

SABBATH SCHOOL
LESSONS

First Half 2024

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

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INTRODUCTION

By the grace of God, for the next half year the Bible book of The Acts of the Apostles will be the subject of study in the Sabbath schools around the world. This book is of great importance, for it is the only historical book of the New Testament. It is the primary source of information about the early Christian church and contains a precise presentation of the plan of salvation and the church's mission.

"The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.

The author of this book was Luke, a Greek Christian and faithful companion of the apostle Paul, who penned the record in about A.D. 61, while the apostle was imprisoned in Rome.

"The whole of the book of Acts should receive careful study. It is full of precious instruction; it records experiences in evangelistic work, the teachings of which we need in our work today. This is wonderful history; it deals with the highest education, which the students in our schools are to receive." -Letter 100, 1909.

"Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, and Theophilus, to whom it is addressed, had been pleasantly associated. From Luke, Theophilus had received much instruction and great light. Luke had been Theophilus' teacher, and he still felt a responsibility to direct and instruct him, and to sustain and protect him in his work.

"At that time it was customary for a writer to send his manuscript to someone for examination and criticism. Luke chose Theophilus, as a man in whom he had confidence, to perform this important work. He first directs the attention of Theophilus to the record of Christ's life as given in the book of Luke, which had also been addressed by the same writer to Theophilus. [Acts 1:1-5 quoted.] ... The teachings of Christ were to be preserved in manuscripts and books." -Manuscript 40, 1903.

"Christ determined that when He ascended from this earth, He would bestow a gift on those who had believed on Him, and those who should believe on Him. What gift could He bestow rich enough to signalize and grace His ascension to the mediatorial throne? It must be worthy of His greatness and His royalty. He determined to give His representative, the third person of the Godhead. This gift could not be excelled. He would give all gifts in one, and therefore the divine Spirit, that converting, enlightening, and sanctifying power, would be

His donation...." -*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1052.

Also, the people of God at the end of time are promised the latter rain, which will enable them to complete their mission and reflect the glory of God to the world.

"Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field." Zechariah 10:1.

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My spirit." Joel 2:28, 29.

"The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was the 'former rain'; and glorious was the result. But the 'latter rain' will be still more abundant." -*Ye Shall Receive Power*, p. 301.

"Before the final visitation of God's judgments upon the earth, there will be, among the people of the Lord, such a revival of primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times. The Spirit and power of God will be poured out upon His children." -*The Great Controversy*, p. 464.

God bless the study of The Acts of the Apostles and give a revival of true godliness to His people. Their most urgent need, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, is to meet the conditions under which the Lord will be able to pour out the latter rain in abundance. May the gospel be preached and His people be prepared for the Lord's soon return.

-*The brethren of the Ministerial Research Institute
and the General Conference*

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1

Sabbath, January 6, 2024

The Call

"And He sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all." Mark 9:35.

"The Jewish leaders thought themselves too wise to need instruction, too righteous to need salvation, too highly honored to need the honor that comes from Christ. The Saviour turned from them to entrust to others the privileges they had abused and the work they had slighted." -The Acts of the Apostles, p. 16.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2023

"THE WEAK THINGS OF THE WORLD"

1. Whom did Jesus call to continue His work on earth?

MATTHEW 10:1-4 *And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. ²Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ³Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.*

"It was at the ordination of the Twelve that the first step was taken in the organization of the church that after Christ's departure was to carry on His work on the earth. Of this ordination the record says, 'He goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto Him whom He would: and they came unto Him. And He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach.' Mark 3:13, 14.

"The disciples were to go forth as Christ's witnesses, to declare to the world what they had seen and heard of Him." -The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 18, 19.

MONDAY, JANUARY 1, 2024

2. Why did He choose men with little formal education?

1 CORINTHIANS 1:25-29 *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. ²⁶For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: ²⁷But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; ²⁸And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: ²⁹That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

“Jesus chose unlearned fishermen because they had not been schooled in the traditions and erroneous customs of their time. They were men of native ability, and they were humble and teachable, men whom He could educate for His work. In the common walks of life there is many a man patiently treading the round of daily toil, unconscious that he possesses powers which, if called into action, would raise him to an equality with the world’s most honored men. The touch of a skillful hand is needed to arouse those dormant faculties. It was such men that Jesus called to be His co-laborers; and He gave them the advantage of association with Himself. Never had the world’s great men such a teacher.

“When the disciples came forth from the Saviour’s training, they were no longer ignorant and uncultured. They had become like Him in mind and character, and men took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.” -*The Desire of Ages*, p. 250.

“For three years and a half the disciples were under the instruction of the greatest Teacher the world has ever known. By personal contact and association, Christ trained them for His service. Day by day they walked and talked with Him, hearing His words of cheer to the weary and heavy-laden, and seeing the manifestation of His power in behalf of the sick and the afflicted. Sometimes He taught them, sitting among them on the mountainside; sometimes beside the sea or walking by the way, He revealed the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 17.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 2, 2024

BREAKING DOWN THE WALL OF SEPARATION

3. How did Jesus show His disciples that the gospel would soon focus strongly on the Gentiles?

LUKE 7:1-10 *Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. ²And a certain centurion’s servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. ³And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. ⁴And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: ⁵For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. ⁶Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: ⁷Wherefore nei-*

ther thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. ⁸For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. ⁹When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. ¹⁰And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

MARK 7:24-30 And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid. ²⁵For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet: ²⁶The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. ²⁷But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs. ²⁸And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs. ²⁹And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter. ³⁰And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed.

