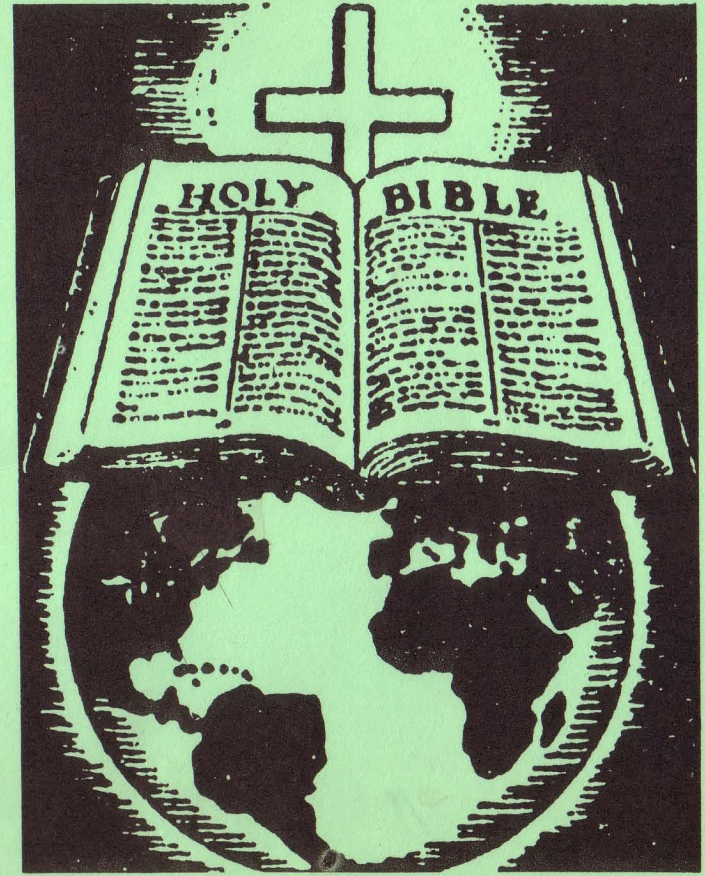


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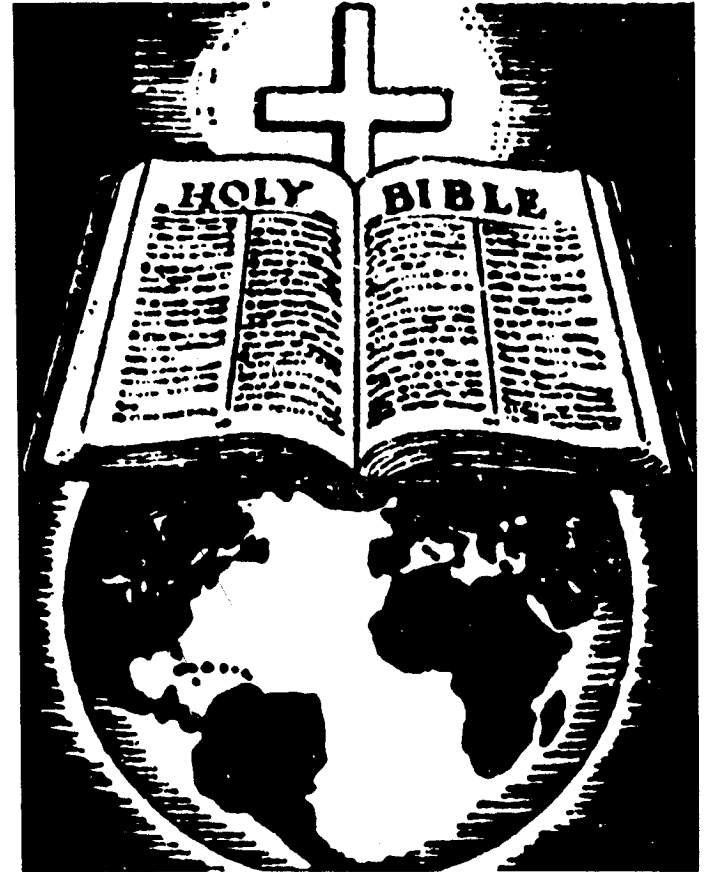


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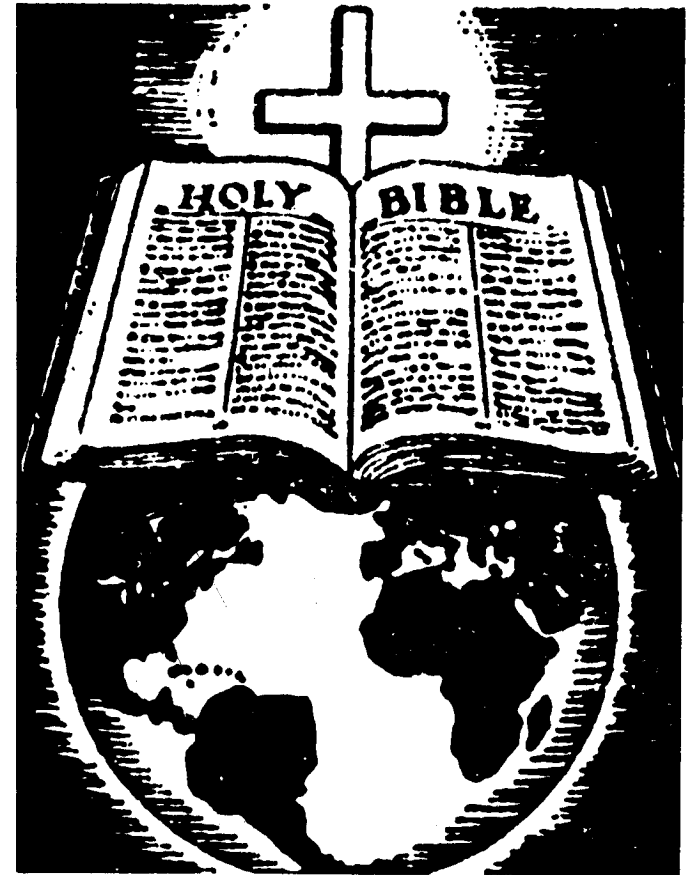
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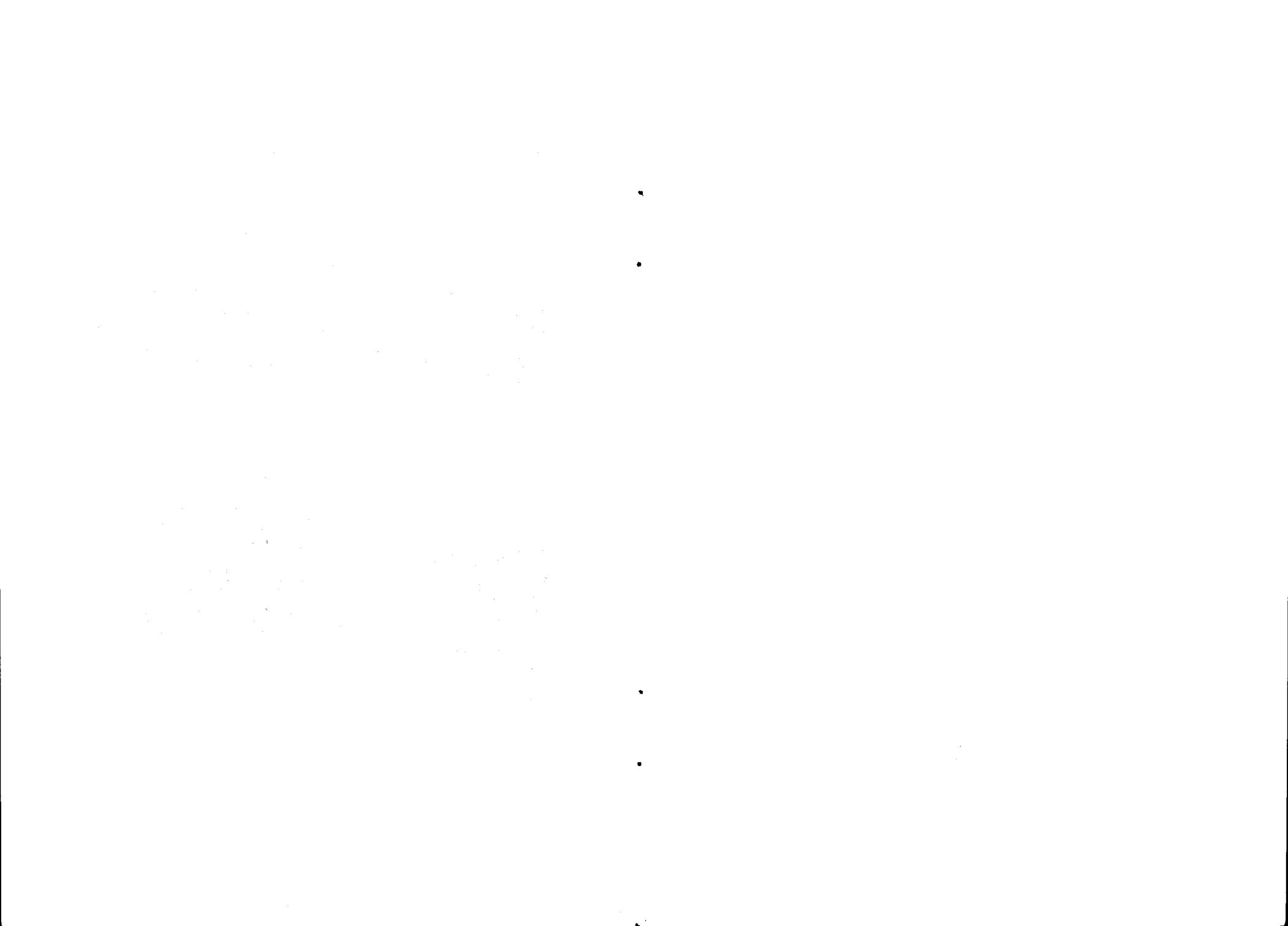
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This lesson shows the need of a church which is free to follow the leadership of God. The church must always be willing to walk uprightly.

THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD
by Ted E. Savage

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They were willing for God to answer their prayer in his own way. However, they were completely unprepared for the coming of Peter at the gate of the house where they were praying. They told Rhoda, the young girl who brought the news that Peter was at the gate, that she was crazy. Peter's continuous knocking at the door of the gate made them believe. They finally believed that the God to whom they had been praying was able to answer abundantly above what they thought or asked.

After Peter told the church how he had been delivered from prison, he told them to tell James and the rest of the brothers. Then he went to a safer place.

Peter recognized James, the brother of Jesus, as the leader in the church at Jerusalem. Peter had been in prison several times. He had been away from the church in Jerusalem on trips to Joppa and other places. The church had developed other leadership. No church should depend on one man to lead it.

III. THE MESSAGE

There are always conflicts between the church and the world. The power of God will always bring the church to victory. This is the great message of this lesson. There are two aims in this lesson.

- (1) It should help us to know that when we are truly Christians, we may be misunderstood and opposed.
- (2) It should help us to know that God is always present to give us the needed strength and wisdom.

The day when people die for Christ has not passed. Stephen gave his life; James gave his life. People of the world have not changed. They have always destroyed the prophets of God. They have always persecuted the righteous. They will continue to do these things until the end of time. God's power is the same today as it was many years ago.

Verses 5-6: *"An apostle in prison."* Herod had succeeded in destroying one of the leaders. He had James, the brother of John, killed. Now he was trying to destroy the apostle, Peter. He did not want to be responsible for a murder at this time of the year. It was the time of the Passover. As in the case of Jesus, the same men, who would brutally kill an innocent victim, could carefully observe a pious formal holy day.

Notice the great care taken to guard Peter. (verse 4) Four groups of soldiers were assigned to watch him through the day and night. This allowed them to chain both of his arms. Usually guards just chained one arm of a prisoner. He was chained to a soldier on each side. The other soldiers guarded the inner door of the prison and the outer gate. There were eight soldiers in all. Peter had been in jail for Jesus before. (Acts 4:3-5:18) God had delivered him before. (Acts 5:9) Herod was going to be sure that Peter would not escape this time!

While Herod planned how to kill Peter, Peter lay in the prison cell asleep. Peter was trusting God to save him.

Verses 7-11: *"God's hand opens the door."* How could God help Peter against the highest powers in the land? God sent one of his angels to lead Peter to safety. Peter was sleeping so soundly the angel had to hit him on the side to awaken him. The angel told Peter to get up and put on his clothes. He led Peter past the guards and out into the streets of the city. Peter thought that he was dreaming. So great was the deliverance he could not believe it was happening to him. When he was in the street, he knew he was free. He was freed by the hand of God.

Verses 12-16: *"The power of prayer."* We know that Peter did not get out of prison by himself. The church was at prayer all of the time. They were calling upon God to spare his life. They knew that Herod had already taken the life of James and helped to take the life of Jesus. The church gathered and prayed for the deliverance of Peter.

CHAPTER 1

WE ARE WITNESSES

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 1

MEMORY VERSE: *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."*

Acts 1:8

I. INTRODUCTION:

1. The Books of Acts.

The book of Acts is the continuing story of the work of Christ. There is no break between the life of Christ in the body and life of Christ in the Holy Spirit. Luke wrote two books:

- (1) The Gospel of Luke tells the story of Christ on earth.
- (2) Acts tells the story of the work of the Holy Spirit through the apostles.

2. The man, Luke.

Luke was the only Gentile writer in the Bible. All other writers were Jews. Luke was a medical doctor. He was a companion of Paul. Luke was a good historian. Much of what Luke tells, he saw while travelling with Paul.

3. The Purpose of the Book of Acts.

The main purpose of the Book of Acts is to show that the Gospel spread as Jesus had commanded. Acts shows the work of some of the apostles. It tells the Christian that the

Holy Spirit is on earth. The book gives us a picture of the practices of the early church. Acts tells of the mighty works and faith of the apostles. The book tells of the great problems of the new church and how these problems were overcome. We are told of the great sacrifices of the apostles and the early Christians.

4. An Outline of the Book of Acts.

- (1) The development of Christianity in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4-8:1)
- (2) The spread of faith in Palestine (Acts 8:2-12:25)
- (3) The work of the apostles among the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-28:31)

The disciples had all of the facts of the life of Christ. However, they were not ready to go to work. They needed to understand how to use these facts. They needed to know what was to be their future work. Jesus told them to wait for a time so that they could understand better. They did not know how long they were to wait. The disciples were to wait for power. As they waited, they prayed. There were 120 people who waited in the Upper Room. They were all in agreement. They chose a disciple to take the place of Judas Iscariot during the time they waited. Matthias was chosen. The believers expected something to happen.

II. THE TEXT Acts 1:1-11

Verse 1: *"In the first book"* means the Gospel Luke, which Luke had written. He was now ready to continue the story of Christ. *"Theophilus"* is the man to whom Luke addressed both *"Luke"* and *"Acts."* *"Theophilus"* means *"a friend of God."* The book could have been addressed to any friend of God. It was probably a friend of Luke's in the Roman government.

CHAPTER 13

PERSECUTION AND DELIVERANCE

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 12:1-25

MEMORY VERSE: *"If you are reproached for the name of Christ you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."*

1 Peter 4:14

I. INTRODUCTION

You may be surprised and frightened as you begin this study. It begins in a prison cell. Before you finish, you will know the experience of victory over the defeat of the powers of this world. Try to live this adventure as you read the Bible passage.

II. THE TEXT Acts 12:1-17

Verses 1-4: *"Politics and persecution."* King Herod Agrippa I had risen to power in Palestine by cleverness and by becoming friends with the enemies of his own nation. He had betrayed the Israelites to become friends with the Romans. Now he wanted to win the Jews who were in power, for his own political future. One way he could win the Jews was to persecute the Christians. The leaders were less and less favoured by the Jews because they were having fellowship with the Gentiles.

This persecution was the third great wave of violence that came upon the Jerusalem church. The agreement between Herod and the Jews to persecute and destroy the Christians was the same as the agreement between the Jews and the political party of Herod to destroy Jesus. (Mark 3:6)

The Holy Spirit called out Barnabas, Paul, Mark, and Silas. Only God can measure the greatness of these men who followed the Holy Spirit and preached the gospel in Antioch.

This lesson teaches us that the acceptance of the Jews and Gentiles into the same church prepared the church for a wider spread of the gospel.

The church at Antioch was concerned for the needy in another country. They sent money to the poor and food to the hungry. They gave to help the Jews and Greeks alike. A church needs to be as this one. The church at Antioch was so filled with the Holy Spirit and faith that they were given a new name, the name we carry today "Christian. . ."

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Verse 2: "*He had given commandment through the Holy Spirit.*" Jesus tried to prepare his disciples for the time when he would no longer be seen by them. He promised to return in the form of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would continue the work with the disciples. Jesus would not leave them alone. Their chief responsibility was to be witnesses of Jesus and his resurrection. (Acts 1:22) God became flesh in Jesus Christ that men might see God. By the power of the Holy Spirit the disciples were to give witness of God in Jesus Christ.

Verse 3: "*To them he presented himself.*" After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples at least ten times. These appearances were between the time of his resurrection and the time he went to be with his Father, God, in heaven. Jesus appeared to people who had faith. When Jesus appeared, it was more than just a feeling of his presence in the Spirit. All the people who saw him saw his body. It means a body that was alive. Resurrection must not be confused with immortality. Immortality means an eternal life in the spirit only. Resurrection means a raising of the body. Resurrection means a body that was dead lives again. A life in the spirit is believed by many religions of the world. Resurrection is survival of soul and body.

The Kingdom of God is the rule of God. When we become Christians, we submit to the rule of the Kingdom of God.

Verses 4 - 5: "*The promise of the Father.*" The disciples would be ready for their life's work after they received power from the Holy Spirit. The work of a Christian life is too great for our own strength. Only as we are "baptized" by the Holy Spirit are we ready to meet the demands of a Christian life. All Christians are baptized by the Holy Spirit at the time they become Christians. Apart from the Spirit, there is no salvation. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, judgement, and righteousness. The Holy Spirit gives us

power to live the Christian life and to work for Christ.

"John baptized." John only baptized those whose lives showed that they had repented of their sins. He pointed to Jesus, who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit.

Verses 6-7-8: *"Witnesses . . . to the end of the earth."* The Christians were not to be concerned with the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel. They would receive power from the Holy Spirit. They were to be witnesses to the end of the earth. One can only find the meaning of life as he gives himself completely in service to Christ. When one is a Christian, he goes beyond concern for his own salvation. He becomes concerned for the salvation of all others.

