

WA

"Acts Chronology"

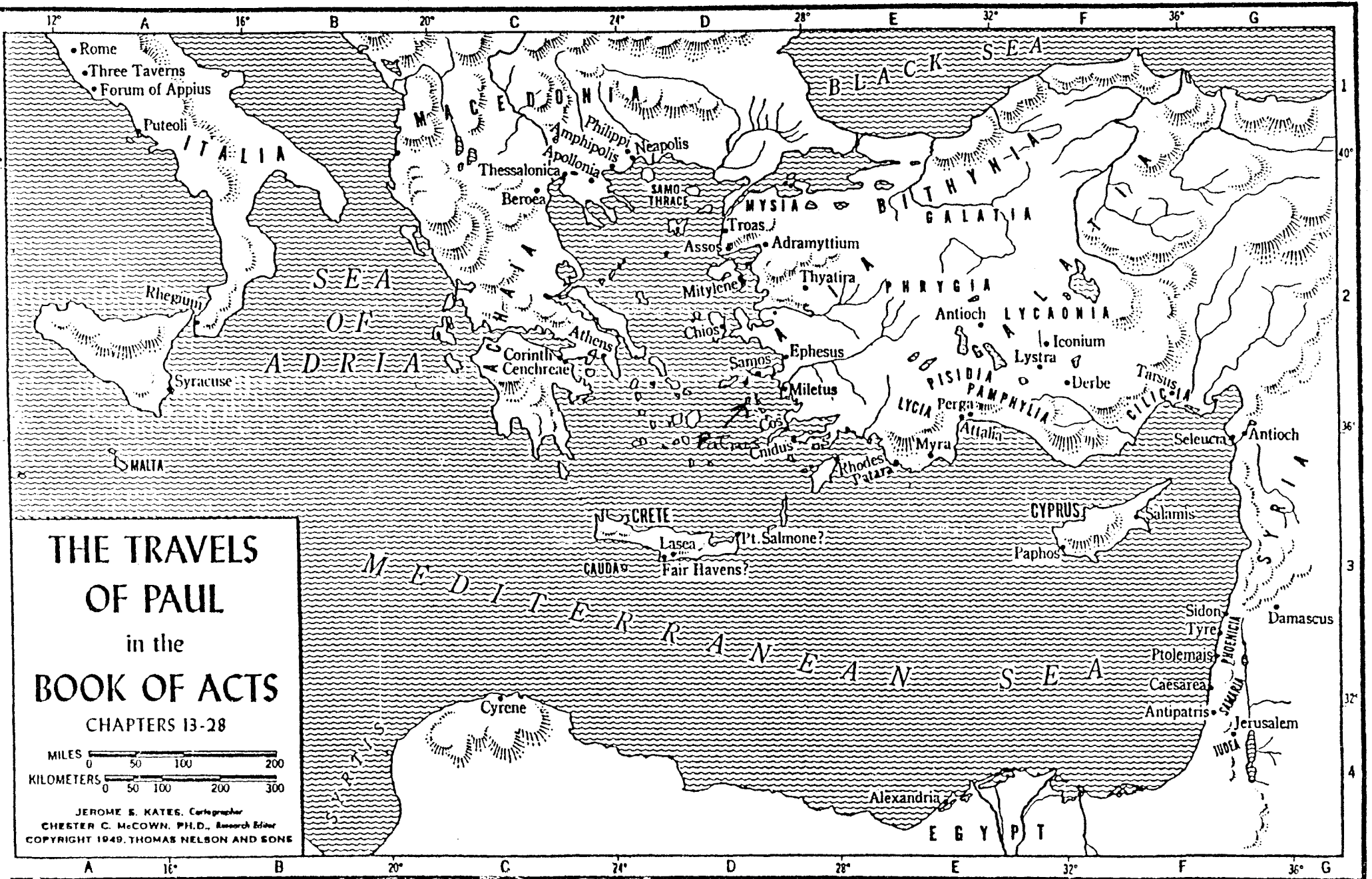
Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

9-03-00
Addendum I

Complete data are not given to be absolute about the exact chronology of Acts. The following factors help determine the timing of the events in Acts.

1. Herod's death is known to have been in 44 AD - Acts 12:20-23.
2. Paul's arrival in Jersalem when Herod killed James - Acts 11:30-12:2
3. Paul's departure from Jersalem just after Herod's death Acts 12:23,25
4. #2 and #3 above probably envelop the "14 years" in Gal. 2:1 after Paul's conversion.
5. Paul's conversion occurred about 31 or 32 AD.
6. Therefore, placing 30 AD as the starting point and 60 AD as the known date of Festus' appointment as Govenor at Caesarea in Acts 24:27, the following chronology is calculated:

Jesus' return to the Father	Acts Chap. 1	30 AD
Formation of church in Jerusalem	2-6	30
Stoning of Stephen and dispersion of church	7-8	31 or 32
Conversion of Saul	9	31 or 32
Paul's first visit to Jerusalem after conversion		34 or 35
Conversion of Cornelius, the Gentile		between 35 - 40
Reception of Gentiles at Antioch	11	about 42
Paul's second visit to Jerusalem	11:27-30	44
Paul's first missionary journey to Galatia	13-14	48-45
Council at Jerusalem	15	about 50
Paul's second missionary journey to Greece	16-18	50-53
Paul's third missionary journey to Ephesus	19-20	54-57
Paul left Ephesus in June (I Cor. 16:8)		57
Paul in Macedonia (I Cor. 16:5-8)		57
Paul in Corinth, three months	Acts 20:2-3	Winter, 57-58
Paul left Philippi	20:6	April, 58
Paul reached Jerusalem	20:16	June, 58
Paul in Caesarea	24-26	Summer, 58 to Fall, 60
Paul's voyage to Rome	27-28	Winter, 60-61
Paul in Rome		61-63



July 2, 2000

"Jesus Assigns Responsibilities
and Takes Leave"
Acts 1

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. The author of Acts, Luke, was not one of the twelve apostles. He was a companion of Paul and a converted Gentile. The companionship is evident through first person, plural pronouns which appear in Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-28:16. Luke's name appears in the New Testament only at Col. 4:14; II Tim. 4:11; and Philem. 24, and each time is associated with Paul. Acts was probably written between 70 and 75 AD, and at the beginning of the book, Luke states to the same person, Theophilus, that he was continuing his discourse which he had begun to Theophilus outlining the life, activities, and teachings of the Lord Jesus. The addressee's name, Theophilus, means "lover of God" when translated from the Greek. This person probably became a believer in Jesus Christ by the testimony of either Luke himself in Antioch or perhaps Paul in Rome. If Luke, then he most likely was a person of high official rank living in Antioch, or if Paul, a similarly situated person living in Rome. The term "most excellent" which Luke used in Lk 1:3 would indicate that Theophilus was not only of high rank but also wealthy and prominent in the social order. We do not know for sure that these books were written upon specific request, but, evidently, Luke was convinced that he had interests in Jesus' life, his teachings, and early events following Jesus' death. Perhaps Luke believed that Theophilus would be convinced of the truth about Jesus by a prominent physician such as Luke, but we have no record of whether he was so convinced. We can surmise that, since Luke chose a follow-up writing (Acts) after his Gospel account, he (Luke) was convinced of the sincerity of Theophilus' interest. We are certainly blessed that the "most excellent" gentleman, for whatever reason (by God's Holy Spirit to be sure), motivated Luke to undertake the task. (God's Holy Spirit had many ways to insure that God's message was preserved for us.) There are some biblical interpreters who believe that subsequent Bible copiers took the original term "theophilus" and personalized it into a proper noun. If this is correct, Luke was simply addressing both books to any "lover of God."

II. After greeting Theophilus and summarizing his Gospel account to him as activities and teachings of Jesus, Luke said that that ended Jesus' personal ministry. But Jesus until he was taken up had given instructions through God's Spirit to those chosen to continue his work. Jesus also had shown himself to have been resurrected from death by many infallible proofs, e.g., in Lk 24:36-43 when he asked his disciples to feel his body, and even ate food as they watched. The Lord continued with the disciples for forty days instructing them in what they should now do. They were to remain in Jerusalem to wait for God's promise which Jesus himself had promised personally, see John 14:15-18; 16:7,2-14. The promise was soon to send God's Holy Spirit to immerse the disciples in that Spirit as John the Immerser had immersed his disciples in water when they had repented for not having kept the Law of Moses. The believers were to go, after being immersed in God's Spirit, to Jerusalem, Samaria, and throughout the earth witnessing about God's mercy through Jesus Christ. The disciples during the forty days asked Jesus

if the coming of the Spirit would be the time when Jesus would restore again the kingdom of (to) Israel. It is very noteworthy that Jesus did not say that the kingdom of Israel (Note that the kingdom of God or heaven is not the question here.) would not be restored, but rather that God, the Father, would determine himself the time when the kingdom of Israel would be restored. Jesus said that their immediate concern should not be the restoration of Israel as a nation but rather witnessing to spiritual rebirth of people through belief and trust in God's Savior, Jesus Christ, himself. This witnessing they are to do after God's Spirit has come to empower them.

III. After delivering this final admonition to be witnesses of God's salvation through him, Jesus was taken up through a cloud as the disciples watched. This ascension took place on the Mount of Olives, and there two of God's messengers explained that they need not continue their vigil. Jesus was now gone but would return to earth in the same manner as he had left. At this time the eleven apostles left Olivet and returned to an upstairs room in Jerusalem, likely the place where the Lord's Supper was instituted in what was perhaps the home of Mary, Mark's mother. They lived there seeking God's will as one, in earnest, humble prayer with the women, among whom was Jesus' mother, Mary.

IV. From the time Jesus left earth to return to the Father (forty days after Passover, see Acts 1:3), there were ten days left to take care of any business which needed the disciples' immediate attention. Peter took the lead in these matters among the approximately 120 persons waiting for Jesus' promise of the special coming of God's Spirit of power. Peter's chief concern was that, with the betrayal by and the death of Judas Iscariot, there were left only the eleven, whereas the Scriptures (Psa. 41:9; 109:8; John 13:18-19) indicated that the betrayer's position should be filled by another. After relating the events surrounding Judas Iscariot's suicide, Peter outlined the qualification: he must have accompanied Jesus throughout his three-year public-ministry from his immersion in the Jordan River by John the Immerser until Jesus was taken up into heaven. The group chose two qualified men to be the new twelfth apostle, Joseph (Barsabas) Justis and Matthias. The two were nominated for the vacant office, and after prayer, they voted and elected Matthais to succeed Judas Iscariot.

V. The apostles (ones especially sent) were distinct, unique and occupied temporary positions in the history of the ecclesia. Paul was the only apostle outside the original twelve and describes himself as one born (made an apostle) "out of due time" at I Cor. 15: 8-10. His experience of becoming an apostle by explicit direction and authority of the Lord Jesus himself is given at Acts 9:1-9. I have noted to this Class my thoughts concerning the implementing of the prophecy at Rev. 21:14 where God's Word states that the New Jerusalem will have a wall around the city with twelve foundations on which will be the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. I look forward to seeing whether Paul or Matthias will note one of the foundations. Only our Heavenly Father, his Son Jesus the Christ, and his Holy Spirit knows now!

July 9, 2000

"God Sends His Holy Spirit"
Acts 2

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. When the fiftieth day after the Passover (marking Israel's deliverance from Egypt and Jesus' deliverance from death), Pentecost (marking the deliverance of the Law to Moses at Sinai), the day promised by Jesus for the coming of God's Holy Spirit (Ghost or Accompanist), came to pass, John 14:15-18; 16:7-14. Pentecost was a feast of the harvest blessings from God. (Passover occurs in April and Pentecost in June. Wheat is ready for harvesting in June in Israel.). In other words, the receipt of God's Spirit in this special way and at this particular time was more important than Moses' receipt of the Law at Sinai and the exercise thereof, Heb. 9:1,15-18. [This occasion was unique, I believe, one which had never happened before and would not be duplicated again. It is true that some of the details were experienced again during the apostolic period to prove special messages which God wanted to emphasize, e.g., the first inclusion of Gentiles in God's kingdom at Acts 10:44-48, and asserting that believing John the Immerser's message of repentance does not make one right with God but that trusting the sacrifice of Jesus and his resurrection is necessary to be in God's kingdom at Acts 19:1-7. - WA] God made sure that the event was indelibly remembered by all those who witnessed it. A strong wind blew right through the building, and flame like tongues rested upon the praying disciples, one by one. In our day of Star Trek and television, such would probably be assigned to electronic manipulation, but this happening could only be a supernatural act of Almighty God himself. As God filled each praying believer with his Holy Spirit, he or she spoke the languages of the different people who had gathered because of the noise and commotion. Many people were in Jerusalem for Passover and Pentecost, people who spoke over a dozen different languages. It was obvious to these various people, as they heard these Galileans speaking not Galilean but their own languages, that the humanly impossible was happening. Also strange was the message they heard in their own languages: God had done and was doing something wonderful in and through Jesus Christ, God's Anointed One. Some of the hearers believed and were convinced by the message, while others decided the believers were drunk with some of the new wine of the recent harvest. The hearers were all either Jews or Jewish converts from all over the Middle East.

II. Peter, sensing the confusion of many of the hearers, stood with the other eleven apostles and delivered an explanation of what God was doing. His text was Joel 2:28-32, and in the message he made it clear that they (the Jews) had sacrificed the very person God had sent to bring salvation to Israel, Acts 2:23,36. Many believed his message and asked what they should do. Peter told them to repent and indicate their trust in [identify with] Jesus as God's Messiah (Savior) by being immersed in water. He assured them that when they did, they would also receive God's Holy Spirit.

III. Those who accepted Jesus according to Peter's message (about 3000 that day) were immersed and began to associate (fellowship)

with one another as believers in Jesus as the Christ (Savior). The twelve apostles (who had been first-hand hearers of Jesus' teachings) taught the new believers what Jesus had taught them. They met daily in the Temple and homes. Their actions and witnessing led many also to believe in Jesus Christ, and the Lord added the new believers to the group, his called out ones. Out of fear for their well-being, they shared their goods and lived from a common supply.

IV. The sharing of God's message with other than ones own tongue, i.e., in another human language or mysterious (angelic) speech, Mk 16:17; Acts 2:1-13; I Cor. 13:1.

A. The original, New Covenant use of nonnative languages was unique and for a special purpose, the establishing of Christ's church.

1. The languages were spoken by believers in Christ through a special anointing of God's Holy Spirit.

2. The languages spoken were languages of nations other than the native languages of the speakers themselves.

3. The Christians were miraculously given the ability by God's Holy Spirit to speak in the language of foreigners present, languages the speakers did not know through normal assimilation and learning.

4. The message given by the miracle was to communicate what God was doing for mankind through Jesus the Messiah.

5. The language miracle was a fulfillment of a promise of God during the Old Covenant period through Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:16-18.

B. Early abuse of speaking in angelic tongues in the church, I Cor. 12-14

1. In discussing the variety of spiritual gifts, Paul mentions that apparently some members felt that their own gifts somehow made them superior spiritually, I Cor. 12:25.

2. The Scripture makes it clear that not everyone was speaking in angelic tongues, I Cor. 12:30.

3. Speaking angelic tongues is far inferior to love for fellow Christians, I Cor. 13:1.

4. Paul asserts that properly speaking in angelic tongues should be considered prayer, i.e., conversing with the Father, and that such activity is for self-help, not for helping the church, I Cor. 14:1-4. The better way to speak in a worship service is to speak in ones normal language, I Cor. 14:5-20.

5. Speaking in unknown foreign languages was for a sign of the New Covenant, Isa. 28:11-16; I Cor. 14:21-22.

6. Speaking in angelic languages was bringing confusion in the church worship services, and God, Paul (God's Word) said, is not the Creator of confusion, I Cor. 14:33, 40.

7. The women were evidently especially involved in the confusion caused by angelic speaking, I Cor. 14:34-35.

8. Paul, after the lengthy discussion of Christian worship with special emphasis on the better language to use in that worship, gave the Gospel in a nutshell, I Cor. 15:3-4.

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. - - - without love, [for God is Love - I John 4:16] I am nothing, I Cor. 13:1 and 2b."

July 23, 2000

" Healing and Witnessing"
Acts 3

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. As the disciples remained in Jerusalem, they continued their daily activities. The regular hour of prayer was three o'clock in the afternoon. One day as John and Peter neared the Temple, they were about to enter the Beautiful Gate on the east side. There by the Gate, a beggar who regularly solicited a handout from those going in and out of the Temple saw Peter and John and accosted them for a donation. The two disciples stared at this handicapped (He had been unable to stand or walk since birth.) beggar and said to him, "Look here." The man (probably about forty years old) assumed that he was about to receive a gift, and gave Peter and John his absolute attention. Peter told him that he nor John had money but that they did have a gift more precious to him than silver or gold. Peter then grasped the lame man by his right hand, pulled him to his feet, and told him in the name of Jesus of Nazareth to walk. The physician Luke notes that the man's problem was defective feet and ankle bones. The defective parts were immediately and miraculously made whole through the power of the resurrected Jesus Christ. The well man walked and leaped as he went with Peter and John into the Temple, giving God the credit for the wonderful miracle that had happened to him. The crowd there recognized the former invalid who had for many years lain by the Temple gate begging for living expenses.