"The Saviour longed to unfold to His disciples the truth regarding the breaking down of the 'middle wall of partition' between Israel and the other nations—the truth that 'the Gentiles should be fellow heirs' with the Jews and 'partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel.' Ephesians 2:14; 3:6. This truth was revealed in part at the time when He rewarded the faith of the centurion at Capernaum, and also when He preached the gospel to the inhabitants of Sychar. Still more plainly was it revealed on the occasion of His visit to Phoenicia, when He healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman. These experiences helped the disciples to understand that among those whom many regarded as unworthy of salvation, there were souls hungering for the light of truth.

"Thus Christ sought to teach the disciples the truth that in God's kingdom there are no territorial lines, no caste, no aristocracy; that they must go to all nations, bearing to them the message of a Saviour's love." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 19, 20.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3, 2024

4. How did Christ plan to achieve unity among the twelve disciples, who had marked character differences?

JOHN 17:21, 23 *That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.... ²³I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.*

"In these first disciples was presented marked diversity. They were to be the world's teachers, and they represented widely varied types of char-

acter. In order successfully to carry forward the work to which they had been called, these men, differing in natural characteristics and in habits of life, needed to come into unity of feeling, thought, and action. This unity it was Christ's object to secure. To this end He sought to bring them into unity with Himself. The burden of His labor for them is expressed in His prayer to His Father." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 20.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 4, 2024

PRECIOUS PROMISES

5. With what encouraging words did He tell His disciples that He would return?

JOHN 14:1-3 *Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*

"He spoke to them also words of hope and courage. 'Let not your heart be troubled,' He said; 'ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.' John 14:1-4. For your sake I came into the world; for you I have been working. When I go away I shall still work earnestly for you. I came to the world to reveal Myself to you, that you might believe. I go to My Father and yours to cooperate with Him in your behalf." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 21.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 5, 2024

6. What other rich promise did He give to them?

JOHN 15:26, 27; 14:16, 17 *But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: ²⁷And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.... ^{14:16}And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; ¹⁷Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*

"By this, Christ did not mean that the disciples would make more exalted exertions than He had made, but that their work would have greater magnitude. He did not refer merely to miracle working, but to all that would take place under the agency of the Holy Spirit.

"'When the Comforter is come,' He said, 'whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning.' John 15:26, 27.

“Wonderfully were these words fulfilled. After the descent of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were so filled with love for Him and for those for whom He died, that hearts were melted by the words they spoke and the prayers they offered. They spoke in the power of the Spirit; and under the influence of that power, thousands were converted.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 22.

SABBATH, JANUARY 6, 2024

7. What is the meaning of Jesus' earnest petition to His Father, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word"?

JOHN 17:20, 21 *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; ²¹That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

“When Christ’s prayer is fully believed, when its instruction is brought into the daily life of God’s people, unity of action will be seen in our ranks. Brother will be bound to brother by the golden bonds of the love of Christ. The Spirit of God alone can bring about this oneness. He who sanctified Himself can sanctify His disciples. United with Him, they will be united with one another in the most holy faith. When we strive for this unity as God desires us to strive for it, it will come to us.” -*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 243.

FOR MEDITATION

“As Christ’s representatives the apostles were to make a decided impression on the world. The fact that they were humble men would not diminish their influence, but increase it; for the minds of their hearers would be carried from them to the Saviour, who, though unseen, was still working with them. The wonderful teaching of the apostles, their words of courage and trust, would assure all that it was not in their own power that they worked, but in the power of Christ. Humbling themselves, they would declare that He whom the Jews had crucified was the Prince of life, the Son of the living God, and that in His name they did the works that He had done.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 22.

* * *

Choosing a Replacement

“And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two Thou hast chosen.” Acts 1:24.

“God will teach His people to move carefully and to make wise choice of men who will not betray sacred trusts. If in Christ’s day the believers needed to be guarded in their choice of men for positions of responsibility, we who are living in this time certainly need to move with great discretion. We are to present every case before God and in earnest prayer ask Him to choose for us.” –*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 264.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 7, 2024

1. To whom was the book of The Acts of the Apostles addressed? What is recorded about Luke and Theophilus?

ACTS 1:1, 2 *The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, ²Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen.*

LUKE 1:1-4 *Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, ²Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word; ³It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.*

MONDAY, JANUARY 8, 2024

“YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER”

2. After Jesus ascended to heaven, what did the disciples wait for in Jerusalem?

ACTS 1:4, 5 *And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. ⁵For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*

“Christ told His disciples that they were to begin their work at Jerusalem. That city had been the scene of His amazing sacrifice for the human race. There, clad in the garb of humanity, He had walked and talked with

men, and few had discerned how near heaven came to earth. There He had been condemned and crucified. In Jerusalem were many who secretly believed Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah, and many who had been deceived by priests and rulers. To these the gospel must be proclaimed. They were to be called to repentance. The wonderful truth that through Christ alone could remission of sins be obtained, was to be made plain. And it was while all Jerusalem was stirred by the thrilling events of the past few weeks, that the preaching of the disciples would make the deepest impression....