Verses 9-10-11: *"Why do you stand looking into heaven?"* The disciples were encouraged to expect and look for the return of Jesus. Waiting is only one part of our command. We are to do more than wait. We are to win others to Christ while we wait. For this task, we need strength and wisdom beyond our own. We must have power from the Holy Spirit.

IV. THE MESSAGE

Each one of us must be concerned for all people. If there is only one God, then he must be the creator of all people. He is concerned about all people. Christian concern must include the whole world. (Ephesians 2:14-16)

There are different works within the church. There is no place in the church for a Christian who will not work. All Christians build the body of Christ. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we Christians are to be engaged in being witnesses for Christ in our town, our province, our country, and our world.

FIRST, their religion should be preached to all people in the world.

SECOND, their religion should be very personal. It is named for the person of Christ. The "Christian" means "Christ-men," or those for whom Jesus is the centre of their lives.

Verses 27-30: *"Love your brother."* The large strong church in Antioch with all its wealth could have forgotten the poorer church in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem had the circumcision party in it. They could have thought they had nothing in common. The party of the circumcision disapproved of the Gentiles being brought into the church.

When Christians have different doctrine and belief, they sometimes think there is no basis for any fellowship at all. The church at Antioch found a good way to show their oneness in Jesus with the Christians in Jerusalem.

At this time, a famine had come to the land of Judea. (verses 27-28) The church at Antioch sent love gifts to the church at Jerusalem. They sent money and food to the people who were in need there. (verse 30) The church at Antioch overcame the difference by their going forward to claim the Gentiles for Christ.

III. THE MESSAGE

This lesson tells how the dedication of a few lives might change a church and the world. Some unnamed men of Cyprus and Cyrene preached at Antioch to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The revival began there and spread to every corner of the Roman Empire. This revival took Barnabas from Jerusalem and Paul from Tarsus. It provided power for salvation and money for the food for the hungry in Jerusalem. This preaching caused missionaries to go out and spread the word of Jesus into all the world of that day.

was to return and tell the mother church at Jerusalem. (verse 22) Barnabas was the right man for this difficult task. The leaders at Jerusalem had full confidence in him. He was also open-minded to any new work of God. (verse 23)

One of the greatest needs today is people who can see both sides of the task. There is a need for people who can bring peace between two groups of people who might otherwise be enemies.

Barnabas' mission was so successful that the work grew rapidly. It was necessary to send for additional leadership for Antioch. Barnabas thought of someone who could help him there in Antioch. He had not forgotten the zeal with which Paul had preached after his conversion. The conversion had been great and lasting. Barnabas went to Tarsus and got Paul. He brought him back to Antioch to help in the church there. Paul's ministry at Antioch prepared him for the great missionary work that he did for the remainder of his life.

Verse 26: *"What is in a name?"* So great was the work of the followers of Jesus that they were given a new name in Antioch. Even the pagans could see that the uncircumcised Gentiles were being accepted into the fellowship of the Jews. This made the church much different from the Jewish Synagogue. Perhaps these people outside the church were the first to call the followers of Jesus "Christians."

The name which they chose could not have been better. The word "Christian" shows how widespread the group had become. In the idea was the word "Christ" which referred to the Old Testament Messiah. The language was Greek. This language was spoken throughout the Roman Empire. The ending of the word was Latin, the language of the Romans. The word shows the three great cultures of the day: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

Because of this background there must be two things true in Christianity:

CHAPTER 2

OUR HELPER IN THE TASK

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 2:1-13

MEMORY VERSE: *"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things."*

John 14:26

I. INTRODUCTION

We are told almost everyday that our task as Christians is a big one. We must know also, that though our task is bigger than we are, our God is bigger than our task.

The disciples had done all that was possible for them to do in their own strength. Now they were to wait for power. This power was from God. When God's power came, they would be able to do any job God had for them to do. Jesus had told the disciples they would receive the power to do their task.

The disciples were all together in one place. Suddenly, a wonderful thing happened. The house was filled with sounds like a mighty wind. It was as though fire settled in separate flames on each believer. At this very time, each believer was filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to speak to other people in other languages as the Holy Spirit gave them power. This was the promise of the Father coming true.

Because of this miracle, a great crowd of people gathered. All of the people were Jews from all the known nations. Every person heard in his own language. The disciples told of the wonderful works of God.

II. THE TEXT: Acts 2:1-11

Verse 1: *"The day of Pentecost"* . . . The word *"Pentecost"* means fifty. This feast came fifty days after the crucifixion of Christ. It was the time of the first harvest of grain. The followers of Christ were gathered together on the day of Pentecost to worship. They were all Jews. They would still keep all the Jewish Holy days. Jesus had appeared to them for forty days. The Christians had been told to remain and wait for power. Now on the fiftieth day the promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled.

"Had come." The day had come. Peter said it was 9.00 hours.

"They were all together in one place." All the Christians were praying. They were looking for the promise of God.

Verse 2: *"Like the rush of a mighty wind."* In the language of the New Testament the word for "Spirit" is the same word that is used for "wind." The Spirit came upon the disciples like the coming of a mighty wind. We have other references to the Spirit in this way. (Read John 3:8) "The wind blows where it will." The Spirit, as the wind, is not seen but is known by its effects.

Verse 3: *"Tongues as of fire."* The disciples were waiting. The Holy Spirit came in the form of a tongue of fire. The tongues of fire came from a central flame. Fire is a sign of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. It may suggest both light and judgement. We must not confuse the Holy Spirit with the signs seen here. The disciples saw tongues of fire and heard the sound of wind. They knew the Holy Spirit was not and is not wind and fire. These were signs they could see and hear. They have passed. The Holy Spirit remains.

Verse 4: *"Filled with the Holy Spirit."* This was an important coming of the Holy Spirit, but this was not the

end of the Mediterranean Sea. Antioch was a city where people from the east and people from the west met. Antioch had about five hundred thousand people in it. Antioch was a very evil city. It had a pagan worship that included prostitution as a part of the worship.

Because there were so many cultures in Antioch, it was a good place for the Gospel to be preached. The people were ready to try something new and their old narrow way of belief could be thrown off. The church in Antioch was much stronger than the church in Jerusalem. The church in Antioch had Jews and Gentiles in it.

Verses 20 - 21: *"The church for everyone."* It was very difficult for the church to begin to include all people. So far we have seen four stages of this development. First, the church included mostly Palestinian Jews. (Acts 1:5) Then it was enlarged by the addition of the Greek-speaking Jews. They were of the same race but they had a different culture and language. (Acts 6:7) The third stage came with the admission of the Samaritan who were considered to be half-Jews and half-pagan. (Acts 8) Finally, Gentiles who were already interested in Judaism were admitted. People like the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius were included with the faith. (Acts 8:10)

Even though these people were admitted, they did not have the freedom that the Jews had in the church. The final decision came in Antioch, when, for the first time, the disciples who went there preached deliberately to the Gentiles. (Acts 11:20) They made a definite effort to convert all the Gentiles they could. The effort of these missionaries was so successful that the church at Antioch became a true fellowship of Jews and Gentiles. (verse 21)

Verse 22-26: *"The ministry of Barnabas."* The church at Jerusalem heard about this great spiritual gift at Antioch. They chose Barnabas to go to this church and investigate. He

CHAPTER 12

A GROWING CHURCH

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 11:19-30

MEMORY VERSE: *"The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number that believed turned to the Lord."*

Acts 11:21

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes businesses will spend much money to change the names of their firms. Sometimes this is because several small businesses have gone together to form one big business. Sometimes it is because the business concerned wants to create a new image of itself.

The movement which was begun by Jesus got a new name at Antioch. Like the businesses that change their names, this name came because the Gentiles and Jews truly joined forces at Antioch. They became known as Christians first at Antioch.

II. THE TEXT: Acts 11:19-30

Verse 19: *"The city of Antioch."* When Stephen was killed, the believers scattered all over Palestine. They went to Syria. They travelled to Samaria. Some of the disciples went to the north as far as Antioch. This city was to become the place where Christian missions began to spread throughout the world.

Antioch was the third most important city in the Roman Empire. Rome was first; Alexandria was second; and Antioch was third. It was a free city located near the eastern

first coming. The Old Testament tells of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament tells of many appearances in the early times. John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb. (Luke 1:15) The Spirit came upon Mary with power. (Luke 1:35) Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1:41) Many others from early times were filled by the Holy Spirit.

"Speaking in other tongues." A miracle of speaking and hearing is implied here. As Peter spoke, he was understood in many languages. This was provided only for this day of beginning. These were real languages of people from many countries.

Verses 5-11: *"Jews devout men from every nation."* Since the time when the Jews had been made slaves in Babylon, they had lived in every nation in the known world. On the Holy days, these men tried to come to Jerusalem. They would come especially for Pentecost. Devout Jews came from all over the world.

After this Pentecost, new Christians returned home to all these countries. Luke tells how Christianity spread from this time.

The gospel was not for one nation or for one religious group of people. The book of Acts tells us that it is for every person in the world.

III. THE MESSAGE

In the Holy Spirit, we have all the power we need for the task we are to do. Our task is to preach the gospel to the whole world. To think of the task would give us much fear. We know the Holy Spirit is here today to help us. We know we can do the job.

The New Testament tells us how the Holy Spirit helps us. He comforts us. He does not remove the troubles we have. He gives us what we need to bear these troubles. He helps us conquer our problems. The Holy Spirit teaches us the fuller truth of what Jesus did and said. The Holy Spirit gives to the Christians love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23) The qualities in one's life are proof that the Holy Spirit lives in him.

