds of the body (Rom. 8:13), and are transformed into the likeness of Jesus (II Cor. 3:18). The place of faith, both in Christian living and in our service to Christ, cannot be over-emphasized. A "good" man is one who does good to and for others, and this is the whole story of Barnabas's life as seen throughout Acts. The result of the work done by him and others at Antioch is that "much people" are won to the Lord (v. 24).

QUESTIONS: 1. How far out from Jerusalem and to whom do those fleeing in Acts 8:4 go in preaching the Word? 2. To what segment of people do they limit their preaching at this time? 3. What is the first congregation to have both Jews and Gentiles in it? 4. What was Barnabas's original name? 5. What

- does his apostles' given name of "Barnabas" mean?
 6. What does he exhort the Antioch members to do?
 7. How is Barnabas described?

B. Barnabas's Trip to Tarsus
 (Study Acts 11:25-29)

No doubt Barnabas and Saul are eager to get back to the full-flowered work at Antioch. For a whole year they pour themselves into furthering this good work, teaching much people. And for the first time since the church began God bestows the name "Christians" on the followers of Christ (v. 26). The place is Antioch, and the time is this "whole year" that Barnabas and Saul are with the Antioch congregation. Denominational scholars frequently say the name "Christians" is nothing but a nickname conferred by the enemies of the church in derision. But the Greek word translated "called" is "chrematizo", which is used 9 times in the New Testament. Here are the 9 times it is used (the words in *italics* represent "chrematizo" in the original: "*Being warned of God* in a dream that they should not return to Herod..." (Matt. 2:12); "*Being warned of God* in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee" (Matt. 2:22); "It was *revealed* unto him by the Holy Ghost..." (Luke 2:26); "Cornelius...*was warned from God* by an holy angel" (Acts 10:22); "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26); "If, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she *shall be called* an adulteress (Rom. 7:3); "As Moses *was admonished of God* when he was about to make the tabernacle..." (Heb. 8:5); "Noah, *being warned of God* of things not seen as yet..." (Heb. 11:7); "If they escaped not who refused him that *spake* on earth..." (Heb. 12:25). Now with the instances before you, judge for yourself. Why shouldn't

the translators have translated Acts 11:26, "The disciples *were divinely called* Christians first in Antioch"? The divine giving of a new name after the gospel has gone to the Gentiles was predicted in Isa. 62:2.

Why has God waited until now to confer this holy name? We are not told, but the followers of Christ are not altogether like Christ (Christian) until they grasp the universal scope of the church such as here in the first congregation composed of both Jews and Gentiles.

While Barnabas and Saul are in this great year with the Antioch church, some prophets from Jerusalem come, and one of them (Agabus--also mentioned later in Acts 21:10,11) foretells a great famine which the writer Luke says later took place while Claudius Caesar was emperor (v. 27,28) between the time of Agabus's prophecy and his writing Acts. Just as the Jerusalem members rallied to the needs of those among them (Acts 4:34,35), so does the same spirit of generosity prompt the Antioch brethren to send relief to their Christian brethren in Judea. Notice: (1) "Every man" joins in to send help--not just a few. (2) "According to his ability"--compare I Cor. 16:2 concerning a later benevolent offering taken. (3) "Determined"--they don't have to be talked in to doing it. Nothing is said about Barnabas and Saul exhorting and constraining them to do this. This makes for "cheerful" giving (compare II Cor. 9:7). (4) They not only intend to do it, but it says, "Which also they did." By way of contrast how many times people intend to do something but never get it done! With this famine to be worldwide (v. 28), why send help to Jerusalem? Gentile Christians feel a material obligation to their Jewish brethren for the gospel which they have received from them (Rom. 15:26, 27).

QUESTIONS: 1. *How long do Barnabas and Saul labor at this time with the Antioch church?* 2. *What*

name is first given to the disciples here at Antioch? 3. Who do denominational scholars say gives the disciples this name? 4. Present arguments for this being a divinely given name. 5. What prophet predicts a coming famine? 6. What do the Antioch brethren decide to do about it?

C. Barnabas and Saul's Trip to Jerusalem
(Study Acts 11:30--12:24)

Again these two men take to the road--to Jerusalem with Antioch's offering for the brethren in Judea.