"In obedience to Christ's command, they waited in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, the outpouring of the Spirit. They did not wait in idleness.... Higher and still higher they extended the hand of faith, with the mighty argument, 'It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' Romans 8:34." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 31, 32, 35, 36.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024

3. What places did He instruct them to go and evangelize? How were they to do this?

ACTS 1:8 *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

"Philip's work in Samaria was marked with great success, and, thus encouraged, he sent to Jerusalem for help. The apostles now perceived more fully the meaning of the words of Christ, 'Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.' Acts 1:8." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 107.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2024

"SHALL SO COME"

4. What will Jesus' return to this earth be like?

ACTS 1:9-12 *And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; ¹¹Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. ¹²Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.*

"The promise of Christ's second coming was ever to be kept fresh in the minds of His disciples. The same Jesus whom they had seen ascending into heaven, would come again, to take to Himself those who here below give themselves to His service. The same voice that had said to them, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end,' would bid them welcome to His presence in the heavenly kingdom." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 33.

LET SOMEONE ELSE TAKE HIS PLACE**5. What proposal did Peter make to his fellow apostles concerning the place that had been vacated by Judas? How should each child of God take care of his own responsibilities?**

ACTS 1:16-20 *Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. ¹⁷For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. ¹⁸Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. ²⁰For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.*

REVELATION 3:11 *Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*

“In the first chapter of Acts, also, instruction is given regarding the choosing of men to bear responsibilities in the church. The apostasy of Judas had left one place vacant in the ranks of the apostles, and it was necessary that another be chosen to take this place. Speaking of this, Peter said: ‘Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection.’” -*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 263.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 12, 2024

6. Who was selected to fill the empty position?

ACTS 1:23-25 *And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, ²⁵That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.*

“Men must be placed in charge who will obtain an enlarged experience, not in the things of self, but in the things of God, an enlarged knowledge of the character of Christ. The more they know of Christ, the more faithfully they represent Him to the world. They are to listen to His voice and give heed to His words.” -*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 265.

SABBATH, JANUARY 13, 2024

7. What do the Scriptures tell about the one who was chosen?

ACTS 1:26; 2:14 *And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. ^{2:14}But Peter, stand-*

ing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words.

"I have no faith in casting lots. We have in the Bible a plain 'Thus saith the Lord' in regard to all church duties....

"I would say to the members of the church in__, 'Read your Bibles with much prayer. Do not try to humble others, but humble yourselves before God, and deal gently with one another. To cast lots for the officers of the church is not in God's order. Let men of responsibility be called upon to select the officers of the church.'" -*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 328.

FOR MEDITATION

"God's work is to become increasingly sacred to His people. In every way we are to magnify the exalted character of the truth. Those who have been set as guardians of the work of God in our institutions are ever to make the will and way of God prominent. The health of the general work depends upon the faithfulness of the men appointed to carry out the will of God in the churches." -*Testimony Treasures*, vol. 3, p. 412.

* * *

3

Sabbath, January 20, 2024

Actions through the Holy Spirit

"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Acts 2:4.

"In obedience to Christ's command, they waited in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father: the outpouring of the Spirit." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 35.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 14, 2024

OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. What was the spiritual condition of the believers before the Holy Spirit was poured out? Similarly, what must take place before the outpouring of the latter rain?

ACTS 1:14, 15; 2:1 *These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. ¹⁵And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and*

twenty,)... ^{2:1}And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

ZECHARIAH 10:1 Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field.

“As the disciples waited for the fulfillment of the promise, they humbled their hearts in true repentance and confessed their unbelief. As they called to remembrance the words that Christ had spoken to them before His death they understood more fully their meaning. Truths which had passed from their memory were again brought to their minds, and these they repeated to one another.

“The disciples prayed with intense earnestness for a fitness to meet men and in their daily intercourse to speak words that would lead sinners to Christ. Putting away all differences, all desire for the supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship. They drew nearer and nearer to God, and as they did this they realized what a privilege had been theirs in being permitted to associate so closely with Christ.

“These days of preparation were days of deep heart searching. The disciples felt their spiritual need and cried to the Lord for the holy unction that was to fit them for the work of soul saving. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely. They were weighted with the burden of the salvation of souls. They realized that the gospel was to be carried to the world, and they claimed the power that Christ had promised.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 36, 37.