WHAT DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT DO IN OUR LIVES?

- (1) He calls us to God and his work.
- (2) He gives us power to do God's work.
- (3) He comforts us in difficult times.

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teaching of this lesson. We are to preach the gospel to all men. We are to accept all of God's children as brothers. Peter found victory in surrendering to God's call, even though it went against his customs and some of the deepest feelings he had.

When we obey God's command, it often proves difficult and dangerous. This was true for Peter when he entered and ate at the house of Cornelius. It was against Peter's custom. It got him into trouble with the church at Jerusalem. Peter's trouble would have been greater if he had not followed God. Then he would have been in conflict with God.

When the Jewish Sanhedrin had threatened Peter, he said, "*We ought to obey God rather than men.*" (Acts 5:29) It took more courage for Peter to do the thing that God asked him to do in Caesarea than it took for him to stand before the church at Jerusalem. It takes more courage to go against the customs of our own people than it does to face danger to our bodies when we stand against the enemy. When God receives people, we must receive them as brothers.

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baptism or the laying on of hands. The church was receiving the knowledge that the grace of God was for all men everywhere.

The victory with the church was not entirely complete. There were some who still did not want to welcome the Gentiles. The church admitted that there was granted to the Gentiles *"repentance and life."* (verse 18) There was still one matter which needed to be settled. This question was *"Could a Jew eat with an uncircumcised Gentile?"*

It is easier to admit that God has accepted our enemies than it is for us to accept them. This problem of eating together was not settled. It would trouble the church again. Peter would be rebuked by Paul for not remaining true to the teaching which he had received on the housetop. (Galatians 2:11-14) It is necessary, when we gain a vision from God, to practice what God is trying to teach us.

III. THE MESSAGE

The main message of this lesson is expressed in the memory verse:

"God our Saviour, who desired all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

It is important to understand that God wants to save all people everywhere. God accepts those who receive this salvation. He wants his people (the Christians) to accept them, too. We must accept those whom God accepts.

Peter did not object to preaching to the Gentiles. He said that it was not lawful for a Jew to enter the house of one of another race. (Acts 10:28) The circumcision party did not condemn him for preaching to Cornelius but for entering the house of Cornelius. He was also accused of eating with the uncircumcised. (11:2) We do not dare to change the

CHAPTER 3

THE CALL TO REPENTANCE

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 2:14-47

MEMORY VERSE: *"And Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

Acts 2:38

I. INTRODUCTION

"Repentance" is the key word in the lesson before us. In the Bible this word means "to turn to God." Repenting is turning from man's way and turning to God's way. The term is used in almost the same way as the word "conversion." In repentance, a man's direction is reversed or turned around.

Repentance means more than sorrow. It includes sorrow. It is more than sorrow for being found out. It is more than sorrow for one's failure. Repentance is sorrow over one's sin. It is an admission of one's guilt of sin against God.

Repentance means more than a change of mind. Repentance means a change of direction. When a person completely turns from a life of sin, he no longer finds pleasure in a life of sin.

In repentance, man gets a new way of thinking about God, about himself, about other people and about right and wrong. A person, in repentance, not only thinks differently but acts differently about God, about himself, about others, and about right and wrong. According to God's plan repentance is the only way to salvation.

Salvation of our soul is God's free gift to man. It is like water to the thirsty man. Just as water quenches thirst, so salvation offered from God will satisfy the need of the sinner and release him from sin.

II. THE TEXT: Acts 2:22-24,32-39

Verse 22: *"Jesus of Nazareth."* The gospel is about Jesus of Nazareth. Many knew him as a man. He was present in human life. No man doubted that he was human. Many saw him walk about, eat, drink, grow tired, laugh and weep. No person doubted that he was a man.

Many who knew him as a man also knew him as God. "Attested to you by God, with mighty works and wonders and signs." We know Jesus is God by the things he did. People know we are Christians by what we do. God pointed out Jesus by what he did. The miracles are signs of the power of God through him. All of the works of Jesus were done by the mighty power of God. Each thing Jesus did was to point us to God.

Verse 23: *"Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God."*

This part of this verse tells of the beautiful act of God. God gave Jesus to men. Jesus was given to show men what God was like. God had a purpose and God knew before time. Jesus' life was freely given. It was deliberately given, and that is the reason why it is redeeming. No one took his life from him. God willed to give up Jesus.

"You crucified and killed." At calvary, we see the cruel act of murder. God gave freely. Men rejected this gift and murdered Jesus.

There is redemption at the cross. This redemption is in what Christ did for man and not in what man did to him.

What the Jews ate and the way they ate was a great part of their difference from other people. This made no difference to God. Circumcision made no difference either. Jesus had already tried to teach this very thing. (Mark 7:14-19)

Verses 11 - 17: *"God tests his lesson."* As soon as Peter had received the lesson that God wanted to teach him, God sent men to test his conviction. There were men at the gate to get Peter to come to preach to them. (verse 11) Because he was a Jew, Peter did not want to go to this soldier's house. The Spirit of God had spoken to him; and because he was a Christian, he followed them. (verse 12)

As Peter arrived in Caesarea, he learned that God had called him there for a purpose. God had also prepared the heart of Cornelius for his visit. (verses 13 - 14) When Peter saw the Holy Spirit at work, he was fully convinced that God had done the work. Because of the leadership of the Holy Spirit, Peter shared the gospel with the enemies of his nation.

The greatest sign of God's calling was the coming of the power of the Holy Spirit. Many times before, the coming of the Holy Spirit had been at the time of baptism or at the laying on of the hands of the apostles. (Acts 2:38; Acts 8:17) This time, however, he came with none of these signs. The Spirit came even before Peter finished the sermon he was preaching. God interrupted by sending His Spirit upon the Gentiles. He came in the same way that he had come to the Jews on the day of Pentecost.

Verse 18: *"The victory of grace."* Peter had been led by the Holy Spirit to put away his prejudice. The whole church at Jerusalem did not agree with him. They needed the experience that Peter had witnessed. Peter based the work he had done so completely on the hand of God that the men who were disputing with him grew silent. A new thing was happening. The Gentiles were receiving the Spirit with

"Circumcision Party." (verse 2) In the beginning of the church, circumcision was the major political and religious discussion in the church. Circumcision was the mark of the Jew as being a member of that nation. To bring circumcision in the church would put the Jews and Gentiles on the same footing.

In the beginning of the church for a Jew to have fellowship with a Gentile was a real threat to the Jew. The Jews were trying to throw off the Roman Empire's power. The Jews were trying to get freedom. A church with both the Jew and the Gentile would require that the people live with their political enemy.

Trouble such as this threatened the unity of the early church. The charge given of eating with the uncircumcision (verse 3) was very serious. There could be no church without true fellowship. This meant that all people must be willing to eat together. (Acts 2:42-46)

II. THE TEXT: Acts 11:4-18

Verses 4 - 10: *"A heavenly vision."* Many times we must change what we believe about God before we can do his work. Peter would not have gone to Cornelius if God had not shown him that his attitude was wrong. God had led Peter to understand the true meaning of "clean and unclean."

Peter had a vision while he was asleep on the flat roof of a home in Joppa. He saw a great sheet sent from God. In the sheet, there were all kinds of animals. God told Peter to eat and satisfy his hunger. (verse 7) Peter refused (verse 8) because of the Jewish claim of the clean and the unclean animal. (Acts 11:8 and Leviticus 11) God sent the sheet three times and told Peter to eat three times. (verse 9 - 10) This meant that these old laws were broken by the coming of Jesus.

Verse 24: *"But God raised him up."* Life is stronger than death. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is victory of life over death. The Christian faith in the life after this one is found in the knowledge that Jesus was raised from the dead after his crucifixion.

Resurrection is not to be confused with immortality. Resurrection is life of body and soul. Immortality is the life of the soul only.

Two important victories are given in verses 23-24: (1) God's victory over the deeds of sinful men by allowing Jesus to die on the cross. (2) God's victory of life over death in Jesus' resurrection.

Verse 32: *"Witnesses."* God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus had appeared to the apostles. He had been seen by many other people. These were all witnesses. Their main task was to tell others about the life and resurrection of Jesus.

Verse 33: *"Being . . . exalted."* Jesus went from the worst disgrace to the height of glory. At the cross, it appeared that the life of Christ had ended in defeat. His followers thought all was lost. When the women first reported about Jesus, the apostles counted it as idle talk. Only when Jesus had appeared to these men did they believe. Peter declared not only that Jesus was raised from the dead but that he was exalted to the right hand of the Father.

Verses 34-35: These verses are careful to show that Jesus did not come to set up his kingdom on earth. He did not come to renew David's kingdom of the Old Testament. He was David's Lord. He was also his son. The true king is not David, but Jesus. The kingdom over which Jesus rules is in the hearts of Christian people.

Verse 36: *"God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."*

(1) "Lord." In the Old Testament the word "Lord" was used for God. Sometimes it may be used only as a word of respect. Sometimes it is spoken to our elders or to one who is respected by us. "Lord" in the same way as the word "Christ" means "one who controls my life." He controls our habits. He controls the way we live every day and the way we think.

(2) "Christ." This is the Greek word for "Messiah." The word "Messiah" is Hebrew. Both words mean "the anointed one." God has anointed him both Christ and Lord. Our work is to acknowledge him as both Lord and Christ. He is the king. Obedient people of a kingdom get all the benefits of the kingdom. Those who rebel are punished.