Before mentioning in Acts 12:25 their return to Antioch, the inspired account drops in a non-related event that cannot be left out of the divine record, for it concerns the slaying of the first apostle and the near-killing of the apostle Peter. The material in Acts 12:1-24 is parenthetical--jumped in at this point because it takes place at Jerusalem about the time Barnabas and Saul are bringing the offering here and to defer recording it until Barnabas and Saul get back to Antioch would be to place it later than it occurred.

In history this Herod is actually Herod Agrippa I, father of the Agrippa before whom Paul later appears in Acts 26. He is much more favorable to the Jews than was his grandfather (the Herod ruling when Jesus was born). Since several men in prominent leadership in Jerusalem wear the name James (James the Lord's brother, the apostle James the son of Alphaeus, and this James), Luke tells us this James is the "brother of John" to distinguish him from the others. Poor James is killed by the sword (likely beheaded like John the Baptist) (v. 1). While he is the first apostle to die, his brother John will be the last of them to die. When Jesus asked these two brothers if they

could drink of the cup He would drink of and be baptized (overwhelmed with sufferings) with the baptism He would be baptized with (at His death), they said they could (Matt. 20:22), and James's martyr-death shows they really meant it.

The Jews are pleased with Herod's action, so he proceeds to imprison Peter for slaying after the Passover season ends (v. 3). The King James' word "Easter" in v. 4 is more properly "Passover" or "Unleavened Bread" as in other versions. A "quarternion" is composed of four soldiers, so the "four quarternions" assigned to guard Peter are sixteen soldiers! His hands are also chained (v. 7) for extreme precaution. Could it be that Herod's extra caution is due to the unsuccessful jailing of the apostles earlier (Acts 5:17-26)?

V. 5 tells of unceasing prayer by the church for Peter while v. 12 tells of a sizable group crowded into Mark's mother's home for prayer. It is a time of deepest concern for the church because the government is killing off its apostolic leaders.

The Passover is ended, and tomorrow morning Peter is scheduled to be brought out of prison to be killed. While Christians are praying, God sends an angel to deliver him from prison. He strikes the sleeping apostle on his side to arouse him and says, "Arise up quickly." Immediately the chains binding him to the two sleeping soldiers fall off without arousing them (v. 6,7). Peter is told to gird himself and put on his sandals and outer garment and follow him (v. 8). Peter is obedient even though he is still groggy with sleep and is under the illusion he is having a vision (v. 9). As the two proceed through the different wards of the prison, the great iron gate of the prison opens of its own accord, and they emerge outside the wall into the city street. Here the angel departs, leaving Peter alone (v. 10).

As Peter stands alone he gets fully awake and

realizes he is not dreaming but has indeed been divinely released from prison (v. 11). For a moment he stands considering just what to do and where to go at such an hour. He decides to go to the home of Mark and his mother Mary. He is surprised that anybody is still up at that late hour. Not knowing that a crowd is inside praying for him, he knocks at the door and calls. When the damsel Rhoda comes to the door and recognizes the voice to be Peter's, she is more excited to run and tell them Peter is at the door than to let him in. He continues knocking as the praying group stops praying to dispute her report. Nobody believes her, some affirming she is mentally off while others say it must be Peter's angel she saw, "The Jews held that everyone had his guardian angel, and they thought this angel had assumed Peter's voice" (B. W. Johnson). Rhoda returns to the door and admits Peter to the utter amazement of them all (v. 12-16). Their prayers may have been for Peter to be courageous in the face of death, and that his faith fail not. If, on the other hand, they have been praying for him to escape death somehow, then they have done more asking than believing--an all-to-common failure of praying people.

His standing in their presence touches off a noisy response. Wishing to share with them the good news of how he has been delivered, he seeks to get an opportunity to be heard by beckoning with his hand (v. 17) (compare Acts 13:16). He explains to them how he was released and then tells them to inform James (evidence would point to James the Lord's brother, one of the leading men in the Jerusalem church) and the other brethren of his release. While it is yet dark and he can flee to a better hiding place than Mary's house, he departs into "another place" (v. 17). Some even think "another place" may signify another place besides Jerusalem where he cannot be so easily located.