MONDAY, JANUARY 15, 2024

2. What was experienced by the 120 people who were together in the upper room?

ACTS 2:2, 3 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. ³And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

“The Holy Spirit, assuming the form of tongues of fire, rested upon those assembled. This was an emblem of the gift then bestowed on the disciples, which enabled them to speak with fluency languages with which they had heretofore been unacquainted. The appearance of fire signified the fervent zeal with which the apostles would labor and the power that would attend their work.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 39.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 16, 2024

3. Drawn by the excitement, the people were surprised by something wonderful. What was that?

ACTS 2:6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

"The scene is one full of interest. Behold the people coming from all directions to hear the disciples witness to the truth as it is in Jesus. They press in, crowding the temple. Priests and rulers are there, the dark scowl of malignity still on their faces, their hearts still filled with abiding hatred against Christ, their hands uncleansed from the blood shed when they crucified the world's Redeemer. They had thought to find the apostles cowed with fear under the strong hand of oppression and murder, but they find them lifted above all fear and filled with the Spirit, proclaiming with power the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. They hear them declaring with boldness that the One so recently humiliated, derided, smitten by cruel hands, and crucified, is the Prince of life, now exalted to the right hand of God....

"Christ's ascension to heaven was the signal that His followers were to receive the promised blessing. For this they were to wait before they entered upon their work. When Christ passed within the heavenly gates, He was enthroned amidst the adoration of the angels. As soon as this ceremony was completed, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in rich currents, and Christ was indeed glorified, even with the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity. The Pentecostal outpouring was Heaven's communication that the Redeemer's inauguration was accomplished. According to His promise He had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to His followers as a token that He had, as priest and king, received all authority in heaven and on earth, and was the Anointed One over His people." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 42, 38, 39.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2024

4. What did some others in the multitude say?

ACTS 2:13 *Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.*

"The priests, determined to account for the miraculous power of the disciples in some natural way, declared that they were drunken from partaking largely of the new wine prepared for the feast. Some of the most ignorant of the people present seized upon this suggestion as the truth, but the more intelligent knew it to be false; and those who understood the different languages testified to the accuracy with which these languages were used by the disciples." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 40.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 18, 2024

PETER'S SERMON AT PENTECOST

5. What had the prophet Joel prophesied many years before? What signs was he referring to?

ACTS 2:14-21 *But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: ¹⁵For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; ¹⁷And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and*

your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: ¹⁸And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: ¹⁹And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: ²⁰The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: ²¹And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

“In answer to the accusation of the priests Peter showed that this demonstration was in direct fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, wherein he foretold that such power would come upon men to fit them for a special work. ‘Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem,’ he said, ‘be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in those days of My Spirit; and they shall prophesy.’” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 41.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 19, 2024

6. What else did the apostle Peter tell them from King David’s prophecy?

ACTS 2:31-33 *He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. ³²This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. ³³Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.*

PSALM 16:10, 11 *For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. ¹¹Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

“They had thought to find the apostles cowed with fear under the strong hand of oppression and murder, but they find them lifted above all fear and filled with the Spirit, proclaiming with power the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. They hear them declaring with boldness that the One so recently humiliated, derided, smitten by cruel hands, and crucified, is the Prince of life, now exalted to the right hand of God.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 42.

SABBATH, JANUARY 20, 2024

7. How were the listeners’ hearts moved by the preaching of Peter under the Holy Spirit’s power? How will this be repeated in the outpouring of the latter rain?

ACTS 2:37-39, 41 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? ³⁸Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. ³⁹For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call... ⁴¹Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

ZECHARIAH 10:1 Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field.

“But near the close of earth’s harvest, a special bestowal of spiritual grace is promised to prepare the church for the coming of the Son of man. This outpouring of the Spirit is likened to the falling of the latter rain; and it is for this added power that Christians are to send their petitions to the Lord of the harvest ‘in the time of the latter rain.’” -*Our Father Cares*, p. 212.

“The great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. The prophecies which were fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the gospel are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close....

“Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers.” -*The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

FOR MEDITATION

“The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep conviction of the Spirit of God. The arguments have been presented. The seed has been sown, and now it will spring up and bear fruit. The publications distributed by missionary workers have exerted their influence, yet many whose minds were impressed have been prevented from fully comprehending the truth or from yielding obedience. Now the rays of light penetrate everywhere, the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them. Family connections, church relations, are powerless to stay them now. Truth is more precious than all besides.” -*The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

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The Holy Spirit Worked in Peter

"Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God." Acts 3:6-8.

"The disciples of Christ had a deep sense of their own inefficiency, and with humiliation and prayer they joined their weakness to His strength, their ignorance to His wisdom, their unworthiness to His righteousness, their poverty to His exhaustless wealth. Thus strengthened and equipped, they hesitated not to press forward in the service of the Master." *-The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 57.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 21, 2024

THE LAME MAN

1. When Peter and John went to the temple to pray, whom did they see at the entrance?

ACTS 3:1-3 *Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. ²And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; ³Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.*

"Peter and John, going up to the temple to worship, saw at the gate Beautiful a cripple, forty years of age, whose life, from his birth, had been one of pain and infirmity. This unfortunate man had long desired to see Jesus, that he might be healed; but he was almost helpless, and was far removed from the scene of the great Physician's labors. His pleadings at last induced some friends to bear him to the gate of the temple, but upon arriving there, he found that the One upon whom his hopes were centered, had been put to a cruel death.

"His disappointment excited the sympathy of those who knew for how long he had eagerly hoped to be healed by Jesus, and daily they brought him to the temple, in order that passers-by might be induced by pity to give him a trifle to relieve his wants." *-The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 57, 58.