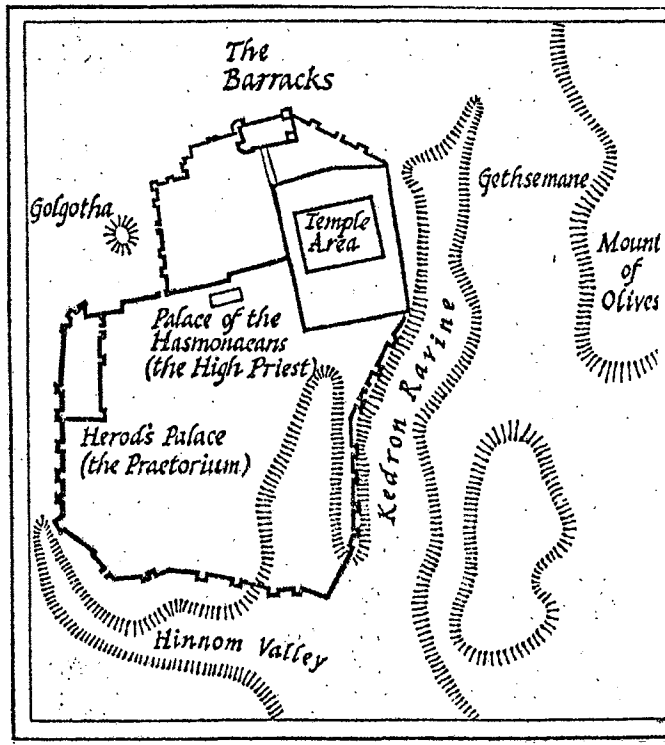
II. The crowd was amazed by the event as they rushed onto and stood on Solomon's Porch (Cloister). The formerly lame man embraced Peter and John, and Peter, seeing that they had the crowd's attention, seized the opportunity to bring his second message, this time to Temple visitors. His first thought expressed was that he and John were not the reason that the lame man had been made whole. It was not their power or righteousness that had healed the man, but the witnesses of this miracle should not be surprised by this happening. The power that healed the man had come from the God whom they knew as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of their fathers. This same God had by healing the lame man, as they themselves had witnessed, verified Jesus as his Messiah through his healing power. Peter again (Acts 2:36) laid the blame for Jesus' death at the feet of his hearers, the Jews, asserting that they had denied Jesus' innocence, although Pilate had been determined to release Jesus, having found him unworthy of death. In so doing, they had demanded the forgiveness of a murderer instead of God's Righteous and Holy One, vss. 13-15. Even though you, in effect, killed the author of life, God raised that same Jesus from death. We are personally eyewitnesses of his resurrection. It is, in fact, through faith in the power of the name of Jesus that this lifelong handicapped man has been made whole. The miraculous power of God you have seen with your own eyes. Peter then held open a chance for his hearers to be reconciled to God even though they, with their leaders, had done such an evil act, bring about Jesus' death. Peter said that their action had been carried out in ignorance (Remember Jesus' prayer on the cross when he asked the Father to forgive them "for they know not what they do," Lk 23:34. God had

even indicated through the prophets that his Messiah would suffer before he was glorified, Psa. 22; Isa. 50:5-7; 53; Dan. 9:26. Note also I Pet. 1:10-11.

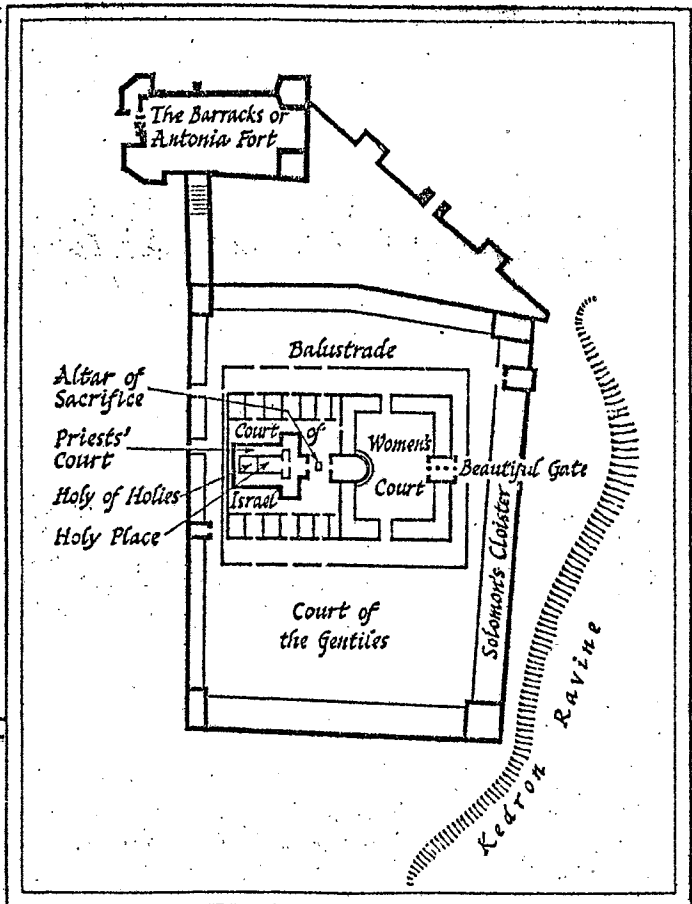
III. As Peter did in his first message in Acts 2, he told his hearers to consider their current, evil condition and ask for God's forgiveness so that what they had done, sinning against God's plan, would be forgotten by God (blotted out). Peter assured them that, although Jesus had gone back to the Father, he would return as the prophets had promised, vss. 21-24, which includes a quote from Deut. 18:15,18-19.

IV. Broad outline of Acts and maps of Jerusalem and Herod's Temple

- A. 1:1 - 5:42 The beginnings of the church (God's called out ones, ecclesia)
- B. 6:1 - 12:25 The church reaches out.
- C. 13:1 - 15:35 The church breaks barriers.
- D. 15:36 - 21:26 Paul leads the advance.
- E. 21:27 - 28:31 Paul's last journey: Jerusalem to Rome



Jerusalem



Herod's Temple and its precincts

July 30, 2000

"The Disciples Meet Opposition"
Acts 4

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. As the disciples continued to witness about Jesus in and around the Temple area, their message was especially offensive to the Saducees who not only did not believe that Jesus had returned from death to life but that such was impossible for anyone. [Jewish sects: Essenes - moral purity, works of law superior, "live the life" or "walk the walk;" Herodians - religious politicians assuming the only hope for Jews to have a nation was an alliance with Rome (Herod); Saducees - (Zadokites-good times) supremacy of Law, no spirit or angels, no future heaven or hell; Pharisees - ritual purity and oral law, were hypocritical; Scribes - their interpretation of law took precedence over law itself] After these Jewish sect members heard that the people were believing the disciples' message about Jesus (because the lame man had been healed - Chap. 3), the Saducees with the Jewish priests summoned the Chief of the Temple Police. The temple police were sent to arrest certain of the disciples whom the Jewish leaders considered to be spokesmen. Among those arrested were Peter and John whom the police took that evening and placed in jail for the night. The urgency which the Jewish leaders sensed was caused by the fact that believers now numbered about 5000.

II. After the arrest, a meeting of the Jews was planned for the next morning to decide what should be done to halt this new group (believers in Jesus as the Christ, Savior) from getting out of hand. Luke indicates that the situation was considered so important that all Jewish leaders were summoned to be involved. Mentioned specifically are: rulers (priests with some assigned offices), elders (older priests who had held offices earlier), scribes (interpreters of the law and written tradition), Annas (high or chief priest from about 6 to 27 AD), Caiaphas (Annas' son-in-law and successor to Annas as high priest), John (probably Annas' son who became high priest in 36 AD), Alexander (probably a relative of Annas), and a number of relatives of Annas and Caiaphas. The next morning this august group of Jewish leaders called the disciples before their council (Sanhedrin) and asked them for the basis of their authority, either through their own power or as representatives of someone else, to have healed the handicapped man of his standing and walking inabilities.

III. Peter, empowered by God's power (Spirit), spoke for the believers and addressed the Jewish leaders. He said that the good deed of healing the lame man should be understood by not only these leaders but by all Jews as God's further approval of the Nazarene, Jesus Christ. Peter again credited the Jewish leaders with Jesus' death as One "whom you crucified." (This is the third time that Peter has directly accused the Jews of physically killing the Lord Jesus, in Acts - 2:36; 3:15,17; 4:10.) Jesus was resurrected by God, and the lame man was made well through Jesus' authority. Peter then quotes Psa. 118:22-24 (See also Isa. 28:16-18) and says, in effect, Jesus is Israel's salvation designee, there is not another Messiah on earth or in heaven. God's proposition is this: accept

Jesus as God's Savior or you or anyone else cannot be made whole spiritually (as the lame man had been made whole physically).

IV. The Jewish council realized that Peter and John as leaders and spokesmen for the believers in Christ were completely committed to the position Peter had given to them. Further, these disciples (students or followers) of Jesus had not reached their conclusion through formal training, i.e., from Jewish scholars, but through personal experiences with and the teachings of Jesus himself. Another proof which could not be refuted was the fact that the man who was born incapacitated was standing before them completely healed, and the knowledge was known by many people who were spreading the good news even more. The Jewish council then sent the disciples out of the chamber and held a conference to determine their best judgment concerning their own best interests. Their chief concern was not to deny the validity of the healing in Jerusalem (They had already lost control over this "problem."), but they worried that the message of the disciples would go beyond Jerusalem and stir up trouble elsewhere. Their decision was to bluff the believers with a threat (Remember what happened to this person you are saying was resurrected.). They called in the disciples and ordered them to forget about talking of this "dead" Jesus person and get on with their lives!

V. But Peter and John countered their threat with a question: Should we heed your threat of retribution, or do you really think we should ignore God's command to us to witness to what Jesus has done for us and proved it to ourselves and even to you through miraculously healing this man, and then act as though nothing has happened? No!, we cannot ignore God's will and obey you! But the Jewish leaders were not convinced that they were wrong and further threatened the disciples. But, fearing the people who were giving God glory (credit) for healing the forty-year-old lame man, they let the believers go.

VI. The disciples who had been held and questioned by the Jewish council returned to the believing group and reported what had happened. An impromptu prayer meeting was the result of their exhilaration. In their prayers they praised God as Creator who had spoken through David (Psa. 2) how the rulers would oppose God's Savior, even as the Jews and the Romans, representing Gentiles, were now allied against God's plan of redemption. They further prayed that in the midst of all this opposition, God would give to them, his servants, believers in Jesus who is the Christ, further evidence of his presence with them. God answered their prayers by giving them a surge of the power of his Spirit to speak boldly God's message about Jesus Christ. God's grace was felt by the entire group and their goals were as one, to witness to everyone what God had made possible through raising Jesus from death to life again. In this spirit of exaltation, the group of believers again thought of their immediate physical needs and again decided to continue to pool their individual assets for the sustenance of the entire group. As a result, a certain man named Joses Barnabas (the son of consolation) sold his land, brought the proceeds to the leaders of the believing community, and made them available for the use of the fellowship.

Aug. 6, 2000

"The Growth of Opposition"
Acts 5

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Evidently the generous and magnanimous spirit of Barnabas (Chap. 4) made him an outstanding role model for the early believers in Jesus Christ. (See also Acts 20:35) Barnabas sold his property and made all the proceeds available to the group. No doubt he was commended for his voluntary generosity. A couple in the group, Ananias and his wife Sapphira, likewise sold their land, and, apparently, wanted all of the group to believe that they, too, brought all the price received to the common treasury of the group. In some way, Peter knew that Ananias and Sapphira had been untruthful about their transaction. They had brought only a portion of the price of their land to the group while, at the same time, assuming that they had deceived the group and God's Holy Spirit. On a given day Peter confronted Ananias (whose wife was away) and asked him why he had let Satan influence him to attempt to deceive God (Holy Spirit) by being dishonest about the land proceeds. Peter told him that his chief problem was not with the believers, but with God. When Ananias realized the gravity of what he had done, he fell dead immediately. The young men who were charged with burying the dead went out and buried him at once. About three hours later Ananias' wife, Sapphira, returned to the group without knowledge of what had happened to her husband. Peter asked her directly whether they had given to the group treasury all that they had received for their land. Sapphira lied as her husband had done, fell dead, and was carried out and buried along with her husband. The effect on the church members was immediate and dramatic. The group realized that their activities meant more than just impressing other individuals, but God himself was directly involved. The church was God's doing, and the assembly of his people must conduct themselves accordingly.

II. Some observations about the Ananias and Sapphira incident:

1. Pharisee-like hypocrisy was inappropriate for those professing Jesus as Lord.
2. What individuals did reflected on the entire believing community. (See Josh. 7:1,11,22 and Matt. 23:13)
3. Individuals were responsible to follow the leadership of God's Holy Spirit as individuals and not depend simply on being in the group for guidance.
4. Pseudomembers of the church (associated with but not true believers) should be dealt with carefully since Jesus admonished that wheat and tares, if torn apart by human effort, can improperly disrupt the group, Matt. 13:28-30. Eventually God's angels (messengers) will take appropriate action.
5. Believers are not to judge wrongdoers in God's church as regarding their ultimate spiritual destination; that is God's prerogative alone, Matt. 7:1-2; I Cor. 5:1-5; Heb. 10:30.
6. The Word does not ascribe Ananias' or Sapphira's deaths to either Peter or God. Their sin had directly separated them from physical life in this instance.
7. Luke's including this incident in Scripture should indicate to readers the veracity of every detail given in Scripture.

Compare II Sam. 11 where David's awful sins of adultery and murder are detailed. (Can you imagine such information being in the minutes of a church's business meeting?) David repented of his sins, but lost his dear son of the adultery.

III. Probably because of the abuse of Peter and John in Chap. 4, many outsiders were reluctant (vs.13) to join the believers in the immediate Temple area for fear of the Jewish leaders. However, people generally profoundly respected the believers. The amazing miracles God worked through the leaders (apostles) of the believers persuaded multitudes to join the group, both men and women. The Sadducees envied the believers' growth and again threw the believers in prison. God sent a messenger who released them from jail and told them to witness openly in the Temple which they did early the next morning. The Sanhedrin gathered and sent for the believers to be brought before them in conference. The police returned without the believers, saying that the prison was secure, but that the believers were missing. Someone approached the council at that time and told them that the "rascals" were out there at this very time still teaching people about Jesus. The police chief quietly brought the believers before the chief priest and Sanhedrin again who repeated their threat against the believers for witnessing about the Savior, Jesus. This time they added the part about being accused of causing Jesus' death, vs. 28. Peter and the others repeated (for the fourth time in Acts) that they (the Jews) were the ones who did slay Jesus whom God raised from physical death, Acts 2:36; 3:15,17; 4:10; 5:30. Not only were they the ones responsible for Jesus' physical death, but the Lord's Anointed One was dastardly hung on a tree, Deut. 21:22-23; Gal. 3:13. The believers are witnesses to these truths as is God's Spirit in every believer.

IV. After this meeting with the believers, the Sanhedrin was determined to kill the leaders (apostles) of the believers. A Pharisee on the council, Gamaliel (a doctor of the law and teacher of one Saul of Tarsus), took a minority position by suggesting that the apostles be given more time before capital punishment was administered. He cited instances where certain men, e.g., Thadius with a following of about four hundred and Judas of Galilee also with a following, had flared up for a time and then were soon forgotten. Gamaliel's reasoning was that if God were not for these believers in Jesus as the Christ, they too would dwindle to nothing. If, on the other hand, God was really with the Jesus believers, the Jewish leaders could find themselves in the less than enviable position of fighting God himself! Gamaliel was well respected on the council so the group agreed with him. This time, however, the believers were not only threatened but beaten before being released. The believers left the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy of suffering "shame" in the name of Jesus. Not a day went by when the believers failed to witness and teach about Jesus' being the Messiah, Savior!

Jesus calls us o'er the tumult of our life's restless sea,
Day by day his sweet voice calleth, saying, "Christian,
follow me,"

Aug. 13, 2000

"Sharing Responsibilities"
Acts 6

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. As the company of believers grew to a large number, dissension occurred among the members of the group. The problem was aggravated apparently by the following:

1. The quantitative element. The last figure indicating the person-count of believers was 5000 in Chap. 4:4, up from 3000 in 2:41 at the end of the day of Pentecost. The numbers were growing enormously as mentioned in 5:14 (multitudes). Further, in 5:16 the Word states that even people from cities away from Jerusalem were coming to hear about Jesus. These believers formed a self-sustaining society, literally living on shared assets. Most of the members relied on the common fund for the necessities of life.

2. The welfare element. Many believers were unable to contribute anything to their own physical support. Widows are mentioned specifically in 6:1, but the mix undoubtedly included orphans and handicapped individuals who also could not contribute to the common treasury. (Paul later made specific requirements for widows at I Tim. 5:3-16. He also made clear that those who could were to work or not eat from the common pool at II Thes. 3:10-13.)

3. The ethnic element. The Grecian or Hellenist believers were those who had been born in Jewish families in the diaspora and had been Jews by faith before accepting Jesus as the Messiah, or those who had been converted (proselyted) to Judaism before becoming believers. These believers spoke Greek and were considered in the general population to be culturally advantaged. The Hebrews, on the other hand, were those who had been reared in the Jewish culture and among the Jews in Jerusalem to be religiously advantaged. Another barrier problem existed between the Grecians and Hebrews since the former spoke Greek and the latter spoke Hebrew or Aramaic (a Hebrew dialect). Note that none of the believers disputed the charge of the Grecians that their widows were receiving a short share of the daily allowance of supplies.

II. The twelve leaders (apostles) took the complaints seriously and decided that the rapid effectiveness of their own witnessing should not be neutralized further by caring beyond this time for the mechanical management of the group. Believing that the growth of God's kingdom should take their full time, they asked the group to select seven men who were guided completely by God's Spirit (the Spirit that had guided their Lord Jesus) and who were known for their integrity. The apostles noted that with this arrangement they could spend all of their time and efforts communing with God and sharing God's New Covenant (Good News) with more listeners. The believing group agreed that the apostles' idea was a good one and proceeded at once to choose seven Grecians (so identified by their names) to assume the procuring and disseminating the necessary daily supplies. The group selected Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. The apostles showed their approval of the seven through blessing them by laying their hands upon them. The result of this sharing of responsibilities gave great impetus to their soul winning efforts. Among those who joined the group were "a great number of the (Jewish) priests." Stephen

immediately did much more than pass out sandals and bagels. He demonstrated his profound faith and God's power by performing great wonders and miracles among the people. He is identified in vss. 3,5, and 8 as being full of the Holy Spirit (completely controlled by God's will), wisdom, faith, and power. Philip likewise demonstrated an outstanding evangelical acumen as we shall see in Chap. 8 of Acts. [Nicolas is thought by many to have started a movement later in Christianity based upon false doctrine. See mention of such in Rev. 2:6,15 at both Ephesus and Pergamum. Some Bible scholars associate II Pet. 2 with the evils of this group. In Peter's condemnation of these false prophets are the following: denying the Lord Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as sufficient for ones spiritual wellbeing (vs.1), subscribing to immoral, lascivious (sexual lust) activities as fitting for believers (vs. 2), materialistic coveting (vs. 3), accepting homosexual behavior for believers (vss. 6-10a), wantonly rebelling against established political authority (vs. 10b), and generally disregarding the holy (separated) living to be practiced by believers as taught by the Lord Jesus, vss. 19-22, and also see John 14:15]. I do not believe that the Nicolas among the seven was the same Nicolas (a common Greek proper name at the time) who taught all these nonChristian teachings. Another thought: nowhere in Scripture is one of these seven referred to explicitly as a "deacon." In Philip. 1:1 where "overseer" (pastor or leader) and "those who serve" (deacons) are mentioned for those fulfilling these two offices, the words episkopois and diakonois are used. In Matt. 20:26-27 Jesus talked about greatness (rank?) among his followers and said that if one chooses to attain high worth, let that one be the believers' diakonos, i.e., servant. Jesus said further that if one would be at the pinnacle (topmost) in God's kingdom, he or she should be the doulos (slave) of the group. Note that in Philip. 1:1, Paul refers to himself and Timothy as slaves, for the Greek word is doulos which appears as "servants" in the King James Version. - WA]

III. The continual antagonism of the Jews against this new "sect in Judaism" was especially prominent in the Jewish synagogues where Greek speaking Jews gathered. Since Stephen was of their number (a Hellenist cultured and Greek speaking believer), the Jews were really irked by him. He knew the Old Covenant text well and by it was proclaiming vigorously that Jesus was indeed the Messiah which God had promised in that Covenant. Stephen at this time, as had Jesus, Peter, and John before, was summoned before the Jewish Sanhedrin as a "trouble-maker." The charge was that he was with blasphemous words profaning the Temple and the Law of Moses. These accusations were from hired false witnesses who "interpreted" Stephen's statements as "lies." As Stephen stood before the council (Sanhedrin), his face glowed with enthusiasm because of his faith in Jesus the Messiah (Savior), like a very angel (messenger) of God. [Which he was. - WA]

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross.
Lift high his royal banner. It must not suffer loss.
From victory unto victory his army shall he lead.
'Til every foe is vanquished and Christ is Lord indeed!