Verse 37: *"What shall we do?"* This was the cry of a lost man to those who know the way of salvation. This was the cry of those men who had crucified Christ. The convicting power of the Holy Spirit had entered their hearts.

Verse 38: *"Repent, and be baptized."* Repentance is the way for forgiveness of sin. One must receive forgiveness before he is ready for baptism. It can be better understood if we realize that baptism is a picture of what has happened within us. One must confess his sins and confess Christ as his Lord. Baptism is the evidence of this confession. It would seem that Acts 2:38 teaches that baptism contributes to salvation. When we look at the whole New Testament, we find this is not true. Baptism is the normal outward way of confessing one's sins and one's faith in Christ.

The Holy Spirit is received before baptism. Salvation is received before baptism. (Acts 10:44-48)

Verse 39: *"Every one whom the Lord our God calls to him."* God's call is a basic doctrine of the New Testament. God does not call some people and permit others to go to

CHAPTER 11

SALVATION FOR ALL MEN

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 9:32 to 11:18

MEMORY VERSE: *"God our Saviour, who desired all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*

1 Timothy 2:3-4

I. INTRODUCTION

William Carey was a minister who made his living by making shoes. He had a conviction that all men everywhere should hear about Jesus Christ. Many of his fellow ministers opposed him. At a meeting of the Association of Churches in 1789, at Leicester, England, he asked a question. The question was: "Is the command that was given to the apostles to preach the gospel to all men everywhere, given to all ministers?"

Immediately the moderator called out, "Sit down, young man. You are just wanting to cause trouble when you ask such a question. When God wants to convert the world, he can do it without your help."

The question of Christian responsibility of all men is an important teaching in the book of Acts. The very thing that proves this point was the conversion of Cornelius. It was so important that Luke repeats much of the information to make it clearly understood. (Acts 10)

The gospel advanced quickly as we have already seen in our former studies. Many of the apostles were preaching the gospel only to the Jews. For the first time these people who wanted the gospel for the Jews only were identified as the

III. THE MESSAGE

The change in the life of Saul was a result of the direct coming of Christ to him. It is not enough for one to know about Christ. One must know Him. When Saul met Christ, he did the most important thing. He yielded his life to Jesus. He could not have borne the suffering in his later life, if he had not settled this one question of who is Lord. Paul went against the custom of his people again and again. Because of this he suffered much. He did this because he was following the Lord.

If Christ could change Paul into a Christian servant, he can change any life. Each one must yield his life to Christ. A person who will give his life to Christ today, can be changed by the strength of Christ.

When Paul of Tarsus saw Jesus Christ with new eyes of faith, he saw other people differently. He saw the people of the church as the body of Christ. He learned what Christ taught. He learned that when people persecuted the Christian people they persecuted God. On the Damascus road Saul was persecuting the Christians and the voice that spoke to him said: "Why do you persecute me?"

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destruction. The call of God shows that God is reaching and searching for each of us. God comes to man. Man cannot go to God unless God is seeking him first. Jesus said, "*You did not choose me, but I chose you.*" (John 15:16) God calls; man is to answer. Salvation is brought by God, not by man.

"And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Acts 2:47) From day to day God adds those to the churches who are saved.

III. THE MESSAGE

All must repent of their sins.

(1) This is what Jesus requires before we can be saved.

(2) One can turn from sin only by turning to Christ.

We must take Christ as Lord of our life.

(1) This is a part of our salvation.

(2) This means Christ rules our life in every way

When we are saved we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

(1) He comes to comfort and help us in Christian living.

(2) He tells us about our sins.

(3) He helps us to witness for Christ.

CHAPTER 4

THE POWER OF FAITH

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 3

MEMORY VERSE: *"Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."*

Matthew 21:22

I. INTRODUCTION

When the church was just starting, all of the people in it were Jews. They worshipped at the Temple and in the synagogues. They were loyal Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Christ. They did not plan to leave the Jewish religion because of their belief in Christ.

The first Christians in Jerusalem were like a family. They were together everyday. They were held together by their faith in Christ. These Christians had fellowship together. They ate together. They prayed together. Read Acts 2:42 These people shared a certain life together. *"Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common."* (Acts 4:32)

These early Christians went to the Temple at the hour of prayer. They studied God's Word in the synagogue each Saturday. They gathered in private homes at the close of the day to eat and study God's word. This meal served as a fellowship meal and also for what we call the Lord's Supper.

In today's lesson, our theme is faith. We will talk of the faith Peter shows in Jesus. This faith made Peter willing to receive what Jesus had to offer. It also made Peter willing to give what Christ might demand of him.

Because Paul did not want to die for Christ at this time does not mean that he had no courage. Ananias had already told him what he had to do. Paul was to take the name of Christ before the Gentiles. He was to witness before kings. He was to tell the Israelites. (verse 15) Paul could not take the message of Christ to the Gentiles if he did not escape from the Jews.

Paul had set out for Damascus with all the power the Jewish Sanhedrin could give him. He left Damascus like a thief in the night. He wanted no one to see him. The things that Paul did in his life show us that the humility of the Christian Paul was stronger than the pride of the Jewish Saul.

Verses 26 - 31: *"Again in Jerusalem."* Because Paul was chased from Damascus, we might think he would act differently in Jerusalem. When he reached Jerusalem, he disputed with the Jews in the synagogue just as he had done in Damascus.

In Damascus Ananias had trusted Paul and opened his door to him. In Jerusalem, Barnabas helped him. Twice Paul was helped by men who saw his ability to work for Christ. Barnabas spoke for him before the church to help him to be recognized as a fellow Christian.

Paul went to the synagogue and disputed with the Greek-speaking Jews. Perhaps he went to the synagogue in which Stephen had been tried. He preached Christ and disputed with the Jews. (verse 28-29)

Again, he began to face certain death and he was forced to leave Jerusalem. He went to his home in Tarsus. (verse 30) Paul went home to preach to his own people.

Is it better for the church to preach what the people want to hear? Or is it better for the church to preach the truths of the Bible that the people need to know?

regain his sight. He laid his hands on him and Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit. (verse 17) Paul was baptized. In baptism he declared his faith in Christ.

The great faith of the Christians was shown when they accepted Paul. He had been their persecutor. Sometimes it is easier to be accepted by God than it is by the church.

Verses 19b - 22: *"A ministry of power."* After Paul's conversion he was different from other Christians in two ways:

FIRST, he began to witness for Jesus immediately. Many people feel that witnessing must be left to the mature Christian. Paul began to give witness immediately. He did not know everything there was to know about Christianity. The way he witnessed may have been clumsy, but he had something to share and he was determined to share it.

SECOND, he went straight to the Jewish synagogue in Damascus (verse 20). Paul went to tell his fellow Jews about what Jesus had done for him. Because these people had seen his life in the past, they could see that something had happened to him. (verse 21)

Verses 23 - 25: *"The cost of conversion."* Paul witnessed so strongly to the Jews after his conversion that soon the Jews were plotting to take his life. Paul could understand the way they felt since it had not been long since he had been one of the people who also persecuted the Christians.

Paul had to decide whether he should remain in Damascus or leave. He must decide if he should resist the Jews or flee for his life. Paul chose to escape from the city. At night the disciples of Christ let him down the wall in a large basket. (verse 25)

Faith may demand that a person be willing to die for Christ. We may, through faith in God, receive great gifts. The demand for us to give may be much. Read Hebrews 11:37.

II. THE TEXT Acts 3:1-16

Verse 1: *"The hour of prayer."* Peter and John were faithful Jews. Christianity grew out of the faithfulness of the Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

The hours of prayer were the third and ninth hours. The Jewish day began with sunrise and ended with sunset. The hours of prayer varied from day to day. They came about 9.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m.

Verse 2: *"A man lame from birth."* This man was more than forty years old. (Acts 4:22) He had been lame from his birth. The Temple was the regular place for beggars. Many people visited the temple each day. It was expected that they would give money to the beggars.

This man was healed by faith. (Acts 3:16) In the New Testament, faith is essential to the one who casts out demons or heals the sick.

The healing of the blind man is called a sign. (Acts 4:22) It is more than a miracle. It pointed to greater blessings from God. This miracle served to give this man a strong body. It pointed to a greater blessing which is salvation.

Verse 3: *"Asked for alms."* The lame man was seeking money only. He was not seeking physical healing or spiritual salvation. What he received was greater than that for which he asked. By the apostles' faith in Christ he was healed.

Verses 4 - 5: *"Expecting to receive something."* After the lame man received the attention of Peter and John, he expected to receive nothing more than money.

Verse 6: *"In the name of Jesus Christ."* The power to give wholeness in the body or the spirit belonged to Jesus Christ. Peter and John had no money, no power, nothing to give, except the name of Jesus Christ. In their own names, they had nothing. This is the main point of the lesson. THE POWER IS IN THE NAME. The power is not in faith. The power is in the one in whom we have faith. Only God can make lame legs walk. Only God can heal a broken heart. Faith is openness to God through which we receive his gifts.

Verses 7-10: *"Walking and praising God."* The man expected money. He received the power to walk. He had the gratitude to praise God for this gift. He held on to Peter and John as they went into the Temple. He was grateful to Peter and John, but he knew the healing came from God. The miracle was through the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. (verse 6) It came from God.