A MIRACLE IN CHRIST'S NAME**2. What miracle did Peter perform for the lame man through the power of Jesus?**

ACTS 3:4-7 *And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. ⁵And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. ⁶Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. ⁷And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.*

"As Peter and John passed, he asked an alms from them. The disciples regarded him compassionately, and Peter said, 'Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none.' As Peter thus declared his poverty, the countenance of the cripple fell; but it grew bright with hope as the apostle continued, 'But such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 58.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2024

3. How did the people react when they saw that the crippled man had been healed?

ACTS 3:8-11 *And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. ⁹And all the people saw him walking and praising God: ¹⁰And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. ¹¹And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.*

"They were astonished that the disciples could perform miracles similar to those performed by Jesus. Yet here was this man, for forty years a helpless cripple, now rejoicing in the full use of his limbs, free from pain, and happy in believing in Jesus." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 58.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2024

THE PEOPLE MARVELED**4. What wise words did Peter speak to the amazed crowd?**

ACTS 3:12, 13 *And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.*

“When the disciples saw the amazement of the people, Peter asked, ‘Why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?’ He assured them that the cure had been wrought in the name and through the merits of Jesus of Nazareth, whom God had raised from the dead. ‘His name through faith in His name,’ the apostle declared, ‘hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.’” –*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 59.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 2024

5. Highlight Peter’s words of understanding and admonition in the following verses.

ACTS 3:14-18 *But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; ¹⁵And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. ¹⁶And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. ¹⁷And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.*

“The apostles spoke plainly of the great sin of the Jews in rejecting and putting to death the Prince of life; but they were careful not to drive their hearers to despair.... He declared that the Holy Spirit was calling upon them to repent and be converted, and assured them that there was no hope of salvation except through the mercy of the One whom they had crucified. Only through faith in Him could their sins be forgiven. Thus the disciples preached the resurrection of Christ. Many among those who listened were waiting for this testimony, and when they heard it they believed. It brought to their minds the words that Christ had spoken, and they took their stand in the ranks of those who accepted the gospel. The seed that the Saviour had sown sprang up and bore fruit.” –*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 59, 60.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 2024

6. What appeal did he make to his hearers?

ACTS 3:19, 20 *Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; ²⁰And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you.*

GOD'S PURPOSE**7. What was God's blessed purpose in sending His Son?**

ACTS 3:26 *Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.*

"Christ had not come in the manner that they expected, and though at times they had been convinced that He was the Son of God, yet they had stifled conviction, and crucified Him. In mercy God gave them still further evidence, and now another opportunity was granted them to turn to Him.... But feeling secure in their own righteousness, the Jewish teachers refused to admit that the men charging them with crucifying Christ were speaking by the direction of the Holy Spirit." *-The Acts of the Apostles, p. 61.*

FOR MEDITATION

"On the day following the healing of the cripple, Annas and Caiaphas, with the other dignitaries of the temple, met together for the trial, and the prisoners were brought before them. In that very room and before some of those very men, Peter had shamefully denied his Lord. This came distinctly to his mind as he appeared for his own trial. He now had an opportunity of redeeming his cowardice.

"Those present who remembered the part that Peter had acted at the trial of his Master, flattered themselves that he could now be intimidated by the threat of imprisonment and death. But the Peter who denied Christ in the hour of His greatest need was impulsive and self-confident, differing widely from the Peter who was brought before the Sanhedrin for examination. Since his fall he had been converted. He was no longer proud and boastful, but modest and self-distrustful. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, and by the help of this power he was resolved to remove the stain of his apostasy by honoring the name he had once disowned." *-The Acts of the Apostles, p. 62.*

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Transformed by Christ

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” Acts 4:13.

“Converts to the new faith were rapidly increasing, and both Pharisees and Sadducees agreed that if these new teachers were suffered to go unchecked, their own influence would be in greater danger than when Jesus was upon the earth.” -The Acts of the Apostles, p. 60.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 28, 2024

SADDUCEES

1. Who were the Sadducees, and what did they believe?

ACTS 4:1, 2; 23:8 *And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, ²Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.... ^{23:8}For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit.*

“While the disciples were speaking to the people, ‘the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.’

“After Christ’s resurrection the priests had spread far and near the lying report that His body had been stolen by the disciples while the Roman guard slept. It is not surprising that they were displeased when they hear Peter and John preaching the resurrection of the One they had murdered. The Sadducees especially were greatly aroused. They felt that their most cherished doctrine was in danger, and their reputation at stake.” -The Acts of the Apostles, p. 60.

MONDAY, JANUARY 29, 2024

INTERROGATION

2. What intimidating question did the priests ask John and Peter?

ACTS 4:3-7 *And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. ⁴Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand. ⁵And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,*

6And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. 7And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?

“With holy boldness and in the power of the Spirit Peter fearlessly declared: ‘Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.’

“This courageous defense appalled the Jewish leaders. They had supposed that the disciples would be overcome with fear and confusion when brought before the Sanhedrin. But, instead, these witnesses spoke as Christ had spoken, with a convincing power that silenced their adversaries.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 63.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 30, 2024

3. To what Stone did the apostle Peter refer?

ACTS 4:11 *This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.*

ISAIAH 28:16 *Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.*

“Peter here used a figure of speech familiar to the priests. The prophets had spoken of the rejected stone; and Christ Himself, speaking on one occasion to the priests and elders, said: ‘Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.’ Matthew 21:42-44.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 64.