August 20, 2000

"Stephen Joins Jesus"
Acts 7

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Factors that shape human history - some theories:

A. Geographical - The natural supply of basic human, physical needs as found on the earth's surface in various regions determines people's choices as to what they do with their lives. An example is mankind's use of streams and other bodies of water. Babylon was in the Tigris-Euphrates valleys where the land was fertile from the mulch-rich supplies along the river banks. Human food supplies were thus assured because of soil fertility and supply of fish. These conditions exist around the world, e.g., New York City, Chicago, St Louis, New Orleans in this country.

B. Great Man - Thomas Carlyle held and promoted the view that people are for the most part acquiescent socially, i.e., as they relate to one another. Mankind is therefore receptive to the leading of a strong, demanding personality. Carlyle points to such persons as Moses, Jesus, Alexander the Great, Confucius, Julius Caesar, Muhammad, Napoleon, and George Washington as human leaders who have as individuals changed the pattern of human history.

C. Divine Will - Some people believe that human destinies are guided to conform to a great cosmic plan or purpose. The one or thing that plans, guides, or directs that purpose depends on ones why of the universe. In recent years science fiction has referred to such a guider as "the force." Muhammadans (Muslims) believe he is Allah, and others have various names and ideas. (Stephen believed that the one true God of the universe is he who appeared to Abraham, as all of us who trust Jesus as God's Savior do.)

II. Stephen, a Grecian Jew who had accepted Jesus of Nazareth as God's Messiah (Savior), now stands before the Jewish Sanhedrin accused of teaching that Jesus' followers would destroy the Temple and change religious traditions which Moses had delivered for the Jews to follow. The chief priest (Caiaphas), leader of the Jews and moderator of the council (Sanhedrin), asked Stephen whether the accusations were true. The new believer, before seventy-one ardent representatives of the Jewish religion, began to give his answer to the question.

III. Stephen began his oration by recalling for the council how the God and Creator of all things had appeared unto Abraham who was the spiritual and genetic father of them all. God had made himself known to the patriarch in Mesopotamia (Iraq) even before he moved to Charan (Syria). God instructed Abraham to leave his native land (Iraq) and the Chaldeans and move to Haran in Syria. By faith in God's bidding, he moved his entire family to Haran. There his father died, and he thereafter continued to follow God's instructions by moving westward into the land at the east end of the Mediterranean Sea and west of the Jordan River. (Where the Jews lived even as Stephen spoke.) The strength of Abraham's faith is indicated by the fact that he had never been to this area and did not know how the people there would accept him (a strange land). Further, God promised Abraham that the land would pass from him to his children and to his children's children even though he was

well along in age and had had no child as yet! A people would enslave his progeny for 400 years, but God would free them and bring them to live in the land promised originally to Abraham.

IV. Stephen continues: God sealed his promises with Abraham by prescribing the rite of circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14) for all males. The first two to be circumcised (Gen. 17:24-26) were Abraham (at age 99 and with no child by Sarah) and his first born son, Ishmael at age 13. Subsequently, Abraham sired Isaac who sired Jacob who sired twelve sons. One of Jacob's (Israel's) sons, Joseph, was sold through spite to Egyptians to be a slave by his brothers. Joseph became a political leader in Egypt, and in a time of severe drought in Canaan, the Jews were forced to seek food in Egypt. Jacob was enticed by Joseph to move his entire family to Egypt where they lived and grew in number for 400 years. During this long period a new Egyptian ruler came into power who no longer used Joseph as a leader. The Jews were then made slaves to do the menial tasks of the Egyptians. Later the Egyptians attempted to eradicate the Jews by genocide.

V. Stephen continues: God raised up a leader, Moses, who for forty years was an adopted member of the household of Pharaoh. He lived as Pharaoh's child and enjoyed everything available to the supreme ruler of Egypt, included the best of training. However, he never forgot his own people, the Hebrews. One day he witnessed an Egyptian abusing a Hebrew slave, murdered the abuser, and buried his body in the earth. Afterwards Moses learned that someone had seen the murder. From fear of retribution, Moses fled for his life to Midian. He lived there for forty years, married and learned the life of a nomadic herdsman. Abraham's God appeared to Moses in a very unique way and enlisted him to return to Egypt and lead his people, the Hebrews, from their enslavement by the Egyptians. Moses reluctantly obeyed God and led a rebellious and griping people for forty years through the wilderness area of the Sinaitic Peninsula, afraid to enter the land God had promised to Abraham's descendants. During Moses' leadership he received from God on Mt. Sinai, God's coded law for the Israelites to follow after entering and occupying the promised land. But the people chose idols to worship instead of the living God. God made them fashion an ark symbolizing his presence with them as they wandered in doubt in the wilderness. God told the people through Moses that he would send the Israelites a Savior like Moses (a deliverer from bondage). Later after David's glorious reign, God commissioned his son Solomon to build a Temple, but God made the situation clear that the Temple could not be where he lived. Heaven is God's home, and he can not be confined to a structure made with hands. God is the Creator of everything that exists.

VI. Stephen then bluntly tells the Sanhedrin that as their forefathers had disallowed God's prophets throughout history, so have they defied God's final prophet (Heb. 1:1-2), priest, and king, Jesus, God's Messiah (Savior) and very Son. As Peter had done earlier, Stephen accused the Jewish leaders to be betrayers of God and murderers of his Anointed One, vs. 52. His furious listeners moaned loudly and stoned the humble Stephen to death as he called upon the Lord to forgive his murderers. Saul of Tarsus approved of Stephen's murder and held the coats of the murderers.

August 27, 2000

"The Gospel Travels"
Acts 8

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Saul approved of Stephen's assassination, but this incident of prejudice was not singular in the Jerusalem church. The believers in that first group of trusters in Jesus Christ were beginning to sense that they could not accept Jesus as the Messiah and live as acceptable neighbors to Jewish friends. As a result, many believers were finding it necessary to leave Jerusalem and live elsewhere, such as in outlying Judea and even northward to Samaria. The twelve apostles were exceptions to the movement away from Jerusalem. Stephen's death and burial made a profound impression on the Jerusalem assembly. He was, as a Hellenistic Jew, the first believer in Christ who promoted with intellectual acumen the Christian perspective of Jewish history. He noted that God had not exclusively favored those Jews in the Holy Land and Jerusalem itself, but that God was everywhere believers called upon him. No doubt this position gave assurance to believers that Jesus, as God's Son, would go with the believers wherever they went since Jesus had promised that God's Holy Spirit (Paraclete, Comforter) would be with every individual truster of Jesus Christ forever, John 14:16.

II. Saul, the Pharisee and intense devotee of the Jewish religion, was blindly determined to extinguish this new sect of Judaism. (See I Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13-14; Philip. 3:6; I Tim. 1:13.) Saul especially hated Stephen, because he, like Saul, was a Hellenistic Jew. Saul asked for and received from the Sanhedrin even to enter private residences and literally drag the occupants (believers in Christ) out for trial as blasphemers and heretics. It is especially noteworthy that the Word states that WOMEN were included in Saul's persecution and humiliation.

III. Stephen had been one of the original seven (Chap. 6) and had experienced martyrdom. Now Philip, another of the seven, as a result of severe persecution, left Jerusalem and "went down" (away from Jerusalem) to Samaria telling the Samaritans about Jesus and God's spiritual salvation through him. The Samaritans overwhelmingly accepted Philip's message as his words were reinforced by many physical and spiritual miracles. The city of Samaria rejoiced with Philip's testimony. However, a certain magician named Simon who glorified himself with magical sorcery was thought by many in the city to be working through God's power. Philip's message concerning God's kingdom and Jesus' part in it revealed the sham of Simon. Simon confessed belief in Jesus, was immersed, and accompanied Philip as the latter performed wonders and miracles in Jesus' name.

IV. When knowledge was received back at Jerusalem that the Samaritans were believing Philip's message, the believers sent Peter and John to learn firsthand what was happening. The new Samaritan believers had not been immersed as Jesus had commanded in Matt. 28:19, i.e., in the name (power) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It was paramount that the same sign that God had shown at Pentecost (See Acts 1:5.) be manifested here in Samaria to give complete assurance to the apostles that God had, in fact,

extended the New Covenant outside Jerusalem. In Acts 1:8 extension of God's kingdom was associated with the special anointing by God's Holy Spirit. Peter and John were unwilling to accept God's work in this place as genuine without the special presence of the Holy Spirit. [See also Acts 10:44-48 when Peter accepted the Gentiles because of the special presence of God's Holy Spirit; and at Acts 19:2 when Paul accepted John the Immerser's disciples after they demonstrated evidence of the presence of God's Holy Spirit as that which accompanied those who had been immersed in the name (power) of Jesus, rather than simple repentance.) Interestingly, the apostle Paul did, there at Ephesus, actually reimmerse the new believers at Acts 19:2 (They no doubt had been immersed by John the Immerser.), and also God elected that they receive the special Holy Spirit anointing as Paul placed his hands upon the twelve people involved. The function of the Holy Spirit during this apostolic period was, as Jesus had promised at John 14:25-29, God's method of ascertaining that the believers were properly instructed while the Word was being compiled for future believers whom God would bring into his kingdom.] The new convert, Simon, misinterpreted the act of hand-placing as a magic act and offered Peter and John money to be able to duplicate the procedure. Peter, of course, rebuked Simon and told him to repent of his wrong impression of God's work. Money will not buy God's power and favor! Simon expressed remorse for his wrong attitude and asked for prayer for forgiveness of his wrong. Peter and John continued to tell the message of salvation, through faith in Jesus, in many villages on their way back to Jerusalem.

V. A messenger (angel) of God instructed Philip to leave the city of Samaria and go southward through the desert area to Gaza. In doing God's bidding, he met an Ethiopian eunuch who was the Secretary of the Treasury in Ethiopia where Candace was queen. The Treasurer was riding a chariot as was appropriate to his high political prominence. No doubt Philip better understood why God had sent him this way when he noted that the Ethiopian had come from Jerusalem where he had been to worship. Very probably he was a Jewish proselyte, because he was, at the moment Philip came along side the chariot, reading from the fifty-third chapter of the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked the Ethiopian whether he was understanding Isaiah's prophecy. The charioteer admitted that he needed someone to guide him in understanding the Isa. 53:7-8 passage he was reading. Specifically, he asked Philip whether the prophet Isaiah was referring to himself or someone else in the passage. Philip told him that the prophet was prophesying about Jesus. [I believe Philip pointed out to the well-educated eunuch the specific reference in vs. 8 this clause, "- - Who shall declare this generation?" This concept is noted in Psa. 22:30; Lk 11:30 as well as here in Isa. 53:8. - WA] Philip had no doubt enlightened the Ethiopian as to the importance of being immersed in water as a symbol indicating a believer's identification with Jesus, because he asked Philip if he might be immersed. Philip informed the eunuch that immersion would be proper if he sincerely believed what he (Philip) had told him about Jesus. When the Ethiopian confessed to Philip that he believed that Jesus was God's Son, he stopped the chariot, and they both went down into the water. Philip immersed the eunuch who went on back to Ethiopia rejoicing. Philip went home to Azotus and shared the Good News about Jesus throughout the area to as far away as Caesarea. The Gospel sped on its way as disciples of Jesus followed God's will.

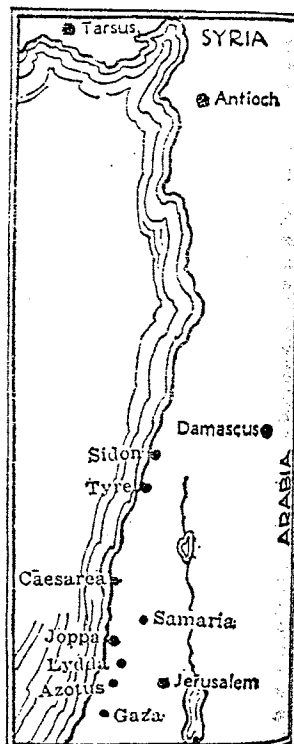
I. Saul, the ambitious Pharisee from Tarsus, was so infuriated that murdering such leaders as Stephen still did not contain the spreading of "the Way" among the Jews, he took the matter into his own hands by asking the Jewish high priest for Sanhedrin authority to intimidate and arrest followers of Jesus as the Messiah. With this authority documented, he headed up north to Damascus to render orthodox Jewish control there. He was authorized to locate Jesus' believers, put them (both men and WOMEN) in stocks, and transport them to Jerusalem for trial.

II. As Saul and his entourage neared Damascus (northeast of Mt. Hermon), he underwent an experience that not only changed him as a person forever, but gave an impetus to the spreading of the Gospel like nothing else since Jesus' resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Peter was still bound by the Jewish law in a way that required a special act of God (We shall see next week in Chap. 10.) to set him straight about God's lack of respect for some persons above others (Gentiles and all other nonJews). Saul forever and ever after the Lord had salvaged his spirit, never, for a moment, lost sight of the Jesus who was sacrificed by God for him (See Acts 22:4-21; 26:12-23; I Cor. 9:1; 15:8; II Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:15-20; 2:1-16). Saul was surrounded by a light so bright that it knocked him to the ground and blinded him. On the ground he heard a voice speaking in Hebrew (Acts 26:14) and calling his name asking him, "- - -why do you persecute me?" (Note that even though Saul did not know who was speaking, he knew that royalty was addressing him.) The voice identified himself as Jesus and noted the struggle Saul was experiencing within himself regarding Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus told Saul to go ahead into Damascus, and he would be instructed there concerning his mission. The others with Saul heard the voice of Jesus but saw no person delivering the words. When Saul stood up, he realized that he was blind and must be led into Damascus. Furthermore, for three days he could not eat, drink, or see.

III. A Damascus believer in Jesus as the Christ named Ananias was told by the Lord in a vision about Saul. Ananias was to go to a certain address on Straight Street where a man named Judas lived. There he was told he would find Saul who had likewise, in a vision, been told of Ananias' coming to see him (Saul). Further, Saul knew from the vision that Ananias would, by placing his hands upon Saul, restore his sight. Ananias was somewhat reluctant to follow the Lord's instructions, because he had heard of Saul's reputation of hatred for believers. The Lord assured Ananias that Saul was now God's special agent to the Gentiles, kings, and even to Israel's children (everyone was included). Ananias then followed the Lord's bidding, found Saul, and, addressing him as Brother, laid his hands on Saul who received his sight and was FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT! Afterward, Saul was immersed in water, ate, became strong, and stayed a while with the believers in Jesus as Christ (Messiah, Savior, Lord).

IV. After a three-year stint in Arabia (Gal. 1:17) "conferring not with flesh and blood," Saul went to Jerusalem (via Damascus) but was not received by the apostles, for they were afraid of him, denying even that he was a believer! But Barnabas (who had proven his loyalty to the Christ and the assembly by his contribution in Acts 4:36-37) vouched for Saul and the reality of his conversion and his Damascus testimony. Saul then spent two weeks with Peter and Jesus' brother James but saw none of the other apostles. The Grecian (Hellenistic) Jews disputed Saul's message, of course, and plotted to kill him. The Jerusalem believers sensed the problems and carried Saul to Caesarea and then to his hometown, Tarsus. With Saul a believer, the churches in Galilee and Samaria realized some less persecution.

V. The Scriptural account now returns to Peter's activities by telling of some of his travels. He went to Lydda, about thirty miles northwest of Jerusalem and met a man named Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years with palsy. Through Jesus' power Peter healed him, and the residents of Lydda believed because of Peter's healing witness. Then at Joppa (now Tel Aviv), Peter learned of a believer named Tabitha (Dorcas, a doe) who had died, been prepared for burial, and laid in an upstairs room. Peter came from Lydda to Joppa by request where Dorcas' friends showed him the clothing she had made, told him how she had been well known for her charity, and grieved for her. Peter sent every one from the room, knelt down, and prayed. He took Dorcas by the hand and told her to stand up. She did and Peter delivered her back to her friends alive. Peter stayed in Joppa several days, living at the home of a tanner named Simon. The news spread all around the city and many believed because of the miracle which Peter performed.



I. While Peter was at Joppa on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, up north at Caesarea a Roman centurion was visited by God for a special purpose. The military officer was named Cornelius, and he commanded a special unit called the Italian squad. Since his family was also there in Caesarea, he was probably on permanent assignment and was body-guard of the governor's assignment from Rome. In addition to his military and political eminence, he was devoutly religious and worshipped the God of the Jews. He feared God (held him in awe and reverence) but had not become a Jewish proselyte, i.e., he had not been circumcised. He practiced a lifestyle of charity and prayed continually. One day about three O'clock in the afternoon at prayer time, Cornelius had a vision in which a messenger (angel) of God came to him and called his name. Cornelius was afraid, but the messenger commended him for his prayer life and works of charity. He then told Cornelius to send messengers down to Joppa to the home of Simon where Peter was staying. There his men were to ask for Simon Peter who would give him instructions for further action. Cornelius sent two aides and even his personal valet to Joppa after telling them what the mission was.

II. The next day about noon while Cornelius' men were on their way to Joppa (about 25 miles), Peter went up to the roof of Simon's house to wait for the noon meal to be prepared. He became very hungry and entranced, saw heaven open, and a certain carriage descend to him. The carriage appeared as a sheet with each corner tied into a knot. As the litter came down to earth in Peter's presence, he saw thereon several types of four-footed animals, wild beasts, creeping things (snakes and lizards), and flying animals (fouls). To Peter's surprise a voice from heaven then commanded him to get up, kill some of the animals, and satisfy his appetite by eating them. Peter refused saying that he was a Jew devoted to God's law which disallowed such eating. Further, he said that in his entire life he had never eaten any meat contrary to the command of God's law. The carriage lifted and Peter perhaps thought he had won the contest, but the object came down the second time. The same voice from heaven then told Peter not to presume any food which God had pronounced clean to be otherwise (See Mark 7:14-23). The word at this point does not give Peter's response even after the third lowering of the sheet except to state that Peter was left puzzled about what all this meant. At the conclusion of the vision, the men from Cornelius in Caesarea arrived asking Simon whether Simon Peter was there.