Verse 11: *"All the people ran together."* Because one man joyful and publicly gave praise to God for this blessing, a large crowd gathered. At first they were amazed. Then they heard a sermon. The lame man gave a witness to others. He gave praise to God without planning to. True worship comes when we freely open our hearts to his love.

Verse 12: *"Why do you stare at us?"* The crowd paid close attention to the apostles. Peter told them that the miracles came from God not from them. He took this opportunity to point this crowd to Jesus. Again Peter insisted it was God's power that cured the lame man.

Verse 13: *"Whom you delivered up."* Peter charged his own people with their guilt in delivering Jesus to Pilate. Pilate, a Roman governor, wanted to free Jesus. The Jews refused. This was not to blame the Jews for the death of Christ more than others. This was the truth. Jews as well as Romans were charged with the crucifixion of Jesus.

If the Christians were right, Paul was wrong in the cause to which he had given his life. He sought to destroy Christianity because he was unwilling to accept this judgement that Christianity laid upon his faith. Saul was completely unprepared for the conversion experience he had. As he travelled to Damascus, burning with the desire to destroy Christianity, his belief and faith were completely reversed.

Paul's whole approach to the life of Jesus was guided by this conversion experience. He did not expect to be converted nor did he deserve to be converted. Therefore, Paul knew clearly that salvation was a gift from God. It was not worked for nor given to those who worked for it. Paul could only receive it humbly as a gift. His whole way of living was changed. Paul knew that the Christian was a new creation of God. He knew he persecuted Christ when he persecuted the church. (verse 4 - 5)

Verses 10 - 19a: *"From enemy to brother."* Even after the glorious conversion Paul had, he would not be accepted by the others unless they could believe Christ had changed him.

Saul or Paul sought in the darkness for someone with whom he could share what Christ had done to him. He wanted forgiveness from those whom he had persecuted. Christ wanted to convert this persecutor, Saul.

It is not difficult to understand why Ananias resisted the call of Christ to go to Saul. (verses 13 -14) Christians always find it difficult to go to those who have been bitter enemies of the church. Most of the time it is fear on the part of the Christian.

Ananias finally obeyed the call of Christ to go to Paul. He showed his great Christian faith by calling him "brother." He showed his acceptance of Paul by touching him with his hands. This showed he had forgiven Paul. He helped Paul to

CHAPTER 10

CHANGED BY CHRIST

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 9:1-31

MEMORY VERSE: *"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ."*

Philippians 3:7

I. INTRODUCTION

It is wonderful to study the lives of the few men who have been able to change the way that men are living. Martin Luther changed the way the whole world lives by bringing a change in the church. John Wesley changed the whole of England by the peaching of the gospel and letting the State Church go her way.

The apostle Paul or Saul was a man such as these. He took Christianity from the narrow thinking of the Jews and gave it to all the people of the world. His message changed the entire world. As we study the passage today let us consider what kind of conversion Paul had. This conversion changed everything that he did.

II. THE TEXT Acts 9:1-31

Verses 1 - 9: *"Journey to the light."* The lesson today is a study of the effect of Paul's conversion. Go back and read the description of the experience. (Acts 9:1-9) Why would a religious leader, who permitted many pagan religions around him, set out to destroy Christianity? The reason was that Christianity claimed to be the truth of Saul's own religion. The interpretation of the Scriptures by the apostles condemned the Jewish rejection of Jesus.

Verse 14: *"But you denied the Holy and Righteous One."* Here, in his sermon, Peter refers to the choice of Barabbas over Jesus. (At home read in your Bible: Luke 23:13-25.) Barabbas was a man who tried to lead the Jews in a revolt against the Roman government. He was a murderer. Barabbas would be a hero among the Jewish nationalists. It was the Roman custom to free one prisoner each year at the time of the Passover feast. This was in memory of the time when the Jews were freed from slavery in Egypt.

Barabbas was a national leader who was trying to free the Jews from the Roman Rule. Jesus Christ was the Holy and righteous one who offered them personal salvation from sin and death. Barabbas stole and took life. Jesus Christ offers salvation by the way of the cross. He gives life instead of taking it.

Verse 15: *"The Author of life."* Jesus was the one who originated life. These very people to whom Peter was speaking were guilty of killing the author of life.

Men sometimes know right from wrong without knowing good from evil. Those who crucified Jesus knew it was wrong to murder. They thought they would be better off if Jesus were out of the way. They thought it was good for their cause if they crucified Jesus. They were guilty of murder and of ignorance at the same time. Because they did not believe that Jesus was the Promised One from God, they did not realise that they had killed the Son of God.

Verse 16: *"By faith in his name."* The name of Jesus had made the man strong. Healing was from Christ. Faith is the channel through which the man received Christ's blessings and power. The man was whole and sound. Salvation brings both a whole man and a sound man before God.

III. THE MESSAGE

Peter wanted the people to know that he and John had not healed the lame man themselves. He wanted God to be praised for healing the man. In verses 13 - 15, Peter told about Jesus whom they killed on the cross. He then said that God raised Jesus from the dead and he and John were witnesses of this thing.

Read verse 16 again. Here Peter told about the power of faith. Faith in the name of Jesus made the lame man walk.

Read verses 6 - 7 again. Peter commanded the man, "*In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.*" The lame man wanted to walk. He believed Peter. He walked. He leaped. Then he thanked God for healing him. Peter said, "*The faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.*"

WHAT THIS LESSON TELLS US

1. God sent the Holy Spirit to earth to help us.
2. If we have faith in God, he will help us to do many things. As our faith grows stronger, the Holy Spirit will help us to do greater things for the Lord.

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III. THE MESSAGE

1. Who are the Samaritans in your world today? Are they members of other tribes? Are they members of other religious groups? Are they other people with whom you are afraid to speak? We must enter these modern Samarias with a Christian witness.
2. Simon came to the church to get something for himself. What is your reason for being a Christian? Are your prayers full of what you want God to give to you? Are you interested only in what you can get out of the church? Do you want religious power so that you can rule over others?
3. What can strong churches do to share their knowledge of the Holy Spirit with the weak small ones? Can your church send representatives to some small church? We must go to the Samaria in our own country.

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Simon knew that there was a greater power in Philip than the power he had. (verses 12-13) Simon could not overcome the Christian movement so he decided to "believe" and be baptized. There was no evidence that he had repented of his sins.

Simon "believed" because of fear and because he wanted to gain something for himself. When Peter came to help Philip, Simon tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter rebuked him sternly. (verses 20-24) The Bible tells us that many come to Christ without a true promise to follow Jesus. (Mark 4:14-19)

Verses 14 - 17: *"Sharing the Spirit."* Philip had such a great revival in Samaria that the Jerusalem church sent Peter and John to see what was happening. (Verse 14) When Peter and John arrived in Samaria, they knew that God was at work there. The Samaritans had not received the Holy Spirit in the same way the apostles had on the day of Pentecost. They had been baptized only in the name of the Lord Jesus. This act alone did not give them the Holy Spirit. (verse 15-16)

John now wanted the Spirit to fall on the Samaritan believers. A few years before when he had travelled with Jesus, John wanted to call fire down on them. Christ makes the difference.

When they had prayed, the apostles laid their hands on the Samaritans who had believed. When this act was done, the Samaritans received the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. This was the Samaritan Pentecost. The Spirit provided the bond that tied the believers together. At first, the Samaritans were not sure that the Jewish church would receive them. When the hands of the Apostles were laid on them, all doubt was erased from both the Jews and Samaritans. Now the Holy Spirit could work in their hearts.

CHAPTER 5

STANDING FOR THE FAITH

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 4:1-22

MEMORY VERSE: *"We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."*

Acts 4:20

I. INTRODUCTION

When a man named Martin Luther revolted against the evil in the Catholic Church, in the 1500s he found that he was the enemy of the supreme religious authorities of his day. His enemies accused him of heresy. They asked him if he alone could understand the Scripture. He was tried before the Emperor and the parliament. He was asked to change his mind about many of the things he believed. His reply was: "My heart is a prisoner of the Word of God. I cannot and will not speak anything else. God help me. Amen."

This study shows the disciples at a place of decision. They had to decide whether they would obey God or men. Hundreds of years later Martin Luther faced the same decision. Read the Scripture lesson.

II. THE TEXT Acts 4:5-20

Verses 5 - 7: *"The religious leaders."* The Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious leaders, were very concerned about the great power of the Christian Church. (Acts 4:1-4) The Sanhedrin was made up of 70 Jewish leaders. The leader was called the High Priest. These leaders were respected by the Roman government. They were sensible men with whom the Romans could work to keep order.

The Sanhedrin was concerned about the Christian message of the resurrection of Jesus. The Sanhedrin was going to investigate. They would start with the biggest offenders, Peter and John.

The Sanhedrin was not concerned with the healing of the lame man. They wanted to know who had given Peter and John permission to do this work.

Verses 8 - 12: *"The unchanged message."* Although Peter was on trial, he quickly brought charges against the judges. Peter did not give a soft message in this difficult time. He had preached this message two times before. This time when he preached, he made the same points.

- (1) You, the Jews, crucified God's Christ.
- (2) But God over-powered you by raising him from the dead. God showed his approval of Jesus in this way.
- (3) Christ is able to heal the lame. Christ is able also to give salvation to all men.

Just a few weeks before this time the Sanhedrin had stood in the same room and voted to kill Jesus. Now Peter was telling them what they decided made no difference. God had overruled their decision. He raised Jesus from the dead.