“In quoting the prophecy of the rejected stone, Christ referred to an actual occurrence in the history of Israel. The incident was connected with the building of the first temple. While it had a special application at the time of Christ’s first advent, and should have appealed with special force to the Jews, it has also a lesson for us. When the temple of Solomon was erected, the immense stones for the walls and the foundation were entirely prepared at the quarry; after they were brought to the place of building, not an instrument was to be used upon them; the workmen had only to place them in position. For use in the foundation, one stone of unusual size and peculiar shape had been brought; but the workmen could find no place for it, and would not accept it. It was an annoyance to

them as it lay unused in their way. Long it remained a rejected stone. But when the builders came to the laying of the corner, they searched for a long time to find a stone of sufficient size and strength, and of the proper shape, to take that particular place, and bear the great weight which would rest upon it. Should they make an unwise choice for this important place, the safety of the entire building would be endangered. They must find a stone capable of resisting the influence of the sun, of frost, and of tempest. Several stones had at different times been chosen, but under the pressure of immense weights they had crumbled to pieces. Others could not bear the test of the sudden atmospheric changes. But at last attention was called to the stone so long rejected. It had been exposed to the air, to sun and storm, without revealing the slightest crack. The builders examined this stone. It had borne every test but one. If it could bear the test of severe pressure, they decided to accept it for the cornerstone. The trial was made. The stone was accepted, brought to its assigned position, and found to be an exact fit." -*The Desire of Ages*, p. 597.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2024

TRANSFORMED BY GRACE

4. What change could the rulers and the people see that had taken place in Peter and John? What did the authorities decide?

ACTS 4:13-17 *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. ¹⁵But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, ¹⁶Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.*

"As the priests listened to the apostles' fearless words, 'they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 64.

"They all agreed that it would be useless to deny that the man had been healed through power given the apostles in the name of the crucified Jesus. They would gladly have covered up the miracle by falsehoods; but the work was done in the full light of day and before a crowd of people, and had already come to the knowledge of thousands. They felt that the work must be immediately stopped, or Jesus would gain many believers, their own disgrace would follow, and they would be held guilty of the murder of the Son of God." -*The Story of Redemption*, p. 252.

OBEDY GOD BEFORE MEN**5. What wise response did the apostles give to the rulers' command? Today, how are God's children to relate to the commands of authorities as long as the divine commandments can be obeyed?**

ACTS 4:18-20 *And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. ²⁰For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*

MATTHEW 22:21 *They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's*

EXODUS 20:13 *Thou shalt not kill.*

"The principle for which the disciples stood so fearlessly when, in answer to the command not to speak any more in the name of Jesus, they declared, 'Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye,' is the same that the adherents of the gospel struggled to maintain in the days of the Reformation.

"We are not required to defy authorities. Our words, whether spoken or written, should be carefully considered, lest we place ourselves on record as uttering that which would make us appear antagonistic to law and order. We are not to say or do anything that would unnecessarily close up our way. We are to go forward in Christ's name, advocating the truths committed to us. If we are forbidden by men to do this work, then we may say, as did the apostles, 'Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 68, 69.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2024

6. Why were the apostles released?

ACTS 4:21-23 *So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. ²²For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed. ²³And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.*

"Gladly would the priests have punished these men for their unwavering fidelity to their sacred calling, but they feared the people; 'for all men glorified God for that which was done.' So, with repeated threats and injunctions, the apostles were set at liberty." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 67.

7. What beautiful prayer did the faithful believers raise to God?

ACTS 4:24-31 *And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: ²⁵Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? ²⁶The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. ²⁷For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, ²⁸For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. ²⁹And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, ³⁰By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. ³¹And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*

“The disciples prayed that greater strength might be imparted to them in the work of the ministry; for they saw that they would meet the same determined opposition that Christ had encountered when upon the earth. While their united prayers were ascending in faith to heaven, the answer came. The place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were endowed anew with the Holy Spirit. Their hearts filled with courage, they again went forth to proclaim the word of God in Jerusalem. ‘With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus,’ and God marvelously blessed their efforts.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 67.

FOR MEDITATION

“This principle we in our day are firmly to maintain. The banner of truth and religious liberty held aloft by the founders of the gospel church and by God’s witnesses during the centuries that have passed since then, has, in this last conflict, been committed to our hands. The responsibility for this great gift rests with those whom God has blessed with a knowledge of His word. We are to receive this word as supreme authority. We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God’s word must be recognized as above all human legislation. A ‘Thus saith the Lord’ is not to be set aside for a ‘Thus saith the church’ or a ‘Thus saith the state.’ The crown of Christ is to be lifted above the diadems of earthly potentates.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 68.

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Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit

"Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men." Matthew 12:31.