III. Peter went down from the roof and introduced himself to Cornelius' men who told them what had happened to their commander. Peter invited them to spend the night, and the next day, he, along with some other believers of Joppa, accompanied Cornelius' three men back to Caesarea. While Cornelius waited for Peter and the group, he invited his relatives and friends to be there for Peter's visit. As Peter approached Cornelius, the latter fell down at Peter's feet to worship him, but Peter told him not to do that for he was a fellow

human being, not a god. The group that had gathered was rather large, and Peter began by saying that as a Jew he was forbidden by God's law to enter the home of, or even associate with, a nonJew. This incident revealed to Peter what his roof-top vision meant: he (Peter) should not consider any person, Jew or Gentile, unclean, because God did not. Cornelius told Peter and the group of his experience four days earlier about the visit of God's messenger with God's instructions.

IV. Peter was gradually beginning to see the import of what God was revealing to him about what Jesus had conveyed to the disciples of John the Immerser at Matt. 9:14-17. Jesus there answered the question regarding the relationship of the Old Covenant with what was changing by means of God's sacrifice of his only Son, Christ (the Messiah) Jesus. God was through Jesus creating a New Covenant with mankind in which there would be no difference between Jews and anyone else. God was not attempting to put a patch on an old "garment," but rather calling out a new people, the ecclesia (church), before establishing again the nation of Israel, Acts 1:6-8; Rom. 11:25-32; Rev. 20:4-6. Peter knew by the vision he had witnessed that God at this time is accepting anyone who will accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Jesus is, indeed, the Savior of the whole world. God has made this message fact by bringing Jesus back from the abode of the dead. Peter's message continues: Peter had been an eyewitness himself of God's creating the New Covenant with all mankind. Further, Jesus had commanded his witnesses to spread the Good News to EVERYONE everywhere, and any person who accepts that Good News will receive eternal life.

V. After Peter related God's Gospel (Good News) to the unbelievers (Cornelius' relatives and friends), the group believed that Jesus was God's Savior as evidenced by their being filled with the Holy Spirit as they spoke in tongues magnifying God (God's apostolic-period sign of the New Covenant) as God's evidence that nonJews were, in fact, to be added to the Kingdom of God (not the kingdom of Israel, Acts 1:4-8). Those who had accompanied Peter from Joppa to Casesarea (believers in Jesus as the Messiah and who had been Jews or Jewish proselytes) were astonished that God would also receive Gentiles into his ecclesia. However, the apostolic - period evidence was given (speaking in tongues) which made the filling of the Holy Spirit obvious to Peter and the other believers from Joppa, because Peter stated that that was the same evidence given to him and the others at the beginning as evidence of the in-filling of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:4,14-17; 10:47; 19:1-7. Therefore, Peter then asked the group whether anyone objected to the new believers' being immersed in water to signify their becoming members of the New Covenant ecclesia. They were then immersed in the name of Jesus.

VI. Biblical references to speaking in tongues, the New Covenant, and the use of signs by God in speaking to his people: Isa. 28:11-12; Joel 2:28-32; Mark 16:14-18; John 2:18-19; 4:48; 20:29; Acts 2:24-21; 10:44-47; I Cor. 1:22-23; 14:21-22; Heb. 8:7-13.

VII. For further study, compare Gal. 2 with II Peter 3:11-18.

I. When the apostles and the other members of the Jerusalem church heard of what Peter had done at Joppa with nonJews (Gentiles) from Caesarea, they wanted an explanation of this diversion from the established pattern of evangelism, i.e., accepting nonJews into the fellowship. The "circumcision party," those who believed that a person must be a Jew before he or she could trust Jesus as Savior (Messiah), especially wanted Peter to explain what they were hearing about his activities. They had already decided that he had broken God's law by associating with the uncircumcised, even eating with them! (See Jonah 1:1-3; 3:15,10; 4:1-3,9-10; Luke 11:30-32)

II. Peter went to Jerusalem and there was confronted by the contending party of the church (ecclesia). He very meticulously recalled (King James: "by order") his experience at Joppa. He told them of his prayer time, the trance, and the vision. A vessel like a large sheet was let down from heaven to him filled with many unclean animals from which he was commanded to arise, slay, and eat. He refused according to his Jewish tradition, and the same thing happened a second time during which Peter was informed that what God had cleansed, he was not to consider profane. After the descent of the animals the third time, three men sent from Caesarea were already in the house to see him. Peter then said that God's Holy Spirit instructed him not to doubt the message he had been told. Then, accompanied by six fellow-believers of Joppa, Peter went up to Caesarea from, where the three messengers had been sent. Peter had been revealed to a Man (Cornelius) in a vision as the one who could inform him as to how God would save him and his family. Peter noted that as he (Peter) began to speak the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit fell on the hearers as it had to the first believers at Pentecost time (Acts 2:4). While this was happening, Peter said that he remembered Jesus' promise that as John the Immer-ser had immersed in water, even so would believers in Jesus (after the coming of God's Holy Spirit) be immersed in the Holy Spirit. Peter related that at this point he could not deny that God had indeed certified (by the acceptable apostolic sign, speaking in tongues) their acceptance by God through their confessing Jesus as their Messiah (Savior). The Jerusalem leaders accepted Peter's testimony that God was, in fact, granting spiritual salvation (eternal life) to the uncircumcised (Gentiles), Matt. 14:33; 16:13-20; John 10:1-39 (especially vss. 7-16).

III. Luke here mentions the sacrificing of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60) and the resulting scattering of the believers from Jerusalem to many outlying areas, e.g., Cyprus, Cyrene, and Antioch. The Jews living in these areas were Grecian (Greek cultured), of course, and many were persuaded by those who had experienced the coming of God's Spirit at Pentecost as many trusted Jesus for eternal life. However, the Good News was being shared to Jews only by these disciples.

IV. The News of the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah by the scattered

Grecian Jews was getting back to Jerusalem, and the leaders there asked Barnabas to go up to Antioch to encourage the believers in their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. When Barnabas (See Acts 4:37-37; 9:27) arrived in Antioch and saw how the believers were responding to the leadership of God's Holy Spirit, he was very pleased and encouraged them in their faith in the Lord Jesus. Because of Barnabas' own ardent faith, many people were added to the kingdom of heaven, but, even so, he apparently felt the need for help. Evidently, he believed that the cause there would be greatly enhanced by the services of Paul's ministry. Paul had been rejected by the Jews in Damascus after his miraculous conversion experience on the road there from Jerusalem years before. Paul had spent some three years searching for the Lord's direction after his conversion, Gal.1:15-24, Further, he was likewise rejected in Jerusalem and Caesarea and as a result returned to his home-town, Tarsus. Barnabas knew that he could likely find Paul at Tarsus and went there to search for him. When Barnabas found Paul, the latter agreed to return to Antioch with him. Paul was especially interested in Antioch, and there he labored with Barnabas for a full year establishing what was the first assembly of believers whose membership consisted primarily of Gentiles. The fact that the believers were nonJews gave need for a new designation for those who trusted Jesus for spiritual, eternal life. The new name whom followers of Jesus as Savior were called first in Antioch was, "Christian," vs. 26; Heb. 8:7-13. The new title "Christian" with its suffix "ian" tells us that these new believers in Jesus were related for eternal life, not to the witnesses who had told them about the Lord Jesus for spiritual salvation, but to Jesus himself as the Messiah, Christ the Savior. [The word "Christian" has come to mean a variety of things since its first use in Antioch. Some believe it refers to those who have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord for eternal life and whose lives reflect a love for Jesus by seeking to keep his commandments, John 14:14-23; I John 1:7-2:6; others, ones from a Christian family (parents are professors of Jesus as Savior); ones who have been baptized by one with the "proper authority;" ones who are citizens of a "Christian country;" those who are members of the "right" church organization or denomination; those who keep the ten commandments; one who has spoken in tongues; those who talks the talk and walks the walk; those who are followers of certain "Christian leaders;" etc.]

V. In an interchange of Christian personnel between Jerusalem and Antioch, a certain prophet named Agabus informed the Antioch church that there was coming a famine in Judaea. The famine occurred during the reign of Claudius Caesar from 41 to 54 AD. [Claudius died on 10-13-54 AD, by poison administered by his fourth wife, Agrippina, the mother of Nero.] The believers in Antioch under the leadership of Paul and Barnabas collected an offering for the relief of the believers in Judaea during the dearth of the famine in that area, especially at Jerusalem. In fact, Paul and Barnabas delivered the relief in person as requested by the Antioch church. This is the first such effort by one group of Christians to relieve the sufferings of believers in another location. [Today we do the same thing for suffering, needful fellow-believers and others around the world.]

Oct. 1, 2000 "Herod Persecutes The Believers" Couples Class
Acts 12 Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Herod began to single out certain leaders among the Jerusalem believers for persecution in order to discourage the growth of the group. At first he had James (John's brother) killed with a sword (probably decapitated).

The Herods (Idumean, i.e., Edomites and offspring of Eseau):

1. Herod the Great, second son of Antipater. He was appointed procurator (governor) of Judea by Julius Caesar in 48 or 47 BC. After a reign of 37 years during which he built the magnificent Jewish Temple, slaughtered Jewish infant males, he died of a terrible (sexual?) disease in Jerico at the age of 70 in April, 4 BC.
2. Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great by Malthake, a Samaritan. He was rebuked by John the Immerser for marrying his half-brother's (Herod Philip I) wife Herodias, the sister of Herod Agrippa I. Herodias' daughter, Salome, was the dancer who so satisfied Herod Antipas, Herodias' husband and who asked for the head of John the Immerser on a platter after the dancing performance, Matt. 14:1-12. He reigned until 39 AD and died in exile by the Roman Emperor Caligula.
3. Herod Philip I, son of Herod the Great and father of Herodias who later married Herod Antipas.
4. Herod Philip II, son of Herod the Great and Cleopatra. He built the city of Caesarea Philippi near the sources of the Jordan River. He married Salome, the daughter of Herod Philip I and Herodias. He died in 34 AD.
5. Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great and son of Aristobulus, Acts 25:13. He was the "Herod the King" of Acts 12:1 in today's lesson. Like his grandfather he died of a terrible disease which Luke attributes to his having claimed to be a god rather than a man at Acts 12:22-23 in today's lesson. His agreement to kill James in Acts 12:3 was an effort to please the Jews.
6. Herod Agrippa II, son of Agrippa I, before whom Paul was tried in Acts Chaps 25 and 26. He turned against the Jews before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and died childless and a Roman vassal (a subserviant position) in 100 AD.

II. As stated above, Herod Agrippa I was killing key leaders in the Jerusalem group of believers one at a time to satisfy Jews and also Rome. Peter was next in line for martyrdom and was captured and held in prison at Passover (Feast of Unleavened Bread, Luke 22:1). Herod was careful to wait until after Passover (Easter, King James Version) to make public his intentions of killing Peter. Sixteen soldiers guarded Peter (four on duty every six hours). The believers in Jerusalem made Peter's imprisonment an object of continual, fervent prayer.

III. On the night before Herod was to try Peter publicly and as two of the soldiers stood at his sleeping place, a miracle

happened. A messenger sent by God shook Peter to awaken him and told him to get up quickly. As Peter did so, the chains around his wrists fell away, and the Messenger (angel) told him to get fully dressed and follow him. They walked away from the two guards at his side, past the other two guards at the cell door, and the iron gate of the stronghold opened allowing Peter to enter the residential area of Jerusalem. The angel left at this place and time, and Peter felt as though he was only partially conscience. In fact, he wondered whether he was dreaming. Upon realizing that he really had been freed by God from Herod and the Jews, he made his way to the home of John Mark's mother (Mary) where many believers were gathered praying.

IV. When Peter reached Mary's home, he knocked on the door and asked the person inside to open the gate so that he could enter. The young girl inside, Rhoda, was so excited when she recognized Peter's voice that, rather than let him in, she ran back to the praying believers and told them that Peter was at the door. They told Rhoda that she surely was mistaken and that if Peter were there, it was his spirit, not Peter in the flesh. All of this speculative thinking did not keep Peter from continuing to knock on the gate. Finally, they opened the gate, saw Peter, and were dumbfounded. There was much elation and noise and Peter quieted the group down by telling them to tell James (the Lord's brother and pastor of the believers there in Jerusalem) and the others that he had been freed from prison. After making sure that they knew what God was doing, he left Mary's home where he, no doubt, knew Herod's soldiers would expect him to be. When morning came, there was much confusion at the prison among the soldiers about Peter's absence. Herod sent for Peter according to his plans to try him. The soldiers reported that Peter had escaped. Herod court-martialed the guards and had them killed. He himself apparently saw in the episode the possibility of self-humiliation. He therefore left Jerusalem and went to Caesarea on the Mediterranean.

V. At this point in his Acts account, Luke feels it necessary to reveal what happened to Herod Agrippa I. Over on the coast the people of Tyre and Sidon did something (We are not told what displeased the people there.) that displeased Herod immensely. He controlled their food supply since they could grow no food, and he ruled Judaea from where their supply came. Herod's treasurer, Blastus, convinced the king to meet their needs. The residents of the area as a result of Herod's generosity after a speech by the king, hailed him as a god. Because Herod accepted their worship and did not give God the glory (credit), Herod was "eaten by worms" (a very serious illness, perhaps syphilis) and died there. All this news (Peter's miraculous escape and Herod's terrible death) gave impetus to the spreading of the Good News about God's people who believed in Jesus as the Savior of God. Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem to Antioch from where they went on a mission taking with them John Mark. (Barnabas and John Mark were cousins, Col. 4:10.)

Oct. 8, 2000

"Antioch Sends Out Missionaries"
Acts 13

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Paul and Barnabas had been at Antioch of Syria for over a year (Acts 11:1-3) teaching the local congregation about God's Christ (Savior) that the members of the group (mostly nonJews, i.e., Gentiles) were not identified as converted Jews but directly and solely related through their faith in Jesus Christ for the first time as "Christians." This designation was different and indicated a new method of God's relating to human beings that bypassed the first arrangement made by God with his human creatures. The Old Covenant (Law) was no longer the factor that made mankind pleasing to God, but now through his Son, Jesus, a New Covenant (Grace) was created whereby all people could be made eternally alive spiritually (like God is alive), John 3:5; 4:24; Acts 2:18-19; Heb. 8:7-13. Paul's and Barnabas' teaching was so effective that certain men became prophets (proclaimers, messengers of the Gospel) and teachers. Luke names five of these: Barnabas (Note that Saul was named last indicating, I believe, that he was the one who had taught them all, even Barnabas.), Simeon Niger, Lucius from Cyrene, and Manaen. The last had been reared as a foster child in the home of Herod Agrippa I (#5 in last weeks outline). These five served the Lord and used their time almost entirely (fasted) for teaching and preaching. As God noted their devotion to their duty of serving him, he, through his Holy Spirit, indicated to the Antioch congregation that Barnabas and Saul should be commissioned to leave the Antioch area and take the Gospel elsewhere. The Holy Spirit revealed that he had a special mission for them, and, although it is not stated that John Mark was ordained (had hands laid on him) as were Saul and Barnabas, he accompanied them on this, Paul's first missionary journey. The three left Antioch of Syria with the Antioch congregation's blessing.

II. As the Holy Spirit led them, the three went to Selucia, a seaport on the Mediterranean Sea about sixteen miles west of Antioch of Syria, They sailed from there to Salamis, a seaport on the east side of the island of Cyprus, and shared the Gospel with the Jews in the synagogues there. (Barnabas was a Levite and native of Cyprus.) They traveled by land across the island to the port of Paphos on the west side of the island. In Paphos they were entertained by Sergius Paulus, an official of Cyprus, who asked them to tell him about God's message. Associated with the official household was a Jew named Barjesus who was a magician and also was known in the area as Elymas, Greek term for Sorcerer. Barjesus claimed to have some religious authority, but Saul (hereafter called Paul) realized that he was, in fact, a false prophet. The Spirit of God took over Paul's thinking. He stared at Barjesus and identified the sorcerer's true position. Paul called him an offspring of the devil, perverting the Lord's truth and turning people away from the Lord. Paul told him further that God would deal with him now causing him to be blind for a while. Barjesus immediately was made blind by the Lord and asked someone to lead him

about. This episode was witnessed by Sergius Paulus who was favorably impressed by the Lord's work and believed that Jesus is Lord.

III. From Paphos the missionaries sailed north to Perga on the coast of Pamphylia (Greece). John Mark for some reason elected not to continue with Paul and Barnabas on their missionary endeavors. Instead, he returned to his mother's home in Jerusalem. From Perga Paul and Barnabas went on to Antioch in the province of Pisidia. In Antioch of Pisidia the two went to the synagogue on the Sabbath to worship and simply sat in the group. After the regular reading of the Law and the prophets, the synagogue leaders invited Paul and Barnabas to share with those assembled for worship, any exhortation they had from God for the people there. Paul stood, raised his hand for attention, and began an historical resume of God's relating to the Israelites beginning with their servitude in Egypt under the Pharaohs. He tells the group how God in leading the Israelites back to their promised land, the people were less than faithful to God's promise to protect them. Even in their reluctance God destroyed seven nations in Canaan and divided the land among the tribes of the sons of Jacob. After a period of about 450 years with judges, the great prophet Samuel led the Israelites, but the people insisted upon a king like their neighbors had. God gave them a man after God's own heart. At this point in his historical summary, Paul connects David to Jesus in the lineage of Jacob. This Jesus, Paul says, is the Savior (Messiah) promised to Israel by their God, Jehovah. God's Messiah, Jesus, was put to death at the request of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, even though the Roman in charge of the area, Pilate, could find no reason for even punishing him. However, God would not leave His Son, Jesus, in the place of the dead (Hades), but brought him back to life from the dead. Jesus was like David in that he died as all men, but Jesus was God, because his body did not suffer decay. He is eternal as God is eternal.

IV. Paul then makes the message clear, the Law of Moses will not make one right with God, but forgiveness comes through faith in Jesus as the Christ. After the service was over, the Gentiles heard what Paul had said about Jesus (Paul had said that All that believe in Jesus are justified.) and asked whether they might come and hear Paul's message the following Sabbath. Paul agreed and the crowd which came made the Jews very envious. They therefore discredited Paul's position that Jesus was God's Savior. The two missionaries declared that they necessarily had to bring God's message of salvation to the Jews first, but now that the Jews had spurned God's offer of eternal life by trusting Jesus Christ, Paul and Barnabas would take the glorious Good News to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were very glad, received the message, and were added to the family of God. Those who believed were rejoicing, but the Jews caused such turmoil that Paul and Barnabas found it necessary to leave Antioch of Pisidia. They went from there southeast to Iconium.