We can imagine the "no small stir among the soldiers" (v. 18) when daylight breaks with their prison-

er gone! They are aware of the Roman penalty for not keeping a prisoner committed to their care (death). And that is exactly what befalls them (v. 19). Herod is provoked over Peter's alluding him and his intentions concerning him. With his business in Judea accomplished, he returns to his capital city Caesarea (v. 19).

From the above events about James and Peter, the inspired historian Luke moves his attention to Caesarea, following Herod. Why follow him? To witness the divine judgment that will befall him for lifting up his hand against the church, for executing innocent guards, and for something very grave about to happen. Let's see.

We are not told what it is that causes Herod Agrippa I to be so "highly displeased" with those of Phoenicia's two famous cities (Tyre and Sidon) (v. 20). The marginal reading says he "bare an hostile mind, intending war." This may explain why they come desiring peace, for Palestine is a chief source of their imported food supply (v. 20). The Phoenician delegation must get by Herod's chamberlain in order to see the king personally (chamberlains kept the door to a king's private quarter--Esth. 6:2). Herod's trusted chamberlain is Blastus, and they accomplish their purpose of placating Herod's wrath through Blastus. Luke's account now moves us forward to Herod's sudden and miserable death which appears to be on the heels of the Phoenicians' coming.

His death is also reported by the Jewish historian Josephus, and the similarities between his account and the brief notice of it here in Acts make it interesting and profitable to draw details from both accounts. Josephus says it was in the great stadium at Caesarea while attending sports and games honoring the emperor Claudius Caesar while Acts does not tell us where it was. Acts tells of the oration Herod delivers--Josephus does not include it. Acts mentions the

"royal apparel" worn by Herod, while Josephus elaborates on it as follows: "He put on a garment wholly of silver, and of wonderful contexture, and early in the morning came into the theatre (place of shows and games), at which time the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the first reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone after a surprising manner." Acts says the people shouted, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man" (v. 22), while Josephus puts it like this: "The flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another, that he was a god; and they added, 'Be thou merciful unto us, for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a king, yet shall we henceforth own thee as a superior to mortal nature'." Acts says Herod "gave not God the glory", taking the honor of God to himself (v. 23), while Josephus says he did "neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery." Acts says, "The Lord smote him..., he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost" (v. 25), while Josephus says he was seized with violent pains in the bowels and died in great torture five days later. The terrible pain was caused by intestinal worms eating on him--something he nor anybody could do anything to alleviate. It was the same thing history says happened to two other wicked enemies of God's people: Antiochus Epiphanes and Herod the Great.

In the first part of this chapter Herod sets out to stop the church in order to please the Jews. By the end of the chapter he is dead and gone. In contrast to him v. 24 says, "But the word of God grew and multiplied," reminding us of I Pet. 1:24,25: "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever."

QUESTIONS: 1. *What tragedy befalls the church about the time Barnabas and Saul are at Jerusalem with*

Antioch's offering? 2. Which Herod is this? 3. Does his act displease or please the Jews? 4. In whose house are many gathered for prayer? 5. Tell of Peter's release from prison. 6. Who answers Peter's knock at the door? 7. What happens to those assigned to guard Peter? 8. Blend Josephus's account of Herod's death with Luke's account in Acts.

*E. Barnabas and Saul's Return to Antioch
(Study Acts 12:25)*

Having safely and faithfully delivered the Antioch offering to the Jerusalem elders to have on hand when the Agabus-predicted famine arrives (see Acts 11:27,28), Barnabas and Saul go back to Antioch, taking John Mark with them. You will remember it was in his mother's house in Jerusalem where many were gathered praying for Peter (Acts 12:12). It is thought by many that Mark was the "young man" he tells about in his own account of the arrest of Jesus--the young man who fled out of the garden naked when they tried to lay hold on him too (Mark 14:51,52). His boyhood name was "John". We know him more by his later name "Mark", possibly because of this name being attached to the New Testament book he penned.

QUESTIONS: 1. *Who accompanies Barnabas and Saul back to Antioch?* 2. *What is his other name?*