"But God hates hypocrisy and falsehood. Ananias and Sapphira practiced fraud in their dealing with God; they lied to the Holy Spirit, and their sin was visited with swift and terrible judgment." -The Acts of the Apostles, p. 72.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2024

1. What was Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus, impressed to do?

ACTS 4:36, 37 *And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

"This liberality on the part of the believers was the result of the outpouring of the Spirit. The converts to the gospel were 'of one heart and of one soul.' One common interest controlled them—the success of the mission entrusted to them; and covetousness had no place in their lives. Their love for their brethren and the cause they had espoused, was greater than their love of money and possessions. Their works testified that they accounted the souls of men of higher value than earthly wealth.

"Thus it will ever be when the Spirit of God takes possession of the life. Those whose hearts are filled with the love of Christ, will follow the example of Him who for our sake became poor, that through His poverty we might be made rich. Money, time, influence—all the gifts they have received from God's hand, they will value only as a means of advancing the work of the gospel. Thus it was in the early church; and when in the church of today it is seen that by the power of the Spirit the members have taken their affections from the things of the world, and that they are willing to make sacrifices in order that their fellow men may hear the gospel, the truths proclaimed will have a powerful influence upon the hearers." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 70, 71.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2024

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

2. Seeing how Barnabas had won the hearts of the people, what did Ananias and Sapphira decide?

ACTS 5:1-3 *But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, ²And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?*

"With others, these professed disciples had shared the privilege of hearing the gospel preached by the apostles. They had been present with other believers when, after the apostles had prayed, 'the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.' Acts 4:31. Deep conviction had rested upon all present, and under the direct influence of the Spirit of God, Ananias and Sapphira had made a pledge to give to the Lord the proceeds from the sale of certain property.

"Afterward, Ananias and Sapphira grieved the Holy Spirit by yielding to feelings of covetousness. They began to regret their promise and soon lost the sweet influence of the blessing that had warmed their hearts with a desire to do large things in behalf of the cause of Christ. They thought they had been too hasty, that they ought to reconsider their decision. They talked the matter over, and decided not to fulfill their pledge. They saw, however, that those who parted with their possessions to supply the needs of their poorer brethren, were held in high esteem among the believers; and ashamed to have their brethren know that their selfish souls grudged that which they had solemnly dedicated to God, they deliberately decided to sell their property and pretend to give all the proceeds into the general fund, but really to keep a large share for themselves. Thus they would secure their living from the common store and at the same time gain the high esteem of their brethren." *—The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 71, 72.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2024

3. Why were Ananias and Sapphira struck down? What important principle was thus given to the church?

ACTS 5:2-11 *And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? ⁴Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. ⁵And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. ⁶And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. ⁷And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. ⁸And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. ⁹Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. ¹⁰Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead,*

and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. ¹¹And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

"Infinite Wisdom saw that this signal manifestation of the wrath of God was necessary to guard the young church from becoming demoralized. Their numbers were rapidly increasing. The church would have been endangered if, in the rapid increase of converts, men and women had been added who, while professing to serve God, were worshipping mammon. This judgment testified that men cannot deceive God, that He detects the hidden sin of the heart, and that He will not be mocked. It was designed as a warning to the church, to lead them to avoid pretense and hypocrisy, and to beware of robbing God....

"In the meantime the high priest and those with him had 'called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel.' The priests and rulers had decided to fix upon the disciples the charge of insurrection, to accuse them of murdering Ananias and Sapphira, and of conspiring to deprive the priests of their authority. They hoped so to excite the mob that it would take the matter in hand and deal with the disciples as it had dealt with Jesus. They were aware that many who did not accept the teachings of Christ were weary of the arbitrary rule of the Jewish authorities and anxious for some change. The priests feared that if these dissatisfied ones were to accept the truths proclaimed by the apostles, and were to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, the anger of the entire people would be raised against the religious leaders, who would then be made to answer for the murder of Christ. They decided to take strong measures to prevent this." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 73, 80.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2024

SIGNS AND WONDERS

4. What did the apostles do for the sick? Why were the Sadducees upset about this?

ACTS 5:12-18 *And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. ¹³And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. ¹⁴And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) ¹⁵Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. ¹⁶There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one. ¹⁷Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, ¹⁸And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.*

"Priests and rulers heard with amazement the clear, bold testimony of the apostles. The power of the risen Saviour had indeed fallen on the disciples, and their work was accompanied by signs and miracles that daily increased the number of believers. Along the streets where the disciples

were to pass, the people laid their sick 'on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.' Here also were brought those vexed with unclean spirits. The crowds gathered round them, and those who were healed shouted the praises of God and glorified the name of the Redeemer.

"The priests and rulers saw that Christ was extolled above them. As the Sadducees, who did not believe in a resurrection, heard the apostles declaring that Christ had risen from the dead, they were enraged, realizing that if the apostles were allowed to preach a risen Saviour, and to work miracles in His name, the doctrine that there would be no resurrection would be rejected by all, and the sect of the Sadducees would soon become extinct. The Pharisees were angry as they perceived that the tendency of the disciples' teaching was to undermine the Jewish ceremonies, and make the sacrificial offerings of no effect." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 77, 78.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2024

5. What was the first thing that the disciples did when they were released from prison? For what did the rulers reproach them?