I. After being declared persona non grata by the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet (See Neh. 5:13; Matt. 10:14; Lk. 9:5; 10:10-11.) and went to Iconium. Iconium, now Konia, was a large and rich city, 120 miles north of the Mediterranean Sea, at the foot of the Taurus Mountains, and on the great line of transportation and communication between Ephesus and the western coast of the peninsula on one side; Tarsus, Antioch of Syria and the Euphrates River basin on the other. Iconium is east of Antioch in Pisidia. The two missionaries went together into the Jewish synagogue in Iconium and presented God's Gospel of Jesus Christ to them. Many of the Jews believed their message along with many Gentiles. The Jews who did not accept Jesus as God's Messiah ignored the miracles performed by Paul and Barnabas and chided the Gentiles who had listened positively, causing a misunderstanding. The end result was that the city of Iconium as a whole was divided. Finally, the Jewish rulers convinced the political authorities to ridicule them and chase them from their city. Stoning them was the method proposed, Lev. 24:13-14, for what was considered blasphemy against God. The two believers from Antioch or Syria realized that their ministry was no longer effective in Iconium and therefore left there and went into the Lystra-Derbe area to the south.

II. As Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel at Lystra, they met a man who had never been able to walk because of a congenital malady. As Paul preached, he realized that the man was interested in exercising faith in Jesus Christ to be healed. Paul shouted for the man to stand up. He did so and not only stood on his feet which had never held him up before, but he leaped around and walked about. The missionaries were surprised when the local citizens, in their local dialect, expressed the belief that the Roman gods Jupiter (Zeus) and Mercury (Hermes) had come down from the heavens in the likeness of men. They believed Paul was Mercury (because he was the message bearer) and Barnabas to be Jupiter (the chief god of Roman theology and husband of Juno). When the priest of Jupiter (who served at the shrine of Jupiter just outside the gate of Lystra) heard that representatives of his god and Mercury were in the city, he brought sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas. He brought oxen for the sacrifice and garlands for the missionaries' heads. This misunderstanding made Paul and Barnabas sorrowful, and they expressed their feelings by tearing their clothing. They also ran among the people telling them that they (Paul and Barnabas) were only human beings even as the Lystrains were. Also, people should give up their belief in the false pagan gods and believe in the true, only living God, the God who created everything. Paul told them that the one true God had until now provided their needs in nature and permitted all nations to walk according to their own customs. Paul's testimony scarcely restrained the crowd from using the missionaries as

gods worthy of blood sacrifices.

III. Although Paul and Barnabas had only been threatened with stoning at Iconium (before they fled), the hatred for them had followed them to Lystra. Some of the Jews from Antioch in Pisidia and Iconium came to Lystra and convinced the citizens there that Paul and Barnabas were bearing false testimony. The Jews took Paul out of the city, stoned him, and, this time they stoned him so badly that he was considered dead. The Jews, no doubt, thought for sure that Paul would no longer be a threat to their religion. They were wrong, because as the believers gathered around the stoned Paul, he stood to his feet, entered the city for the night, and left with Barnabas for Derbe the next day, II Cor. 11:25; II Tim. 3:11.

IV. Derbe is the only place in Galatia where no overt opposition to the preaching of Paul and Barnabas was experienced. They preached and taught there and then returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia. Why did Paul at this time decide to turn around and go back through the places he had already been? Also, why did he decide not to continue to the west after arriving first at Antioch of Pisidia? Instead, he went east to Iconium as though they were veering back toward their beginning point, Antioch of Syria. I suggest that there were several reasons for the apparent change of plans:

1. Paul never expected as much opposition to their ministry as they encountered. It is true that when the Grecian and Hellenist Jews (Paul and Barnabas were in this category of Jews.) in Galatia realized what was happening to their established Jewish traditions through Jesus' position and teachings, they knew that something must be done to counteract the influence, or their own religious position would be jeopardized.
2. Paul realized that more time and effort should be given to strengthening the local believers before leaving them to withstand such opposition noted in #1 above. Note that in vss. 14:22-23 the missionaries returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia expressly to encourage the new disciples' spirits, to plead for their continued faith in Jesus Christ, and to expect opposition to their being believers in Jesus as God's Savior.
3. There is strong evidence that Paul experienced illness during the period. In his letter to the Galatians later, he recalls for them that he preached to them first because of an "infirmity of the flesh," i.e., his attention to their need for the Gospel was sequenced by his illness, Gal. 4:12-18.

V. Paul and Barnabas left Perga and went to the coast at Attalia and sailed therefrom back to Seleucia. They went from there to Antioch of Syria to the local church which had commissioned them as missionaries. The church gathered together, and Paul and Barnabas told them the wonderful news of how God had opened the door of his kingdom to the Gentiles through their witness. Afterwards the two tired missionaries stayed at their home church and enjoyed the fellowship of their fellow believers.

I. While Paul and Barnabas recuperated at Antioch from the first Missionary experience into Cyprus and Asia Minor, a group of men came down from Judaea and contended that for a person to be in God's will (be assured of eternal life) he or she must be circumcised (become a Jew religiously) before being baptized as a testimony to becoming a Christian. In other words, one must be of the Jewish faith before he or she could become a Christian. The dispute of these "Judaizers" with Paul and Barnabas was so intense that the Antioch church decided to confer with the Jerusalem church. They, therefore, sent Paul and Barnabas along with representatives of the Judaizers to the Jerusalem church. Being true missionaries, Paul and Barnabas told the people on their journey through Phenice and Samaria about how God was being merciful even to Gentiles through trust in his Son, Jesus Christ. Members of the Antioch entourage arrived in Jersalem and were received by the church there. Evidence became apparent immediately in the Jerusalem church that the Pharisees who professed Jesus as the Messiah and were members of the church there, insisted that not only must Gentiles be circumcised before becoming true Christians, but that they must also keep the law of Moses after conversion to God's will through faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

II. The Jerusalem church leaders held a business meeting to consider the relationship of faith in Jesus Christ to faith in the rite of circumcision and keeping the law of Moses. There was a heated discussion from which no consensus came. In the impasse Peter was given the floor and related how (Acts 10:34-35) God had made clear to him by the sign of speaking in a divine language (Acts 10:44-48) that Gentiles are in God's favor (grace) through trusting Jesus for eternal life. In summary, Peter agreed with Paul and Barnabas. Note also Paul's experiences at Acts 19:1-7 and I Cor. 12:27-31.

III. At this point in the deliberation Paul and Barnabas related how God had worked through them in Cyprus and Asia Minor to bring many to trust Jesus Christ, even Gentiles. After their testimony, James (evidently at this time the senior pastor in the Jerusalem congregation) told the congregation that he agreed with Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, because the Scripture (Old Testament) states clearly that God intended to select a people from among the Gentiles before returning to rebuild David's kingdom (Amos 9:11-15), and see Romans Chapter Nine. James further suggested that the Jerusalem church send a written message to the Antioch congregation telling them what their position was on the questions raised, i.e., being circumcised and keeping Moses's law were unnecessary to become believers in Jesus for eternal life and to become citizens of the kingdom of God. He did say, though, that believers should be told to refrain from giving any credence to any idols, refrain from sexual intercourse with anyone other than ones spouse, and,

because of the social intercourse between Jewish and Gentile Christians at the time, refrain from eating meats (including meat containing blood) that did not conform to Moses' law. (Relate vs. 20 with vs. 21.) The committee of apostles and elders (vs. 6) agreed with the Peter-Paul-Barnabas-James position, and presented the recommendations to the church who agreed. They agreed to send their conclusions to the Antioch church in writing. The messengers chosen to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch were Judas Barsabas and Silas. The latter was an outstanding teacher in the Jerusalem church. The letter sent follows:

GREETINGS TO GENTILE CHRISTIANS IN ANTIOCH, SYRIA AND CILICIA:

We have heard that men from our area (Judea) have troubled Gentile believers in your area (Syria and Cilicia) by saying that they must become Jews before becoming true believers in Jesus Christ. This is not the position of the Jerusalem church. In fact, the Jerusalem church in business conference has formalized our position against such doctrine. We are sending with this letter two Jerusalem church members, Judas and Silas, who will personally assure you of the authenticity of the letter's message. Further, the Holy Spirit himself, in our opinion, agrees with our position that Gentiles are not required to become Jews before becoming believers in Christ Jesus. We do, however, believe that such believers should not eat meat or blood which offends those who have been cultured in the Jewish faith, i.e., meat offered to idols, nor should believing Gentiles practice sexual immorality.

FAREWELL.

IV. The Jerusalem church sent the four with its letter and its blessings to Antioch. At the Antioch church's next business meeting (no doubt called special for this special purpose), the letter from the Jerusalem church was read amidst much joy and elation. Afterward Judas Barsabas returned to Jerusalem, but Silas remained in Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. After a while Paul suggested to Barnabas that they return to the congregations they had established on the missionary trek to the west. When Barnabas expressed the opinion that John Mark be invited to go with them, to perhaps redeem his earlier desertion, Paul disagreed so emphatically that the two agreed that they should go separately, Barnabas with John Mark and Paul with Silas. This dissension among early leaders in God's work seems strange to us, although it should not. That is the reason we have so many different groups who each claims to be in God's will as they disseminate their own "brand" of God's Gospel. I am reminded of God's Word at Phil. 1:15-18 where Paul stated, "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife, and some of good will. One preaches Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to those [true to the Gospel]. - - - What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." Paul and Barnabas were both all right.

Nov. 05, 2000

"Missionaries Beaten And Jailed"
Acts 16

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Geographic overview: Derbe; Lystra; through provinces of Phrygia, Galatia, and Mysia; Troas; Samothracia Island; Neapolis; and Philippi

II. Paul and Silas, after leaving Antioch in Syria, went on through Syria and Cilicia to Derbe and Lystra. At Lystra the missionaries met a young man named Timotheus (Greek) whom Paul appreciated very much. Timothy's mother was Jewish and a believer in Jesus as the Messiah, Savior. His father, however, was a Greek and uncircumcised. Although Timothy was a God fearer and well respected there at Lystra and at Iconium where Paul had been on his first missionary journey with Barnabas, he was uncircumcised like his father. Timothy had become a believer in Jesus Christ, and his mother, Eunice, as well as his grandmother, Lois, were or had been women of profound faith. The young man had become a disciple of the Lord Jesus through Paul's witness, and Paul wanted Timothy to accompany them as they continued their journey westward. Contrary to Paul's own theological position concerning circumcision (See Rom. 4:11-16; I Cor. 7:18-20; Gal. 2:1-5), he circumcised Timothy so that the Jews, who knew that Timothy's father was a Greek and uncircumcised, would not be completely disinterested in either Paul's or Timothy's testimony. Paul, Silas, and Timothy left Lystra and visited the cities in the provinces of Phrygia and Galatia, but God's Holy Spirit would not permit them to enter Asia or Bithynia. They established churches wherever they went building upon the Jewish populous where possible. The churches were founded on faith in Christ Jesus as God's Messiah and grew in numbers day by day. The documentation which Paul presented to each congregation was based upon the deliberations in which the Jerusalem church had concurred with the proposal of the Antioch of Syria church (See Acts 15:23-29) concerning the relationship of Gentile believers in Christ to the law of Moses. The churches which had been established earlier were strengthened by the new understanding.

III. The missionary party then passed by the territory of Mysia and came to Troas, the seaport city on the extreme western tip of Mysia. Here a grave decision had to be made about whether to go farther west or turn back eastward. To go west beyond this point would mean that the Gospel would be preached for the first time in Europe. (Apparently Luke, the author of Acts, joined Paul, Silas, and Timothy at Troas as is indicated by the person of the pronouns "them," "they," and "he," but note that in the latter part of vs. 10 and in vs. 11, "us" and "we" are used.) So, to enter Europe or not to enter Europe with the Gospel was the burning question which Paul must decide. One night during sleep, Paul saw a man from Macedonia (across the water in nearby Europe) asking for help for him and his people. Paul interpreted this dream as an order from the Lord to advance westward to Macedonia and Europe to share the Gospel with the people there. The group immediately made preparation to sail from Troas through

Samothracia to Neapolis and on to Philippi where Paul felt safer, for the Romans maintained a military contingency there. They stayed at Philippi for some time, but a problem existed: No synagogue was available where Jews gathered to worship on the Sabbath days. Although Philippi is inland about nine miles, a river flows by the city to the sea. Along this river women gathered for prayer, and it was to these women that Paul brought the Gospel for its first hearing in Europe.

IV. Among the women who heard Paul preach one Sabbath was a certain business woman, Lydia, from the city of Thyatira in the province of Asia on the Galatian peninsula. Her business had to do with Purple cloth. She heard the Good News about what God was doing for all people through his Son, Jesus Christ. God's Holy Spirit opened her heart, she accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior as did her associates, and they were immersed as a public testimony of their faith in Jesus Christ. Afterwards, Lydia as a new believer, begged Paul to bring the group and stay at her house while they were in Philippi. When she made their willingness to stay a matter of believing the sincerity of her faith in Christ, Paul agreed to stay at her home.

V. Later at one of their worship meetings, a young girl shouted that Paul and his group were sharing Jehovah God's plan of salvation, but her intention was inappropriate. She was employed by those who used her as a fortune-teller or soothsayer for profit. Paul with the power of the Holy Spirit corrected her evil spirit, and she was no longer able to perform her magic activities. Her employer aroused the public and took Paul and Silas before the political authorities as Jewish troublemakers. To quiet the uprising, the authorities had Paul and Silas publicly beaten and placed in the stockade in stocks with the other prisoners. In prison about midnight Paul and Silas, even after the public humiliation, rejoiced in the Lord by praying and singing. As they did so, an earthquake shook the place, opened the prison doors, and unshackled the prisoners. The commotion awakened the jailer who realized what had happened and prepared to take his own life before his superiors did. Paul yelled for him not to do this, because none of the prisoners was gone. The jailer was filled with gratitude and asked Paul to tell him about this plan of salvation he had been talking about. What would he, the jailer, have to do to be in the plan? Paul told him that he and his family could be made right with their Creator by simply trusting God's Son, Jesus Christ. They went to the jailer's house and witnessed to the jailer and his family members. The jailer and his family believed Paul's message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Then, the jailer and his family were immersed to express their faith in Jesus, and the entire group dressed the prisoners' wounds and ate. They rejoiced in their newly found faith in God's salvation. At daylight the judge instructed the guards to release the prisoners and tell them to leave the town, but Paul refused to accept the punishment as untried Roman citizens. The authorities relented, and the group returned to Lydia's home, informed the congregation of the event, and departed.

I. The two missionaries, Paul and Silas, along with Timothy, their associate, left Philippi and went through Amphipolis which is 33 miles southwest of Philippi and about three miles from the sea. Apparently nothing of significance happened there or in the next city they passed through, Apollonia. Apollonia is about 30 miles from Amphipolis and 37 miles from Thessalonica. As in Amphipolis, nothing of consequence happened in Apollonia. However, in Thessalonica Paul and the crew spent three Sabbath days discussing the fact that the Scriptures attest that Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, Savior, necessarily had to suffer, die, and rise from death to qualify as God's promised Savior, Isa. 53. Many of the God fearing Greeks (Gentiles), both men and women, understood and believed the Gospel.

II. After only three weeks, the Jews who did not believe Paul's message made efforts to disqualify him and to insist that the missionaries leave Thessalonica. To do this the disbelieving Jews hired some thugs and punks to rabble the citizenry into a mob. The mob was incited to enter the home of a person named Jason, Rom. 16:21, who had evidently been entertaining the missionaries in his home. At the time the mob invaded Jason's home, Paul and Silas were not there, but they dragged Jason out with some other believers and took them to the mayor and city council. The Jews' accusation was that Jason was harboring a ban of criminals who were breaking Caesar's laws by claiming that one Jesus was a king in opposition to the Caesar in Rome. The city officials were disturbed, of course, but did rescue Jason and the other believers from further harm by the mob.

III. The believers in Thessalonica, in order to save Paul and Silas from harm, sent them on down the coast to the city of Berea about 45 miles southwest of Thessalonica. The missionaries went immediately to the Jewish synagogue and presented the Gospel. The Jews there were less prejudiced (King James, more noble) than those in Thessalonica as indicated by their willingness to examine the Scriptures (Old Testament) concerning Paul's assertions. Among those interested were many God fearing Greeks (Gentiles), both men and women. As one would expect, the Jews in Thessalonica received word that the "troublemakers" were down in Berea "doing the same thing there." They came there and aroused the crowds as they had done in Thessalonica. The decision was made that Paul would sail down to Athens and leave Silas and Timothy in Berea to further establish and encourage the congregation. However, Paul told them that, should he send them word, they should join him hastily.

IV. While Paul waited for Silas and Timothy to finish the work in Berea, he met daily with the leaders of the synagogue in Athens and with anyone who would listen to him in the market place. He met with opposition and unbelief in every instance and thereafter engaged the Greek scholars attending the prestigious Athens

Academy,. These "learned men" considered Paul to be an intellectual dwarf, perhaps because he was unknown to them. Also, he was emphasizing a particular religion rather than the more important (to them) general philosophy, the pursuit of wisdom through logical reasoning rather than factual observation. In particular these philosophers were in one of two philosophical persuasions, Epicureans or Stoics whose positions were briefly as follows:

A. Epicureans - Named for Epicurus (342-271 B.C.), a Greek philosopher whose doctrines sought to find in philosophy a practical way to happiness. True pleasure (physical) and not absolute truth was the end at which he aimed. Experience and not reason was the test on which he relied. The inevitable result of such a system would degenerate by natural decline into brute materialism. Epicurianism in this form was the popular philosophy among the Greeks at the beginning of the Christian era. Its chief opposing philosophy was Stoicism, next noted.

B. Stoics - First systematized by Zeno in about 280 B.C., just following the death of Epicurus. Its name was taken from the portico (Greek, sto) at Athens where Zeno taught. They believed that God is power and creation the results of his exercising that power. All matter, then is passive and is important only as an expression of the divine energy required to create and sustain it. Ethical concerns involve protesting moral indifference. Their chief goodness resulted from living in harmony with nature; and in utmost indifference to pleasure, pain and all external good or evil. One of the chief differences between Stoic and Christian ethics is that Stoicism is based upon pride (in self-made rightness), while Christianity bases genuine rightness on humility, i.e., a complete dependency upon God's mercy through faith in what God himself has done in Jesus Christ. Stoicism's ultimate result is subject to the Fates (chance), but Christians believe that anyone's ultimate disposition is determined entirely as prescribed by God's WORD (Communication), Jesus, John 1-3. Stoics probably come closest to Christian beliefs in: fatherhood of God (as Creator, but not ReCreator, brotherhood (common bonds) of mankind, and the sovereignty of the soul (human spirit).