Verses 13-16: *"The Sanhedrin must decide."* Peter's sermon made the Sanhedrin come to a decision. They must decide whether to follow God or their own customs and traditions. These men, Peter and John, had no papers to show they were workmen of God. Their only authority was that they had been with Jesus. None of the Sanhedrin could deny that the lame man could walk.

The Sanhedrin had made an agreement with Rome that they would keep the peace. They were so anxious to please

It was, therefore, a great thing when the Jewish Christian Philip began to preach in Samaria. Philip was one of the deacons. He was a Greek-speaking Jew. He was concerned about the whole world hearing about Jesus. He had helped to settle the trouble in the Jerusalem church. He now wanted to settle the trouble between Judah and Samaria. He was the first Christian missionary to carry the gospel to those of another race.

Verses 5 - 8: *"Philip broke down the wall."* Philip could not preach about friendship to the Samaritans. He only went to them with one message. "He preached Christ to them." He was able to get away from the Jewish tribalism and let Jesus break down the wall of hate.

The disciples were surprised when Jesus went through Samaria once and won a Samaritan woman to faith. (John 4:4-27) An entire Samaritan village had been converted. (John 4:29-42) Jesus told his followers to witness in Samaria. (Acts 1:8)

There were two important things in the message Philip preached about Christ. First, he spoke a message of salvation. He told of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. He did many miracles in the land of Samaria. (Acts 8:6) All of Philip's work was shown to give the whole picture of Christ Jesus. As a result thousands became followers of Jesus. Hate forgotten and the wall of tribalism against the Samaritans was broken. (verse 8)

Verses 9-13: *"Miracles and magic."* Philip did not break down the wall of hate without trouble. There was a witch-doctor named Simon who had a great following. He practiced magic. He claimed he could do great things. People who had remained ignorant for many years believed these magicians. These magicians used their false powers on these people.

church to destroy it. This scattering of the Christians was like the sowing of seed in the rainy season. Everywhere there came into being new churches. The truth of Jesus was carried from Jerusalem to all parts of the land of Judah.

The death of Stephen brought a victory for God. The enemies of the church did not know they were causing the Christian church to grow by trying to destroy it.

The apostles remained in Jerusalem for two reasons:

- (1) To provide leadership in Jerusalem and to make sure that the church remained pure at the home-base.
- (2) Perhaps they did not yet know the real difference between Christianity and Judaism. The Greek-speaking Jews were far more aware of this matter. Many times it is not the preacher who takes the message to the next village, but it is the layman.

Verse 5: *"The wall of tribalism."* To the north of Jerusalem was the country of Samaria. It was in the centre of the country of Judea. In the time of David and Solomon it was a part of the country. Soon after the time of Solomon, the country divided into two areas. Samaria was in the north. Assyria captured Samaria and brought many foreign people in. These people worshipped foreign gods. The Jews called them half-breeds and refused to worship with them. The Samaritans built their temple of worship in another place.

Many hundreds of years of hatred between the two countries caused a wall of hatred to grow between them. The Jews could work with the Romans easier than they could work with the Samaritans. The Jews might pity the pagans for having no religion, but they hated the Samaritans because they had corrupted the Jewish religion.

the men of Rome that they had no room for God. These religious leaders agreed that God could make a lame man walk. They could not agree that God would speak to untrained men.

Verses 17-18: *"The sin of not speaking."* The Sanhedrin decided to warn Peter and John. They told them not to speak in the name of Jesus again. The Sanhedrin made no effort to destroy, nor deny the claim of Peter. Peter had declared that his authority came from Jesus Christ who had been resurrected. Men who have experienced the salvation of Jesus cannot help but speak.

Verses 19-20: *"God, rather than men."* Peter and John did not wait. When they were told they must not speak in the name of Jesus, they showed respect for the Sanhedrin. They acknowledged the right of the Sanhedrin to judge men in human matters. But they also told the Sanhedrin: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

Peter and John denied the right of the Sanhedrin to convict them. They believed and obeyed God.

III. THE MESSAGE

The message of this lesson is clear. One is to obey God above all other people. A Christian is to live under the authority of God. Peter and John found that they could and must reject the highest authority in their land. They chose to obey God rather than the religious leaders. Peter and John stood for faith. They committed themselves completely to God.

How committed are you to God and his Cause?

CHAPTER 6

A WITNESSING FELLOWSHIP

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 4:23 to 5:11

MEMORY VERSE: *"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God with boldness."*

Acts 4:31

I. INTRODUCTION

There are times when it is best to be silent. There are other times when it is cowardly to be silent. Every Christian is faced with a decision. There are times when he must decide whether to speak boldly for Christ or keep silent. Many of the early Christians had to make this decision. They had to decide whether they would speak out and defy the Jewish leaders or be silent. All of us must face our responsibility as a Christian and speak out if we feel that an injustice is done.

II. THE TEXT Acts 4:23-33

Verses 23-24: *"From prison to prayer."* The last study described the arrest of Peter and John. They appeared before the supreme Jewish council. Because Peter and John were so popular, the Jews refused to punish them. They were afraid. They compromised and remained silent. (Acts 4:17-21) When they were released from prison, Peter and John could have fled in fear of being arrested again. They could have forgotten their Christian responsibility for fear of future arrests. The church could have refused to welcome them for fear of being in trouble with the law. Peter and John went to the church immediately. They were welcomed. Together Peter, John, and the church sought new strength by

CHAPTER 9

THE GOSPEL IN SAMARIA

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 8:2-40

MEMORY VERSE: *"Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word."*

Acts 8:4

I. INTRODUCTION

Tribalism has been one of the walls that has stood between the people of many lands and the gospel. Some would not hear because this was the religion of another tribe. The difference in the white man and the black man has been a wall that has kept some from receiving Jesus as Saviour. The breaking down of the walls that stand between us and our fellowman is one of the greatest tasks of our Christian faith. There are walls between the rich and the poor. There are walls between the educated and the uneducated. There are walls between the people of the city and the country. All of these walls must be broken down. This is the job of Christians today. Today we will study how one of these walls was broken down by a Christian who loved other people.

II. THE TEXT: Acts 8:4-17

Verse 4: *"The scattered seed."* The death of Stephen brought severe persecution upon the young church. The Pharisees and Sadducees were so angry over what had been said by Stephen that they were determined to destroy the young church. They began to kill and imprison all the Christians. Saul was in charge of the persecution. (8:1-3)

It was mostly the Greek-speaking Jews who were persecuted and pushed from Jerusalem. The Pharisees attacked the

2. Do we know what we believe?

Do we believe as everyone else believes
in order to avoid troubles?

Do we believe what the Bible teaches?

Do we go with the crowd because this
is the safest way to go?

3. Stephen wanted all people everywhere
to know about Jesus.

What keeps us from preaching to all
the world today?

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uniting to do God's will.

Verses 24-28: *"The battle that can never end."* The church was being persecuted. They began to pray. They prayed to God the Creator. They recognized him as the only God. This prayer tied the lives of the Christians with the power of the Creator of the World. This power must win because it is God's power.

In prayer they remembered the Word of God. They remembered the truth in Psalm 2:1-2. They knew that the foes of God had always oppressed his people. They were reminded that they had tried to oppress Jesus. The crucifixion of Jesus could not destroy the plan of God. Even so the persecution of the Christians could not bring his work to an end.

Verses 29-30: *"Laying their problem before God."* Now the Christians knew that God had conquered his enemies in the Old Testament and in the life of Jesus. The disciples would now ask God for strength that they might remain faithful to him.

Their Prayer: For boldness of speech to witness about Jesus.
(verse 29)

(1) This contradicted the command of the Sanhedrin that they speak no more. (verse 18)

(2) God had commanded them to witness.

(3) The Jews had told them to be silent.

They prayed for power in the things they did. (verse 30)

(1) They faced the issues of life and death, and they looked to God for their strength.

- (2) God was to bless the work of the Christians with power from his hand.

Christian witnessing is not all talking. It is doing the work of God as well.

Verse 31: *"The power of prayer."* God's answer to this prayer was the same as on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:2)

They prayed for boldness. They received boldness of speech. They prayed for power. They received power.

What does this experience in prayer show us?

- (1) One powerful experience of the Holy Spirit is not enough.
- (2) Each situation demands a new renewed experience in the power of the filling of the Holy Spirit.

At Pentecost the power of the Holy Spirit led the disciples out of hiding into public preaching. The public preaching of the gospel brought persecution to the disciples. Now the Holy Spirit would give new power for them to continue.

Verses 32-33: *"The reason for sharing."* The early Christians were so severely persecuted that they were driven together. They made a plan for the believers. The disciples witnessed and preached. The church, all of them, shared in their testimonies and gave of their money so that everyone had enough to eat and a place to live.

This sharing of goods and testimonies was not a requirement of the church. If one shared, it was because he loved the Lord and wanted to share. It was temporary. Because of persecution, many people lost all the goods they had. The Holy Spirit gave them power to speak as well as a concern for one another.

but as a call for all men everywhere to repent. The Pharisees and Sadducees had pride in their circumcision. They thought circumcision made them belong to the people of God. Stephen told them they were not children of God because they had no understanding in their hearts or their ears. They were deaf and could not hear the command of God. They could not hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. When Stephen made this accusation, the Jews shouted him to silence.

Stephen was surrounded by angry enemies. He looked to Jesus for strength. Stephen made his last claim before he died. As Stephen looked up he said that he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. The Sanhedrin rushed upon him and seized him.