V. Paul's attempt to reveal the truth of God to these philosophers involved agreeing that the Creator God was indeed unknown by them (their unknown God). Further, God did create all things and therefore should be worshipped directly as God rather than worshipping his creation. Since people are God's creation, made by God in his own image, God is not far away but near everyone. In fact, people are sustained by God. The time has come, however, when God wants all people to turn to him and admit that he has made only one man to be judge of everyone. That man was approved by God's having raised him from death. Paul's referring to ones being raised from death brought scorn and ridicule from the philosophers. They wanted to think more about Paul's message, perhaps because Paul had quoted from one of their poets, Epimenides, in vs. 28, "in him we live, and move, and have our being." Some believed Paul's message and accepted Christ as Lord and Savior. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the Supreme Court, and Damaris, a woman. The ones who believed joined Paul.

I. Paul left Athens alone and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila and his wife Priscilla who were from Pontus, but had later moved from Rome, because Claudius had commanded all Jews to leave Rome. Aquila originally moved to Italy to practice his trade, tent making. Having been driven from Rome as a Jew, he then decided to move to the thriving metropolis of Corinth. Paul no doubt met the couple because he was also a tent maker by trade, II Thes. 3:8, and they worked together and lived in the same area. On the Sabbath days Paul followed his regular custom of going to the Jewish synagogue for worship. At these assemblies he presented Jesus as the Messias (Christ). Many Jews and Gentiles believed his testimony. Silas and Timothy arrived in Corinth after Paul had been there a while, and their presence encouraged Paul to be even bolder in the spreading of the Gospel. The Jews were split in their opinions regarding Jesus and began to be vindictive toward Paul. Paul, in effect said, "I've had it with you, your blood (life) be accountable to your own choice. Beginning now and hereafter, I will work with the Gentiles among you." Earlier, Paul had reasoned with both the Jews and Gentiles before the Jews became disgruntled, denied that Jesus could be the Messiah.

II. As a result of his decision, Paul stopped attending the Jewish synagogue, but instead went next door to the home of one Titius Justus who was a man who revered Jehovah God. God's Spirit won the heart of Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, through Paul's witness. Crispus' entire family believed in Jesus and was immersed personally by Paul, I Cor. 1:14, and this public testimony moved many other Corinthians to accept Jesus as their Messiah, Savior. Paul apparently became somewhat discouraged during this eighteen months here in Corinth, for the Lord appeared to him one night in a dream (vision). In the vision Jesus told Paul not to become afraid to continue testifying to God's saving grace. There are many in Corinth who are to become citizens of the kingdom of heaven through your witnessing. Continue what you have been doing, because I am depending upon you in this place. Jesus' vision is the reason Paul stayed as long as he did at Corinth on this visit during the second missionary journey.

III. Luke here ties his account in Acts to the political situation in the Achaian Province in AD 53. Gallio was the Roman proconsul under the emperor Claudius. Gallio was the brother of Lucius Seneca, the noted Greek philosopher. The proconsul was either killed in AD 65 by Nero or was a suicide, historians disagree on the exact cause of death. [I believe that Nero ordered him to commit suicide in favor of the teachings of Epicureanism. Seneca was a Stoic and advisor to the Roman emperor. WA] During Gallio's proconsulate, the Jews in Achaia decided, through concerted action, to get rid of Paul for the sake of their religion, once and for always. The Jews compiled a case against

the missionary and took him to the court of Gallio. The chief charge was that Paul was persuading people to worship God contrary to the law. The legal technicality which the Jewish leaders were trying to present was that Christianity was not a licensed religion according to Roman law, i.e., Christianity was not a legitimate sect under the umbrella of Judaism such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, etc. The Jews were saying that these Christians are not part of our religion which is recognized and licensed under Roman law but a new religion which must be licensed on its own. [In the USA today the like argument would be whether a given denomination could receive donations which would be exempt from federal taxes. WA] After the Jews had presented their case and even before Paul had made the defense, Gallio could understand that the case before him was a religious dispute. The proconsul said that the Jewish case did not pertain to the infringement of Roman law, but had to do with illusive names and other words relating to various Jewish traditions and customs. The Jews would have to present a case that explicitly involved trespassing Roman law such as an obvious wrong doing, like wicked lewdness. Gallio refused to hear the case further stating that his authority was under Roman law not in matters having to do with differences within religious beliefs. The differences being presented to him should be settled out of court by the parties themselves. "Take care of the problems yourselves," he said. As a consequence of these proceedings, the crowd took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the local synagogue and successor to Crispus who had become a Christian believer, and beat him right before the judgment seat. Gallio did nothing to constrain the crowd.

IV. Sometime later Paul left the church at Corinth with Priscilla and Aquila to return to home at Antioch. On their way to Ephesus, Paul stopped in Cenchreae, the western port of Corinth, and had his head shaved to indicate a vow he had made. Luke does not mention why the vow was made, but possibly he had vowed to be in Jerusalem for Passover. Ephesus was merely a stop over for the ship on which Paul was taking to Caesarea. However, Paul did attend the synagogue briefly and witness there. He left Priscilla and Aquila at Ephesus, and even though the believers asked him to stay longer, he told them that he needed to be in Jerusalem at Passover time. He did promise, as he boarded a ship sailing for Caesarea, that he would return if God permitted. After arriving at Caesarea, he visited the Jerusalem church and then went to his home church, Antioch in Syria. Luke then introduces Paul's third missionary journey by stating that he stayed in Antioch for a time and then went again through Galatia and Phrygia encouraging the churches there.

V. After Paul left Ephesus, a man named Apollos came there and was teaching the message of John the Immerser: confessing ones sins, repenting, and being immersed. Aquila and Priscilla instructed him that Jesus, God's Messiah, had come. God's grace in Jesus Christ is God's final WORD, and therefore pleasing God involves confessing Jesus as God's Savior and being immersed in Jesus' name is now God's ultimate plan of spiritual salvation.

I. At the end of Acts, Chapter 18, a man from Alexander, Egypt by the name of Apollos came to Ephesus. He was an Old Testament scholar and an excellent public speaker. He had a major theological handicap in that he knew only what God had done through John the Immerser. Apollos knew that people were in need of God's forgiveness, but not that God had sacrificed his only Son for the restitution of mankind's sins. Aquila and Priscilla had heard him and further enlightened his knowledge of Jesus' having finalized God's plan of salvaging people's spirits. Now here in Acts, Chap. 19, Luke tells of twelve men who had accepted John the Immerser's testimony as presented by Apollos in Corinth when John proclaimed God's message of repentance. John had baptized them. These men were in Ephesus when Paul arrived from a portion of his third missionary journey through the provinces of Galatia and Phrygia (see Acts 18:23; 19:1). God had not sent the special outpouring of his Holy Spirit during John's ministry, and therefore these twelve men had not heard either of God's Son, Jesus Christ, or his Comforter, the Holy Spirit. Their commitment (immersion) to God was only to John's message of repentance (personal guilt and need for forgiveness). Well, Paul informed the twelve of the Gospel of God in Christ, and when they believed in Jesus' power, they committed themselves (were immersed again in Jesus' name) to Jesus as their Savior and Lord of life and were filled with the Holy Spirit. After this confession of their faith in Jesus as their Savior, they received the apostolic sign of entering God's kingdom, i.e., speaking in tongues other than their native language. [At this point and since this is the last mention in Acts of an incident of believers' speaking in tongues, I have chosen to review these occurrences. - WA]

II. One of the SIGNS of the New Covenant was the sharing of God's new message with other than ones own tongue, i.e., in another language, or, to pray, in a mysterious (angelic or spiritual) language (see Isa. 28:11-12; Mk 16:17-20; [Acts 28:3-6] Acts 2:1-18; 10:44-48; 19:1-7; I Cor. 13:1; 14:1-4,18-24,33,40)

- A. The original, New Covenant use of foreign languages was unique and for a very special purpose, the birthing of Christ's bride the ecclesia, Matt. 22:1-3; Rev. 19:7-10.
1. The languages were spoken by believers in Christ through a special anointing of God's Holy Spirit.
 2. The languages spoken were of nations other than the native languages of the speakers themselves.
 3. The Christians were miraculously given the ability by God's Holy Spirit to speak languages of the foreigners present, languages the speakers did not know through normal assimilation and learning.
 4. The message given by the miracle was to communicate what God was doing for mankind through Jesus the Messiah.
 5. The language miracle was a fulfillment of a promise of

- God during the Old Covenant, Acts 2:16-18. (Joel 2:28+32)
- B. Early abuse of speaking in angelic tongues in the church, as given by Paul (God's Word) in I Cor., Chaps. 12-14.
1. In discussing the variety of spiritual gifts, Paul mentions that apparently some members felt that their own gifts somehow made them spiritually superior, I Cor. 12:25.
 2. The Scripture makes it clear that not every believer, even during the apostolic period, was speaking in angelic tongues, I Cor. 12:30.
 3. Paul asserts that properly speaking in angelic tongues should be considered prayer, i.e., conversing with God, and that such activity is for self-help, not for helping the church, I Cor. 14:1-4. The better way to speak in worship services is to speak in ones normal language, I Cor. 14:7-25.
 4. Speaking in angelic languages was creating confusion in the church worship services, and God is not the Creator of confusion, I Cor. 14:33,40.
 5. EVERY BELIEVER in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord receives the Holy Spirit and is sealed by that Spirit, Acts 2:3-4,38; I Cor. 12:1-4; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30.

III. For three months after Paul arrived at Ephesus, he witnessed in the Jewish synagogue. Some Jews were so divisive that Paul left the synagogue with the believers in Jesus and for two years lectured at the school of Tyrannus. During these two years God approved of Paul's message by performing many miracles through the missionary. In an attempt to contradict Paul's message, the Jewish leaders, including seven sons of one Sceva, the chief priest in Ephesus, were using the name of Jesus as Lord to try to do miracles. This pseudofaith in Jesus backfired, and the result was that Paul's message was magnified throughout the area.

IV. As the Jews had attempted to use Jesus' name (power) to further their own message and were confounded, the Ephesus believers in a false goddess were also confounded. The Ephesians worshipped Diana (Latin) or Artemas (Greek) represented by a huge temple erected in her honor. Evidently she was the outgrowth of religious sentiment associated with a meteor which had supposedly fallen from Jupiter, husband of the Roman God, Juno, queen of heaven. A silversmith, Demetrius, was especially disturbed when his trade was threatened by Paul's message of monotheism and against gods made with men's hands. The Jews as well had become a like target of the Ephesian wrath, because all knew that the Jews were also against manmade gods. The Jews had a spokesman, one Alexander, who was ridiculed by the people of Ephesus in the mob incited by Demetrius. For two hours the mob chanted their allegiance to their goddess Diana, and Paul would have entered the fray except that some believers dissuaded him because of his plan to return to Jerusalem. The city clerk persuaded the Ephesians that their god Diana was based upon a natural phenomenon (the meteor from heaven which was undeniable) and was, therefore, secure from all criticism.

12-10-00

"Paul Continues Third Journey"
Acts 20

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Geographic synopsis of Chap. 20: Began at Ephesus in western Asia and left for Macedonia and Achaia (Greece). Intention to sail for Syria was thwarted by Jewish plot so began return to Syria through Macedonia from Philippi by ship to Troas in Asia (Mysia), to Assos, Mitylene, Chios, Samos (Port there called Trogyllium), and at Miletus, at end of Chap. 20, c. AD 57-58.

II. This chapter begins at Ephesus with the Demetrius uprising settled down and with Paul meeting with the believers to say farewell. After the emotional good-bye, he left Ephesus and went to Macedonia and the cities there. Luke does not name the stops Paul made, but he does state that after entering Achaia (Greece), he stayed there three months. [It is generally agreed by Bible scholars that these three months were spent in Corinth during which Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans, and I agree.] As Paul left for his return to Asia, he had with him seven men from the area: Sopater of Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica, Gaius and Timotheus of Derbe, and Tychius and Trophimus of Asia. Paul evidently stayed at Philippi until joined by Luke (See first person plural pronouns "us" and "we" in vss. 5 and 6.) The other seven men continued on to Troas and waited for Paul and Luke there.

III. Paul and Luke sailed from Philippi just after the days of unleavened bread (Passover, about the middle of our April). It took the couple five days to go from Philippi to Troas where they stayed for seven days. Paul was, of course, invited to speak to the Troas believers on the first day of the week (Sunday, the Lord's Day) that they stayed. At the worship service the Lord's Supper was observed, and since this was the last day before leaving for Assos, Paul was still speaking at midnight. Ample light was provided (probably candles) in the upstairs (third floor) where the believers congregated. The room was filled to overflowing, and people were even sitting in the windows! A young man by the name of Eutychus fell sound asleep which probably would have been no problem except that he had one of the window seats! Eutychus not only fell asleep, he also fell to the ground outside the building. The commotion surrounding his falling broke up the regular worship service, and Paul went down and revived him. Assuring the group that Eutychus was again well, Paul ate with them and continued discussing church concerns with them until daylight. As Paul and the missionary entourage left, everyone marveled that the young man who fell from the window was alive and well after so serious an accident.

IV. When the group went to board the ship at Troas sailing for Assos, Paul, for a reason Luke does not disclose, decided to go overland by foot. At Assos he rejoined the group, and they went in turn to Mitylene, Chios, Samos (Trogyllium), and Miletus. No doubt Paul would have stopped at Ephesus under

ordinary circumstances, for he had spent three years there and had many dear friends in the city. But he did not have time if he would be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost is only fifty days after the days of unleavened bread when he had been at Philippi. Some three or four weeks had already lapsed since he was in Philippi.)

V. At Miletus Paul sent messengers back to Ephesus asking the church leaders (elders) there to come down to Miletus and visit with him. The distance between the two cities was about thirty miles, and by the time the messengers went and the church leaders came, perhaps three days had passed. Some question whether it would have been better simply to have gone by Ephesus at the first. There are several reasons why such did not happen. First, Paul did not have a private ship at his command. The pilot of the ship was no doubt under orders concerning freight loading and discharging at the various ports en route. Secondly, one of the reasons Paul was returning to Jerusalem was to deliver an offering to the needy Christians there. (Acts 24:17; Rom. 15:25-27 I Cor. 16:14) He wanted to be sure that every fellowship which he had established would have a chance to contribute to the Jerusalem collection, hence a need for personal contact with the Ephesus fellowship. Thirdly, there could have been a need for the ship to be at Miletus for several days. Note that it is located on a rather large stream which goes back inland some distance. The information which Paul shared with the church leaders contains many very personal experiences. He reminds them that his long stay at Ephesus was a period of much humiliation for him, with a constant pressure from Jewish opposition, tears and temptations. His service there was exhausting for everyone, Jews, Gentiles, and even door-to-door evangelism, with the most important message that God has for all people: repentance toward God and faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. Paul admits that Christians' testimonies in all the places he visits are that trouble lies ahead for him in Jerusalem, but he confesses that his mission there is worth more than even his own life. The missionary then cautions the church leaders that they are to take their responsibilities very seriously, because after Paul is gone, there will appear among them ones who will seek their own monetary gain at the expense of the truth of God's grace in Christ. He had supported himself by his own labor (tent making). Jesus is quoted by Paul at this point as having said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." This direct quote is not found in the Gospels or elsewhere in the Bible. One should remember that Paul after his miraculous conversion from Judaism to the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, on the road to Damascus, spent three years in Arabia where he, no doubt, learned many things directly from the Lord, Gal. 1:11-24. Paul then told the church leaders from Ephesus that he would not be seeing them again in the flesh because of his plans to go to Jerusalem, Rome, and, Lord willing, even to Spain. He had told the Roman believers as much in the letter he had written to them recently from Corinth. In that letter he also mentions that he would be taking the offering to Jerusalem, Rom. 15:24-28.

I. Geographic summary of Chap. 21: Left Miletus for Coos, to Rhodes, to Patara, by Cyprus, to Tyre in Syria, to Ptolemais, to Caesarea, and to Jerusalem: End of Paul's third journey.

II. After saying good-bye to the believers at Miletus, Paul and the group boarded ship and sailed directly to Coos, Rhodes, and to Patara. At Patara they boarded a larger ship sailing for the Phenicia area. The ship sailed by Cyprus on the south of the island and docked at Tyre in south Syria where its cargo had been sent. They sought out followers of Christ in Tyre and lodged with them for seven days. The believers of Tyre (whole families) went with the mission group down to the dock area where they all knelt and prayed especially for Paul's safety upon arriving at Jerusalem. When they had first arrived, the church members had related to the travelers how explosive the conditions were in Jerusalem for Jews and Christians. Their ship sailed south down the coast to Ptolemais where they spent one day with the believers, and the next day they came to Caesarea where they lodged with the evangelist, Philip, who was one of the original seven servants (deacons) elected by the Jerusalem congregation to care for the day-to-day physical matters of the church's business. By this time Philip and his wife had four unmarried daughters who had become prophets (preachers). (See Joel 2:28; Acts 2:16-17.) The group stayed with Philip for several days, and during their stay the prophet Agabus came to Caesarea from Judaea (Jerusalem area). Agabus had a message for Paul which he wanted to clarify explicitly. [Note Agabus' status as a prophet earlier at Acts 11:28 regarding an upcoming drought in the area of Judaea.] To make his point, Agabus took Paul's girdle (belt) and tied his own hands and feet with it, signifying that such would surely happen to Paul upon his arrival at Jerusalem. Further, he stated that such bondage would happen at the hands of the Jews who would place him under the authority of the Gentiles (Romans). After this graphic demonstration of Paul's destiny, both those traveling with him (including Luke) and also the local congregation there in Caesarea, with tears, begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. Paul's answer was that, though they were appreciated for their concern and attempt to change his mind (break his heart), he was absolutely determined to go in the name of the Lord Jesus to Jerusalem even if his presence there brought about his physical demise. When his friends understood his determined mental state, they agreed that Paul's going must be the Lord's will. After the period was ended for their stay in Caesarea, the group loaded their baggage and headed off southeast toward Jerusalem, about 65 miles. Some of the believers of Caesarea went with them along with one Mnason, native of Cyprus, who now lived in Jerusalem. They were to lodge at Mnason's home while in Jerusalem.

III. At Jerusalem the church members received Paul and the group with open arms, and the following day James, the Lord's

brother and pastor of the Jerusalem congregation, along with the other church leaders (elders, deacons) met with the missionary Paul and his group. Paul and the others with him explained how God was working through them to bring believers in the Lord Jesus into his kingdom. James and the other church leaders glorified the Lord for the good news about the expansion of God's kingdom among the Gentiles. But immediately following the rejoicing, James and the local group related how some of the believing Jews (Judaizers) were still so devoted to Moses' Law that they openly opposed Paul's missionary activities among the Gentiles. [Note that Peter is not mentioned as being in the Jerusalem church at this time. I believe that he was no longer acceptable there, because he had taken a firm stand that God was, in fact, accepting Gentiles into his kingdom. See Acts 10:34 and Gal. 2:11-21 for the basis of my belief. WA] James told Paul that the Judaizers were aware of Paul's lack of instructions to new Gentile believers about circumcising their male infants or keeping the other customs of the Jewish faith. [See Jesus' teaching about the coming difference between God's calling out the ecclesia and maintaining the Jewish Law (rituals) at Matt. 9:16-17; Mk 2:27-28. WA] What should be done therefore to neutralize the opposition of the Judaizers to Paul's presence in Jerusalem? James outlined a plan to satisfy the opposition to Paul: they (the Jerusalem congregational leaders) had found four men with whom Paul was to satisfy the Law's requirements for purification by taking a vow and shaving his head with them. This procedure was to indicate publicly that Paul was, in practice, continuing to meet the requirements of Moses' Law. The ritual was to require seven days for completion (See Numb. 6:9,18,24-26) and to be registered at the beginning with the Temple priest, note also Acts 16:3.

IV. Just before the seven-day period was to end, some Asian (Ephesus area) Jews recognized Paul in the Temple and made a public pronouncement to the crowds there that Paul was polluting the Temple by bringing a Gentile, an Ephesian, into the sector where only Jews were allowed. The news spread quickly, the doors to the Jewish area were closed, and Paul was in danger of his life. The commanding Roman officer saw what was happening and rescued Paul by binding him with two chains and placing him in protective custody. The crowd began yelling accusations against Paul and demanding that he be punished. With the crowd following, the Roman officer led Paul from the Temple toward the military headquarters (castle) nearby. To enter the building a stairway was taken to the entrance. There Paul spoke to the captain in Greek, and the officer was surprised by his linguistic abilities. The captain asked Paul about his citizenship status. Had he recently led an uprising against the Romans? Paul told him that he was, in fact, a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia. He then asked the captain for permission to address the crowd and was granted his request. Paul addressed the crowd in Hebrew (probably Aramaic). The crowd came to a quiet hush to hear what this object of their contempt had to say in their language!

I. Paul, with the permission of the commanding Roman officer, addressed the antagonistic crowd of fellow-Jews by first calling them "men, brethren, and fathers" (today we would say, "gentlemen,"), because there were no women in that area of the Temple. [Oddly enough, Paul had heard Stephen address the Jewish leaders with the same greeting on the day Stephen was stoned to death for his confession of Jesus as the Messiah (Savior), Acts 7:2. I believe that this experience was indelibly fixed in Paul's memory and gave impetus to his later conversion and loyalty to Christ as an apostle. WA] Now Paul stands before his own people, the Jews, and announced that what he was about to tell them was his defense for his present position.

II. Paul begins his testimony by properly identifying himself as a Jew born in Tarsus, Cilicia, who had his advanced religious training entirely, i.e., brought up, under the tutelage of Gamaliel. Gamaliel held a doctorate in Jewish Law and also had an excellent reputation among the Jewish scholars in Jerusalem. The implication in Paul's remarks was that he himself was an attentive student of Gamaliel and had learned in "perfect manner" (thoroughly) the Law of the fathers and oral traditions. In other words, Paul considered himself not only well versed in the Law (Pentateuch), prophets, and poetic literature of the Old Testament, but also knowledgeable of the interpretations of that same material which had become a written part of Jewish tradition. Further, Paul had demonstrated a zeal for keeping God's will even as the Jewish leaders among them were so doing even in this very instance. The display of Paul's religious enthusiasm had been so real and unequivocal that he had personally sought out those who were persuaded to follow Jesus (the Way), in order for them to be imprisoned and thereby stop their "apostasy." In the course of routing out these "religious fanatics" (The high priest himself as well as the entire Sanhedrin could attest to Paul's activities in this regard.), Paul said that he had, on one such occasion with proper letters of authorization from Jerusalem headquarters, gone down to Damascus to arrest and bring back to Jerusalem those there who were followers of the Way. Paul admitted that at the time he thought that he was doing God a favor by helping stamp out this "heresy." (See John 16:1-3; Acts 26:9.) As he neared Damascus on this occasion, at about noon time, suddenly a brilliant light from heaven surrounded him. The light forced Paul to the ground, and in this fallen position, he heard a voice calling his name and asking him why he was persecuting the very one who was speaking to him. Paul questioned the one calling him by asking him to identify himself. The voice said that he was the one whose memory Paul had been trying to obliterate, Jesus of Nazareth. [This appearing of the Lord Jesus to Paul was considered by Paul to be the same type of experience as that of Jesus' appearing to Peter, James, and all the others after the resurrection, I Cor. 9:1; 15:3-9.] Those who were with

Paul on the way to Damascus did not understand the voice but did see the bright light which had knocked him down. Paul asked the Lord what he should do. Jesus told him to continue into Damascus and there he would be told what he should be doing. Because the new disciple could not see, those in the party led him into the city. In Damascus a religiously devout man named Ananias came to Paul and addressed him as Brother Saul. At that moment he could see again and was told by Ananias what his mission was to be. The God of the Jews had chosen Paul to know his will by being the Just One's witness to all people of what Jesus would tell him. Paul was then immersed calling upon the name of Lord Jesus. After a long time (three years Gal. 1:10-24), Paul did return to Jerusalem, and there in the Temple he was deep in the Spirit (in a trance, II Cor. 12:1-12) and was told by the Lord to leave Jerusalem where he would not be welcome. Paul expressed some concern about whether the Jewish believers would ever listen to him since he had persecuted and imprisoned them. He confessed that he had been a part of Stephen's martyrdom and had personally participated in his death, Acts 7:59-8:1. Evidently the Lord agreed that Paul would be more effective with people who were not Jews, and so he said that he would send Paul therefore to the GENTILES.

III. When Paul mentioned Gentiles in his defense, his antagonistic listeners would hear him no more. They yelled to the Roman commander that Paul was not worthy of life but should be killed. They expressed their venomous hatred of Paul by taking off their clothes and throwing them with dust into the air. Obviously Paul's safety was in jeopardy, and the chief captain (commander) gave orders to take him into the military fort adjacent to the Temple. The officer was still not sure why the Jews were so upset. He was about to torture Paul for the truth by having him beaten. When Paul was taken away by the soldiers for the torture, he asked the one in charge whether it was legal to administer such treatment to a Roman citizen without due process under Roman law. The captain in charge of the punishment did not miss the import of the prisoner's question. He immediately passed the word along to the commander who asked Paul directly whether he was a Roman citizen. The prisoner assured the commander that he was, in fact, a free born citizen of the Roman Empire. The chief dismissed the torture detail, but was left with a dilemma: if he punished Paul as requested by the Jewish leaders, he would be doing an illegal act (his Roman superiors would retaliate), and if he released Paul to the Jewish crowd, they would surely kill him as they had Stephen. The commander's decision was to keep the prisoner in protective custody (but remove chains) and summon the Jewish leaders (the Sanhedrin) the next day for a council meeting to consider the problem. He did this and brought Paul before them. What defense will the great missionary give before the same Sanhedrin that condemned his (and our) Lord and the first Christian martyr, Stephen? And what was the result of Paul's testimony before them? We will examine the ongoing life of the channel, Paul, of much of God's Word to us next week.

I. Paul stands before the chief council of Jewish authority, the Sanhedrin. The Roman military commander had made the decision for Paul to be examined thus so that the real reason for Jewish opposition to Paul could be established. The missionary began his remarks by addressing the council as "men and BRETHERN." The high priest at that time, Ananias, perhaps thought that the use of BRETHERN was insubordinate for a "low-life" like Paul. He therefore commanded that Paul be struck in the face (a most humiliating form of reprimand) to prove Paul's inferiority before such an august group of leaders. This act of insolence riled Paul's temper, and he said that God would so treat the person who had ordered him to be stricken. In fact, Paul referred to the high priest openly as a tomb which, though appearing pleasant in appearance externally, was nevertheless a covering for one no longer alive. (See Matt. 23:27-28.) Paul's intent was to pronounce him to be a hypocrite and deceitful person. At this point someone near Paul asked him whether he should show more respect for the Jewish high priest? Paul acknowledged that such action was contrary to the Law (Exod. 22:28), but that he did not know that the high priest had given the order. At this time Paul had been away from Jerusalem for several years, and Ananias had been made high priest by Herod Agrippa I. He served as high priest until AD 58.

II. Paul did not apologize for his statement against the high priest, but he did, in this interlude in the chief matter before the group, note that the Sanhedrin was still made up equally of about one part Pharisees and one part Sadducees. He then called the group's attention to his own situation there. I am a Pharisee and a second generation one at that! Actually, I would not be here if I had not openly expressed my belief in the resurrection of the dead. (He had said the day before that he had talked with Jesus, the Messiah, after that Jesus had been crucified and killed, thus Jesus had been resurrected to life.) Luke then reminds readers that Paul's having witnessed to the trance (vision) in which one spoke to him was contrary to the belief of the Sadducees but not contrary to the belief of the Pharisees. Obviously the Pharisees would agree with the position, in principle, with a fellow Pharisee regarding the possibilities of messengers and spirits being sent to men. The Pharisees said that they found no fault with Paul's position, i.e., he could have had an experience with a spirit even if with a different person than Paul thought. In fact, the Pharisees stated that fighting Paul could be, in effect, fighting against God himself.

III. The dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees was so intense that the Roman commander sensed that Paul's physical well-being was again in trouble. He then rescued Paul by bringing him back into the Roman bastion. The missionary spent the second night in custody where Jesus appeared to him and

encouraged him by commending him for his witness there in Jerusalem and promising him that he would also be permitted to witness in Rome. We know that Rome was included in Paul's hope, but note that the Lord does not include Spain, another hope of Paul, Acts 19:21; Rom. 15:24.

IV. The next day a self-made posse of Jews vowed to each other that they would neither eat nor drink until Paul's life had been taken. The posse was made up of over forty men. The conspiring group knew that their scheme could not be done without the cooperation of the Jewish leaders. They shared their plan with the chief priest and elders and asked them to request that the Roman commander again convene and continue the hearing which had been held the day before, telling him that there were further unsolved problems which needed more attention. The plot called for Paul's death to occur between the castle and the council chamber of the Sanhedrin. The Scriptures do not give many details about certain aspects of some of the main participants in the establishment and early affairs of the church, but in vs. 16 of this chapter, Luke reveals that Paul had a sister who lived in Jerusalem and who had a son (Paul's nephew). The nephew learned of the subterfuge planned against his Uncle Paul and was able to visit Paul in the prison and divulge the secret to him. Paul told one of the guards watching him to inform the commanding officer that his nephew had an urgent message for the commander. The commander listened to the boy's information and believed what he said. The nephew was told by the commander to be sure and not tell anyone of what he knew of the plot, and especially that the commander knew of it. The commander promptly called out a contingent of military personnel to change plans for Paul's disposition. He marshalled two hundred foot soldiers, two hundred spear carriers, and seventy cavalrymen on horseback to ferry Paul to Caesarea. There Paul was to be delivered to Felix, the supreme Roman authority in the area and who was headquartered on the coast at Caesarea. Paul was provided a horse and the entire military contingency left before daylight. What happened to the forty conspirators?

V. A letter was sent to Felix by Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander, to accompany Paul and the entourage as follows:
This man [Paul] was captured by the Jews who tried to kill him. I presented him to the Jewish Sanhedrin, and the discussion there led me to believe that the problems consist of merely religious matters, not broken Roman law. I learned afterwards that a big group of Jews had sworn to kill him. I have sent him to you and am informing his accusers that any further action will be in Caesarea. Sincerely, Claudius Lysias
The entire military force went with Paul to Antipatris (about half way), but only the seventy cavalrymen went on to Caesarea with him the next day. The rest of the force returned to Jerusalem from there. Felix received Paul and Lysias' letter, and when the governor learned that Paul was from Celicia, he told the missionary that he would stay in the stockade until his accusers came for his case.

Jan. 14 2001

"Paul Before Felix"
Acts 24

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. It took the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem just five days to learn and follow through on the fact that Claudius Lysias, the chief Roman authority in Jerusalem, had rescued Paul and taken him to the next Roman authority in Caesarea, Governor Felix. They came down from Jerusalem to Caesarea well prepared to present their case against Paul. The high priest himself, Ananias, along with all the elders (Sanhedrin) and their chief spokesman, Tertulus, assembled in Caesarea. The latter was apparently not only a good speaker but well versed in Roman and Jewish law. He also knew well the political aspects of the precarious relationship of the Jews and the power emanating from Rome. Tertulus was, in effect, a Roman lawyer retained by the Sanhedrin to present its cases before Roman tribunals. Felix was the Roman procurator of all Judea who had been appointed by the emperor Claudius in 53 AD. He ruled the province in a mean, cruel and profligate manner. His period of office was full of troubles and seditions. At the end of Felix's term, Nero had become the emperor of Rome and appointed Porcius Festus to succeed him. Felix's wife was Drusilla, a daughter of Herod Agrippa I and of a Jewish mother. She was Felix's third wife and had been persuaded by him to leave her husband to marry him.

II. The court, with Felix presiding, called upon the Jews from Jerusalem to present their case against Paul. Tertulus took the floor and began their case. His first statement was the customary flattering the judge, in this case Felix. He stated that the Jews were extremely pleased with Felix's handling of the political affairs in Judea, having maintained the peace and performed many very worthy deeds to support the general welfare of the Jewish people. The Jews accept your grateful treatment with gratitude. Now, another matter has arisen which needs the noble procurator's attention. It is not our intent to be tiresome or boring to you, but I plead with you to be lenient (merciful) with us in your judgment. The Jews have discovered this man [Paul] to be annoying by encouraging our people to revolt against the Jewish people's religious customs and teachings. Not only has he perpetuated negative feelings against us in Jerusalem but also throughout the (Roman) world. In fact, he is the prime ringleader of a spurious religious sect referred to as the Nazarenes. What has brought his antiJewish activities to our attention at this time is his recent profaning the holy place of worship for all Jews, the Temple. We felt that his having profaned the Temple made him properly subject to our law. But before we could exercise such judgment, the commander in Jerusalem high-handedly took him from our jurisdiction, forcing us to bother you with the matter. Tertulus then turned to the assembled Sanhedrin and asked whether he'd properly presented their case, and they agreed unanimously with his presentation of their case against Paul.

III. After Tertulus had rested his case against Paul, the missionary was given the floor by Governor Felix. Paul then followed the pattern of presenting one's case by referring to Felix's long years of service

as having been a judge over the Roman affairs in Judea. This long service made Paul glad to have him sitting in judgment, and as a defendant before him, he believed that he (Paul) would be fully heard. Paul said that less than two weeks prior to this trial date he had gone up to Jerusalem to worship God. No one found him misbehaving in the Temple, inciting anyone to create disorder either there or, in the synagogues (schools), or even in the city anywhere. What has been said against me here is hearsay information that has not been proved, i.e., the accusation against me is not based upon factual evidence. I will admit here, however, that I do myself practice and teach others to believe and live after the Way, a position which these Jewish leaders consider heresy. I still believe the facts presented in the Old Testament (the law and the prophets) and worship the God who gave those documents to our Jewish forefathers. The hope I now enjoy is based upon the same promises which my accusers here hold, namely that there is to be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. My conscience is absolutely clear in my relationship with God and men. For many years I have been living away from Jerusalem but have come back from time to time to worship, and on this most recent trip, I also brought money to help the needy among my nation (the Jews). In my travels throughout the area of Asia, I have met many Jews who also come to Jerusalem to worship. This last time as I was being purified in the Temple, some of these Asian Jews saw me, and, although I was doing nothing illegal, they wrongfully accused me of improper conduct according to Jewish law. These Jews should be the ones accusing me of impropriety, or the Jewish leaders should be specific about whether I acted incorrectly before them at the hearing at Jerusalem. Perhaps the one thing there which disturbed some of them was that I emphasized the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Some of them did take offense at that. I hereby rest my case.

IV. When both sides had concluded, Felix, who knew much about the new Christian position, decided that he would defer a verdict for Paul until he could summon the commander, Lysias, from whom he wanted additional evidence. Felix held Paul under guard but gave him considerable freedom as a prisoner. One restriction he did impose, none of his family or friends could see him. After some time Felix with his wife Drusilla sent for Paul for a visit. Paul gave the two God's plan of spiritual salvation through faith in Christ, including the need for repentance, a temperate lifestyle, and sure judgment against those who refused to accept the Way. Felix was convicted in the truth of Paul's testimony and trembled in concern, but he elected not to accept God's salvation through Jesus Christ. He did say that when the occasion presented itself, he would call for Paul again for further consultation. Luke tells us that Felix had an ulterior motive, he hoped that Paul would offer him a bribe to release him. For two years Felix, in concurrence with his successor, Portius Festus, left Paul imprisoned to please the Jews. [Next week, Lord willing, we will see how Paul adapts to the next step in his imprisonment under the next Roman in command, Portius Festus.]

Jan. 21, 2001

"Paul's Case Continues"
Acts 25

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Paul had been in custody for two years under Felix's command in Caesarea when Portius Festus came to succeed him (came into Felix's room). Festus lost no time in checking into Jerusalem personally after coming to his new command in Caesarea. Just three days after arriving in Israel, he went up to the capital of the Jews. He asked the chief priest how things were doing, and the first concern he shared with the new procurator was about what could be done with "that troublemaker, Paul" whom Felix had been holding as prisoner. The chief priest spoke against Paul to the current new Roman appointee asking Festus back to Jerusalem. Luke reveals to us that the real reason the priest wanted Paul back in the holy city was for a chance to kill him while in transit. Festus refused to fill their wish but told the Jewish priest that he and his fellow Jewish leaders should come again to Caesarea with him to retry Paul on any charges of wickedness he had committed.

II. Chap. 25:6-11 After about a ten-day stay in Jerusalem, Festus returned to Caesarea, and the next day after returning convened a court session and summoned Paul to appear there. The trial in Chap. 24 under Felix was essentially repeated now under Portius Festus. The Jews from Jerusalem testified many unproven charges against Paul. Then Paul again stated that he had neither desecrated the Temple, the Caesar in Rome, or any other thing whatsoever. Festus, in order to please the Jews, asked Paul whether he would agree to return to Jerusalem for trial there before the Jews where Festus would preside. At this point and after all that had happened for some two years, Paul had reached his limit of tolerance and patience. He told Festus that as a Roman citizen he was claiming his prerogative of appealing to the Roman supreme court. He told Festus that he had done no wrong against the Jews and reminded Festus that he himself also very well knew the truth of the situation. If, Paul contended, I am worthy of death, then deliverance to the Jews is tantamount to having such happen, but since such is not the case (that he was guilty of any wrong), I APPEAL UNTO CAESAR.