Verses 58 - 60: *"Victory in death."* The Jews claimed that Stephen had blasphemed. The penalty for this was to be stoned to death. They carried him outside the city quickly. They threw large stones on him to kill him. Stephen followed the example of Jesus in his death. First, he asked Jesus to take his spirit. Second, his dying breath was a prayer of forgiveness for those who were killing him.

A young man named Saul stood over the coats of those who stoned Stephen. Saul could never forget the way Stephen died. He died as though he was in the presence of God. In his death, Stephen had been a great witness to Saul. He had preached the cross of Christ. Later this same Saul was to become a great apostle.

III. THE MESSAGE

1. We are not persecuted unto death in our country for our religious belief. Because we are Christians, we may have to give up our popularity with others. We will have to leave our friends who persist in sin. The sinful things in our lives must be put aside if we are to be effective Christians.

to the Sanhedrin that Jesus would destroy the Temple. (verses 13 - 14 - Mark 14:55-59) Stephen must have repeated the teaching of Jesus.

The Sadducees had been unable to persecute the Christians up to this time. The message of Jesus was popular with the multitudes of the people. The people of Jerusalem felt that the Temple was the house where God lived and therefore respected it very highly. They resented a threat to destroy it. They praised Jesus loudly until the report was given that he would destroy the Temple. (Mark 15:29) Now that Stephen had made the same statement, they would feel free to kill him also.

Acts 7:1-50: *"Stephen was not afraid to speak for God."*

First, Stephen was accused of speaking against the Temple. He answered by telling the people who heard him that God was never living in a single house and God did not live in a single country either. Stephen pointed out that from the time of Abraham God had led his people from place to place. All the written laws of their faith had been carried by Moses in the wanderings in the wilderness. It was a mistake for the Jews to think that they could put the living God in the Temple and expect him to stay in one place.

Second, Stephen had been accused of speaking against Moses and the law. Stephen reminded the people of Israel that they had rebelled against Moses. They had rejected all the spiritual leaders whom God had sent to them because they did not want to hear their messages. The highest leader of all had been Jesus whom they had crucified on the cross. Jesus had not come to destroy, but to fulfill the law. (Matthew 5:17)

Verses 51-57: *"The accusers on trial."* Stephen based his defence against his accusers on the Old Testament. Stephen began to accuse those who had brought charges against him. He saw the Old Testament not only as a record of the Jews,

The early Christians could depend on two things:

- (1) The gift of the Holy Spirit.
- (2) The concern and help of fellow Christians.

This gave them greater power for preaching the Gospel.

They preached the resurrection of Christ. They knew he had risen because they experienced his daily presence.

III. THE MESSAGE

1. If you are a weak Christian, consider the things that will make you strong:
 - (a) Prayer.
 - (b) The Power of the Holy Spirit.
 - (c) Christian fellowship.
2. Early Christians did not pray that the disciples only would be bold in witnessing. They prayed that every Christian would be a bold witness.

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CHAPTER 7

GOD WILL PREVAIL

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 5:12-42

MEMORY VERSE: *"Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will be established."*

Proverbs 19:21

I. INTRODUCTION

Baptists have always struggled against government control of religious worship. In the same way they have struggled against state churches which have tried to force people or churches to follow their own interpretation of the Bible.

In the early history of the United States of America, some of the states were controlled by the Church of England. Many people were compelled to worship in that church. Many Baptists were thrown into prison, whipped at the whipping post and given no rest or mercy, because they refused to worship there. Two such men were William Webber and Joseph Anthony. They were thrown in jail and told to be quiet. Instead of silence they preached great messages from the jail windows.

The earliest writings on religious freedom were written about the first Christians and the Jewish religious leaders of Jerusalem.

II. THE TEXT Acts 5:27-39

Verses 27-28: *"Spiritual stubbornness."* The earliest enemies of the Christian movement were the keepers of the religious laws, the Sadducees. They were the wealthy

For many years the Jews had been scattered over the Greek and Roman world. Some of them spoke Hebrew or Aramaic and followed the Hebrew customs. Some of the people spoke Greek and followed the Greek and Roman customs. There were more Hebrew Jews. They gave more food and help to their own group than they gave to the Greek-speaking Christians.

The apostles knew that they must have a strong church. They knew that every one must love each other. They appointed a special group of men to look after the problem of distributing food and clothing to the Christians who were in need. Stephen was one of the deacons who was chosen.

Verses 8 - 10: *"A witness to those about him."* Stephen worked to get the church to have a true fellowship together. He also wanted to give a witness for Jesus to others about him. Stephen had a vision of taking the gospel to the whole world. He was a Greek-speaking Jew. He wanted all the Jews who had come from other countries to know about Jesus. There was a special synagogue in Jerusalem for those Jews who spoke Greek. Stephen worshipped there.

Stephen disputed in the synagogue rather than preaching in the Temple. He searched the Old Testament scripture and followed the Holy Spirit. As he studied the Old Testament he also followed the teachings of Jesus. The Jews in that synagogue could not match him in the discussions.

Verses 11 - 12: *"A cry for blood."* Because the Jews could not defeat Stephen in the talks at the synagogue, they wanted to make him silent by force. The Pharisees had not been active enemies of the church before, but now they were because they accused Stephen of preaching against the law of Moses.

In the case of Stephen as in the case of Jesus, false witnesses were called. In both trials, the false witnesses reported

CHAPTER 8

A MAN OF FAITH AND COURAGE

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 6:1 to 8:1

MEMORY VERSE: *"I can do all things in him who strengthens me."*

Philippians 4:13

I. INTRODUCTION

Dietrich Bonhoffer was a young pastor in Nazi Germany during World War II. He believed the church should not confine its ministry to its own members. He believed that the church must preach and minister to all people of the world.

Because he spoke to the world of God and righteousness, Reverend Bonhoffer was killed April 9, 1945. He was conducting a service in prison. The Nazi soldiers came and took him to be hanged before he finished preaching. He told a fellow prisoner, "This is the end for my body and the beginning of life."

This week we study about Stephen, a deacon in the first church, who died because he believed God was for every man. In our lesson today, we see the church leave Jerusalem and start its journey to all the world.

II. THE TEXT Acts 6:1-12 and 7:51-60

Verses 1 - 7: *"Trouble in the church."* The church had adjusted to the persecution of the Jews. Now the trouble began between two groups in the church. The trouble came because of two cultures. The Jews of Greek training and the Jews of Jewish training were separated into two groups.

descendants of the kings and High Priests. They controlled the Temple.

At first, the Sadducees brought the apostles into court. They wanted to stop the preaching about Jesus. They wanted the disciples to stop preaching. (Acts 4:17) They were afraid to punish the disciples. (Acts 4:21) After they were arrested a second time, the disciples went again to the Temple to teach. (Acts 5:18,25) Multitudes of people came to the apostles for healing. Because so many people heard and believed what the apostles taught, the Sadducees were angry. They wanted all the people to hear and believe them, but they had nothing to preach.

Verses 29-32: *"The only authority for an apostle."* The apostles were arrested a third time. This time, as before, they said, "We must obey God rather than men." Because the apostles chose to obey God, they found that it was necessary to disobey the religious leaders.

There were two reasons why the apostles would not obey the religious leaders:

- (1) The religious leaders had a part in crucifying Jesus on the cross. They brought to him the deepest disgrace. God overcame their deed. He made Jesus the leader and Saviour of men.
- (2) The disciples knew their witness was directed by the Holy Spirit.

Verses 33-35: *"Advice to be careful."* The Sadducees were so angry because the disciples did not obey them that they wanted to destroy the disciples at once. Peter's words were like a knife in their conscience. He had said they were enemies of God. The Sadducees thought that the Christian movement threatened the peace in the city. If this peace were not kept, Rome would take away their small privilege of rule.

The Sadducees were not the only group on the council of the Sanhedrin. The Pharisees were also on the council. The Pharisees and Sadducees were enemies because they did not believe alike. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the body. They looked for the coming of the Messiah. They thought he would drive the Roman soldiers from the country of Judea. The Pharisees were not angry because of the Christian movement.

Gamaliel spoke for the Pharisees. He was the greatest teacher of his day. All the people held him in high respect. Because he was not confused as the Sadducees were, he gave good advice to the council.

Verses 36 - 37: *"Look at what happened."* The Sanhedrin knew there had been much political trouble in Palestine during the past 100 years. One man after another had declared he was the Messiah. Each man had tried to lead the country to political freedom.

Gamaliel gave two stories of such men.

- (1) Theudas had caused a political uprising of 400 people and all were killed or chased by the Romans. Nothing came of it.
- (2) When Jesus was a boy a certain man named Judas came. He claimed to be the Messiah, but he was destroyed by the Romans army.

Verses 38 - 39: *"Wait and see what happens."* Gamaliel was a devout follower of the Jewish religion. He believed God guided the things of the nation according to his will. Gamaliel believed any work of men which God did not approve of would fail. He wanted God to decide the fate of the Christian Church. Gamaliel believed God would take care of God's friends and God's enemies as well. Gamaliel himself did not necessarily believe that this Christian group had the approval of God.

III. THE MESSAGE

1. Do you believe everyone should be allowed to worship as his conscience tells him? Would you speak as Gamaliel did? Would you speak for the right of all religious groups to worship as they please?
2. The Christian Church is still here. Time has answered the question of Gamaliel that the church is of God.

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