III. Chap. 25:12 Now Festus was presented with a serious dilemma: He had not enough, if any, proof of Paul's guilt according to Roman law, but he felt severe pressure from the Jewish leadership to stop Paul's efforts to teach people throughout the entire Mediterranean basin, doctrines which they believed to be against their own religious welfare. (One need not become a Jew before satisfying God's will.) Such a religious dispute could get out of hand and develop into a general insurrection against Roman authority in the area. Festus knew that the Temple that Herod the Great had built was a stabilizing factor which was jealously guarded by the Jews. Any attack on it was a potential undermining of peace. The new procurator's immediate action was to consult with his advisors. Afterwards he pronounced his decision to honor Paul's appeal directly to the Roman Emperor.

IV. Chap. 25:13-22 [Coming into the narrative now is the newly

made king, Herod Agrippa II, and his sister, Bernice. His authority was, as king, ranked supreme over all others in the area of Judea, including Festus. Agrippa II was authorized to appoint the Jewish high priest, i.e., even the high priest of the Jews served in that position at his pleasure. Bernice was the eldest daughter of Agrippa I and therefore sister of Agrippa II. That Bernice and her brother King Agrippa II lived in an incestuous relationship was common knowledge in the area. By religion they were Jews, as was Festus. Bernice later became the mistress of the Roman Emperor Titus. She was also the elder sister of Drusilla who was the mistress of Felix. I make this information a part of the disclosure at this point to indicate the precarious moral situation the Jews were in in relating to the local Roman authorities. WA] After some time had passed, Agrippa and Bernice came to see the newly appointed procurator of Judea, Festus, at Caesarea. During the visit Festus told King Agrippa about the prisoner whom Felix had left with a legal case yet unsettled, Paul. Further, he said that the Jewish leaders wanted him dead, but he had withheld the death penalty in keeping with Roman law which states that one accused of a crime has the right to face his accusers and state his own case in their presence. Festus told Agrippa that he had summoned his accusers, but their accusations had to do only with religious matters (superstitions), not infractions of Roman law. For example, they (the Jews) disbelieved that a certain man named Jesus, whom they knew to be dead, was declared by the prisoner Paul to be still alive. I asked Paul if he would agree to go up to Jerusalem to stand trial before the Jewish court even if I presided, but he at once appealed to Caesar Augustus. Well, I still have him here in prison and am in a quandry as to what to do next. Agrippa told Festus that he would like to hear Paul also. Festus agreed to such a hearing.

V. Chap. 25:23-27 The next day Festus assembled all the city officials and military commanders together at the federal courthouse. When the group was ready, Agrippa and Bernice entered pompously, and Festus commanded that Paul be brought into the box for the interrogation. Paul came in and Festus announced to the group the purpose of the meeting. Festus addressed Agrippa and said that before them was the man whom the Jewish leaders wanted dead. He is a Roman citizen and has appealed to Caesar, and I have decided to send him to Rome at his own request. My problem is that I have no valid reason to do so, because he has not committed any crime according to Roman law. Since Agrippa is here, it is my hope that after this hearing, the great king will be able to assist me in preparing a statement regarding his crime to send to Caesar Augustus. It will look bad for me in Caesar's eyes if I forward a criminal to him for justice without outlining a reasonable charge against him. [Next week, Lord willing, we shall hear again the third testimony concerning Paul's dynamic conversion on the Jerusalem-Damascus Road.]

AND DON'T FORGET THAT THIS TUESDAY, THE 16th, IS THE COUPLES CLASS MONTHLY MEETING.

Jan. 28, 2001

"Paul's Final Defense"
Acts 26

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. With all of the notable citizens present in the judicial chamber, the king of Judea, Herod Agrippa II, told Paul that he had the floor to present his defense concerning why he should be sent to Caesar. Paul then raised his hand to alert the assembly to give attention to what he was about to say. He addressed King Agrippa as follows: "I am happy for this opportunity, King Agrippa, and I will give to you a complete account of the Jewish accusations against me. This opportunity is special for me since I know that you are completely familiar with Jewish customs and beliefs. For this reason I will be thorough and beg your patience, for it will take some time."

II. Paul's testimony continues, "After I left Tarsus in Celicia as a youth, I went to Jerusalem for further training and to be with my own people, the Jewish nation. Because of my long time living there (in Jerusalem), I became well known among the Jewish leaders. They know that from my first days in the Holy City, I believed and practiced Judaism in its strictest requirements as a member of the sect of the Pharisees. Now these leaders could truthfully testify concerning my zeal in those days, but today these same leaders judge me to be wrong since I hold the same hope which was promised to our forefathers. This promise our people first heard and understood God to have begun when they were led out of Egypt and began as a kingdom of twelve tribes in the promised land. That promise was not completely fulfilled before recently, but God's final kingdom is now ready for establishment. Our forefathers served God continually with the promised hope that he would set up a kingdom of his own people. (See Heb. 11:39-40) It is my position that the kingdom of God is now, in fact, being created. The Jewish leaders disagree with my belief, King Agrippa. Why should you believe that God, our Creator, could not bring a dead person back to life again? I also had sincere reservations about the things being done and being said about Jesus of Nazareth just after his disciples began witnessing about faith in him and what he had done. I took strong action against the group of believers, first in Jerusalem where I personally committed many of them to prison. I could do this because I had authority from the chief priests. I even appeared at their trials before the Sanhedrin and witnessed against God's very chosen ones (saints). In the various synagogues I forced the believers in this Jesus as the Messiah to blaspheme against him or suffer the consequences of being shunned socially, or worse. When I had exhausted my abilities in the immediate area of Jerusalem, I requested and received authorization to go to other cities to persecute the followers of the Messiah (Savior) there."

III. "With specific authority from the Sanhedrin, I was commissioned to go down to Damascus from Jerusalem and bring believers in the Christ back to Jerusalem for trial against their blasphemy. About noon just before reaching Damascus, I saw a light coming down from heaven. The light was even brighter than the sun itself and came down and enclosed me and the entire entourage with me. The light

forced us to the earth, and in a prostrate position, I heard a distinct voice in Hebrew speaking directly to me, 'Paul, Paul, why are you causing me to suffer? My suffering is the reason that your conscience has been bothering you.' My answer to that voice was, 'Who are you, Lord?' The Lord said to me, 'I am Jesus, the one you are causing to suffer, but stand up, for I have a special task for you. This task is why I am communicating to you in this way. My responsibility for you is to become my servant and revealer of my salvation to the nonJews (Gentiles). This experience will become your testimony to the Gentiles along with other revelations which I will reveal to you later. I will deliver you from any harm which will come upon you, both from the Jewish nation and from the Gentile authority. Your message from me will also open the spiritual eyes of those who hear you, especially the Gentiles who will be delivered from the darkness of Satan to the glorious light of God. God will forgive the sins of all who accept my message and make them citizens of God's kingdom. As citizens of that kingdom these believers will be set aside (sanctified) because of their faith in me as their Savior.'"

IV. "When this miraculous event happened to me, King Agrippa, I was completely subservient to the message Jesus gave to me in the vision. Immediately, my zeal for doing what I now know to be what God truly wanted me to be doing was with even more determination than it was before, as a Pharisee. I went on into Damascus, but the message I gave there was exactly what I had gone there to destroy. Then on to Jerusalem, throughout all Judea, and to areas mostly occupied by Gentiles, I went telling everyone who would listen that all should recognize their condition as God saw them, turn to him, and then live a life which represented their condition under God's will. This is the real reason the Jews caught me in the Temple and have been trying to kill me. But God has helped me just as Jesus had promised me on the Dasmascus Road, and, as you can see here today, I continue to witness with my testimony both to common people as well as people of prominence, what Moses said would happen eventually, that the Messiah would be forced to suffer death, then rise and become a light to the Gentiles."

V. At this point in Paul's testimony, Festus interrupted to say to Paul that his scholarship and learning had affected his mental abilities. Paul told Festus that, on the contrary, his words were truthful and sober and that Agrippa knew that what he said was true, because Paul's activities had been open and known everywhere. Agrippa told Paul directly that his testimony had almost persuaded him to accept Jesus as his Savior. Paul replied that he was praying that not only Agrippa would believe, but that all who were there listening would become believers and become like him, except for the prisoner shackles. After Paul's presentation, Agrippa the king, his sister Bernice, Portius Festus the procurator (governor), and all the other dignitaries went into private conference. After discussing the case at some length, the conclusion was that Paul had done nothing worthy of awarding the death sentence. Agrippa told Festus that Paul could have been freed had he not appealed directly to Caesar Augustus.

Feb. 04, 2001

"Paul Sails for Rome"
Acts 27

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Geographic synopsis: Left Caesarea by ship in the fall of 60 AD; to Sidon up the coast the next day; around the north side of Cyprus Island by Celicia and Pamphylia; to Myra in Lycia and transferred to an Alexandrian (Egyptian) ship headed for Italy; to Cnidus; south by Pt. Salmone on east tip of Crete Island; around south of Crete to Fair Havens near Lasea; attempted to make Phenice (Phoenix); by Cauda (Clauda) Island and westward; zigzag course north and south alternately toward Africa coast and the Adriatic Sea, but generally northwestward; unknown land was finally discovered.

II. Finally, the group of prisoners were ordered to be taken from Caesarea to Rome for their final legal disposition. They were put in charge of a Roman captain, Julius, who was especially commissioned for duties relating to Caesar himself. Paul was one of the prisoners designated for this sailing. While we do not know the particulars, Luke was evidently on the passenger list, for his account is referenced by first person pronouns throughout the chapter.

III. The ship taken was from Adramyttium in the province of Mysia near Assos and Mitylene. The plan was to sail close by the Asian coast on up to Thessalonica after transferring Julius and his Roman prisoners to another ship sailing for Italy. This probability is noted, because Luke states that Aristarchus was a passenger aboard. He does not designate this Aristarchus as the same person who traveled with Paul on the third missionary journey in Acts 19:29 and in Acts 20:4 when he helped collect and carry the Asian churches' gifts for the Jerusalem Christians. He could have been the same person returning to his home in Thessalonica. After sailing one day, the ship docked at Sidon up the coast where Julius permitted Paul to visit with Christian friends and get a supply of personal needs. After the short respite at Sidon, the ship set sail northward and west between the island of Cyprus and the Asian coast. This course was taken because the prevailing winds would not permit the desired route. They stayed close by the coastline near Celicia and Pamphylia until they reached the port of Myra in the province of Lycia.

IV. At Myra Julius, the Roman captain in charge of the prisoners, found an Alexandrian (Egyptian) ship docked there with orders to sail to Italy. He transferred the prisoners to the other ship. It is interesting to note that the friends of the prisoners, e.g., Luke, were permitted to accompany the prisoners enroute to Rome. The winds were so contrary to their desired route that it took several days to come to the area of the port of Cnidus. The captain of the ship decided to favor the windage and sail southward to the island of Crete. As they neared the eastern end of the island, they barely missed Pt. Salmoe. Steering hard to the west, they came to a safe place called The Fair Havens near Lasea. The wind was continuing to be very tempestuous as the winter weather had set in. They spent several days there until the Day of Atonement

which fell at the end of September or early in October. Sailing the Mediterranean was considered very hazardous beginning about the second week of November. Their expected voyage time could now take them even beyond that time. The way the weather had been up until this time, meant that this winter could be an early one. At least Paul recognized this possibility and suggested to the Roman captain that the cargo or even the passengers could be in jeopardy if the voyage was not halted until spring time.

V. Paul's advice was ignored by both Julius and the ship's captain and owner. Near Fair Havens was a port, Phenice (Phoenix), where better accommodations were available for the long winter stay. A day occurred when the ship's captain believed that due to a moderate wind from the south, they could make Phenice. They weighed anchors and set sail westward along the island. Not long after the ship left shore, a severe northeaster (Euroclydon) struck and literally took over navigation of itself. Since the ship's crew could hardly control the situation, they were hard put to miss the small island of Cauda (Clauda). There were quicksands to the south toward Africa, and the crew did everything possible to avoid that direction. They tacked storm sails as much as possible, struck the mainsail, and secured ropes tightly designed to add strength to the ship's hull in hopes of not being shipwrecked by the exceedingly high winds and sea. In order to keep the sea out of the hull, they threw the cargo overboard. Many days and nights passed during which neither sun nor stars were visible. The crew and passengers gave up hope of living through the storm. In the midst of this misery, anxiety, and hopelessness, Paul said, "Sirs (Roman captain and ship's captain), you would have done well to listen to me back in Crete, but, nonetheless, I assure you that we are all safe, except the ship. My God's messenger appeared to me last night and promised me that everyone of our lives will be spared." They, still, so feared for their lives that they lost their appetites and did not eat for two weeks. They had neared what promised to be land as indicated by depth sounding, and the group wanted to abandon ship lest rocks shatter the ship and kill them. Paul told them to stay on board and eat, because they were about to need extra strength. The group did eat and were cheered by Paul's suggestion. When the next day dawned, they discovered a small cove and stream nearby and tried to ease the ship there. However, the ship ran aground and remained fast. The aft of the ship broke from the bow and began breaking into small pieces. The waves were still violent, and the question arose whether the crew could be expected to make land without severe consequences. Julius' guards begged him to permit them to kill the prisoners in order to save their own lives. But Julius, no doubt remembered Paul's counsel concerning their safety, refused to take the suggestion of his men. According to Luke's account, not having Paul killed really is the factor that saved all the other prisoners. Julius gave the command that everyone subject to his authority should jump into the sea, swim if possible, and assemble on shore. Some of the men had to grab pieces of the ship which had fallen apart in order to make it to land. And so it happened that all 276 people escaped safely to land. The Lord had kept his promise, as always!

Feb. 11, 2001

"Paul Reaches Rome!"
Acts 28

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. When the wrecked ship's 276 passengers and crew assembled on the edge of the cove where they had been thrown by the grave tempest, they discovered the land to be the island of Melita (Malta). The natives there were evidently not civilized (without a western world-view) but were very amicable to the shipwrecked passengers. They showed no disrespect to any of the group, but since it was raining and the wind was cold, they built a fire to warm the wet and chilled visitors. As the ship's passengers began bringing wood for the fire, Paul brought a load and threw it on the flames. A poisonous snake ran from the heat, bit his hand, and hung on by its fangs. The island natives knew the snake and that its bite was fatal. Their reasoning was that Paul was one who was worthy of death, a murderer or some such evil person. The snake bite was an omen of evil according to their superstition. The sea could not get Paul, but the snake has. Paul shook the snake into the fire, and the local citizens kept watching Paul's hand for swelling and him to fall to the ground dead. After sufficient time had lapsed for Paul to succumb to the poison, their superstition turned to devotion and then to worship. (See Luke 10:19; Mk 16:18) Publius, the chief leader of the local citizens, entertained the group for three days, and during that time his father had a fever and a serious case of dysentery. Paul went in where he lay, prayed, put his hands on the sick man, and healed him. They stayed there for three months and during that time many came to Paul for healing of various illnesses. No doubt because of Paul's demonstration of God's power to heal, they gave special honor to the visitors, and at the end of their stay, they were sent on their way with abundant supplies for the remainder of their trip to Rome.

II. A ship from Alexandria with a figure head of Gimini in the zodiac was found that had wintered on the island also. It was now about the middle of February, 61 AD, and the captain considered the weather safe for sailing for Italy. They docked at Syracuse on Sicily and after three days sailed for Rhegium (KJV, "brought a compass," circled around the toe of Italy). A good south wind brought them shortly to Puteoli where Paul and Luke found fellow believers and stayed with them for a week before traveling on north by land. Believers from Rome met Paul all the way down south at Appius Forum and Three Taverns, and this show of concern encouraged Paul and caused him to thank God. Upon reaching Rome the prisoners except Paul were placed in the common stockade, but Paul was permitted to have a private guard and live in a private rented house. After only three days Paul invited the Jewish chief priests to his place and explained his situation to them. He told them that he had been delivered by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem to Roman authorities although he had not trespassed Jewish customs or was he personally against the Jewish nation. "The Romans examined me and would have set me free, because I was not found to be guilty. Ultimately, I was forced to appeal directly to Caesar," Paul said. My position is that God is the hope of the Jewish people. The chief priests told Paul that they had neither heard from anyone personally nor

had communication from Judea about Paul. The priests did request that Paul tell them about the new sect (followers of a Messiah). They made an appointment and later Paul spoke to them a full day about Jesus' coming as a fulfillment of the promises made to Moses and the prophets of a Savior. Some believed and some did not, and they left after Paul quoted to them Isa. 6:9-10 and Jer. 5:20-21. The great missionary Paul told the Jews that the God of their fathers was turning to the Gentiles, because the Jews would not accept God's plan of salvation. Paul lived as a prisoner for two years in his own rented place witnessing continually about Jesus as Savior. No one bothered him.

III. Letters written by Paul during the period covered by Acts and later, with place and time written.

1. I Thess. from Corinth, 2nd jour., late 52
2. II Thess. from Corinth, 2nd jour., late 53
3. I Cor. from Ephesus, 3rd jour., early 57
4. II Cor. from Macedonia, 3rd jour., late 57
5. Gal. from Greece, 3rd jour., late 57
6. Rom. from Corinth, 3rd jour., early 58
7. Eph. from Rome, 63
8. Philip. from Rome, 63
9. Col. from Rome, 63
10. Phile. from Rome, 63
11. Titus from Rome, 63
12. I Tim. from Rome, 63
13. II Tim. from Rome, 63
14. Heb. from Rome, 63 Some scholars seriously question the place and dates of what I have given for Nos. 7 through 14, and, of course, Paul's authorship of Hebrews.

IV. General contents of the Pauline letters.

1. God's historical perspective of human salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ - Rom. and Gal.
2. Jesus Christ as God's exclusive means of salvation - Philii., Eph., and Col.
3. End-of-time events - I and II Thess. and I Cor. 15
4. Kingdom of God organization and practice (local church practice) I Cor., I and II Tim., Titus, and part of Eph.
5. Personal - I Cor., Gal., Philip., I Tim., Phile., and part of I Cor.
6. Heb. - Relationship of First with Second Covenant.

V. Roman emperors - Jesus' birth through sack of Jerusalem, 70.

1. Augustus Caesar, 27 BC - 14 AD (41 yrs.), 2. Tiberius, 14-37, 3. Caligula (Gaius), 37 - 41, 4. Claudius 41-54, 5. Nero 54-68, (suicide, 31), 6. Galba, 68-69, (murdered 1-15-69), 7. Otho, 69, (suicide, 4-15-69), 8. Vitellius, 1-2-69 - 12-22-69, (murdered), 9. Vespasian (Titus), 70-79. He had two sons named Titus and Domitian by Flavia Domitilla who both became Roman emperors after him. Before becoming emperor he served in the military over the Empire. He ordered son Titus to destroy Jerusalem in 70 AD.