ACTS 5:19-28 *But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, ²⁰Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. ²¹And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²²But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, ²³Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. ²⁴Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. ²⁵Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. ²⁶Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. ²⁷And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, ²⁸Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.*

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2024

6. What wise advice did Gamaliel give the Sanhedrin? What example did he set?

ACTS 5:34-39 *Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; ³⁵And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as*

touching these men. ³⁶For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. ³⁷After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. ³⁸And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: ³⁹But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

"But in the council there was one man who recognized the voice of God in the words spoken by the disciples. This was Gamaliel, a Pharisee of good reputation and a man of learning and high position. His clear intellect saw that the violent step contemplated by the priests would lead to terrible consequences. Before addressing those present, he requested that the prisoners be removed. He well knew the elements he had to deal with; he knew that the murderers of Christ would hesitate at nothing in order to carry out their purpose." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 82.

SABBATH, FEBRUARY 10, 2024

7. Persuaded by Gamaliel to let the apostles go free, what did the members of the Sanhedrin do before releasing them? What did the faithful apostles feel about this?

ACTS 5:40, 41 *And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.*

"The priests saw the reasonableness of these views, and were obliged to agree with Gamaliel. Yet their prejudice and hatred could hardly be restrained. Very reluctantly, after beating the disciples and charging them again at the peril of their lives to preach no more in the name of Jesus, they released them. 'And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 83.

FOR MEDITATION

"In the case of Ananias and Sapphira, the sin of fraud against God was speedily punished. The same sin was often repeated in the after history of the church and is committed by many in our time. But though it may not be attended by the visible manifestation of God's displeasure, it is no less heinous in His sight now than in the apostles' time. The warning has been given; God has clearly manifested His abhorrence of this sin; and all who give themselves up to hypocrisy and covetousness may be sure that they are destroying their own souls." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 76.

* * *

Sabbath, February 17, 2024

Appointment of the Seven Deacons

“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” Acts 6:3.

“The appointment of the seven to take the oversight of special lines of work, proved a great blessing to the church. These officers gave careful consideration to individual needs as well as to the general financial interests of the church, and by their prudent management and their godly example they were an important aid to their fellow officers in binding together the various interests of the church into a united whole.” *-The Acts of the Apostles, p. 89.*

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2024

BACKBITING

1. What problems arose as the number of the believers increased?

ACTS 6:1 *And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.*

“Thus it came to pass that as disciples were multiplied, the enemy succeeded in arousing the suspicions of some who had formerly been in the habit of looking with jealousy on their brethren in the faith and of finding fault with their spiritual leaders, and so ‘there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews.’ The cause of complaint was an alleged neglect of the Greek widows in the daily distribution of assistance. Any inequality would have been contrary to the spirit of the gospel, yet Satan had succeeded in arousing suspicion. Prompt measures must now be taken to remove all occasion for dissatisfaction, lest the enemy triumph in his effort to bring about a division among the believers.” *-The Acts of the Apostles, p. 88.*

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2024

2. What do the Holy Scriptures say about widows?

ISAIAH 1:17 *Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.*

JOB 29:12, 13 *Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. ¹³The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy.*

1 TIMOTHY 5:3-5 Honour widows that are widows indeed. ⁴But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God. ⁵Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.

"Many a widowed mother with her fatherless children is bravely striving to bear her double burden, often toiling far beyond her strength in order to keep her little ones with her and to provide for their needs. Little time has she for their training and instruction, little opportunity to surround them with influences that would brighten their lives. She needs encouragement, sympathy, and tangible help." -*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 203.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2024

AGREEMENTS

3. What solutions did the apostles find under the Holy Spirit's guidance? What characteristics were the proposed deacons to possess?

ACTS 6:2, 3 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. ³Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

"The time had come, the apostles stated, when the spiritual leaders having the oversight of the church should be relieved from the task of distributing to the poor and from similar burdens, so that they might be free to carry forward the work of preaching the gospel. 'Wherefore, brethren,' they said, 'look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.' This advice was followed, and by prayer and the laying on of hands, seven chosen men were solemnly set apart for their duties as deacons." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 89.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2024

4. Whom did the apostles choose as deacons, and how were they solemnly dedicated to God's service?

ACTS 6:5, 6 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: ⁶Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

DEUTERONOMY 34:9 And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the Lord commanded Moses.

"The same principles of piety and justice that were to guide the rulers among God's people in the time of Moses and of David, were also to be followed by those given the oversight of the newly organized church of God in the gospel dispensation. In the work of setting things in order in all the churches, and ordaining suitable men to act as officers, the apostles held to the high standards of leadership outlined in the Old Testament Scriptures. They maintained that he who is called to stand in a position of leading responsibility in the church 'must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.' Titus 1:7-9.

"Thus the efforts of Satan to attack the church in isolated places were met by concerted action on the part of all, and the plans of the enemy to disrupt and destroy were thwarted." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 95.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2024

5. Whom did the power of the word reach?

ACTS 6:7 *And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*

"That this step was in the order of God, is revealed in the immediate results for good that were seen. 'The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.' This ingathering of souls was due both to the greater freedom secured by the apostles and to the zeal and power shown by the seven deacons. The fact that these brethren had been ordained for the special work of looking after the needs of the poor, did not exclude them from teaching the faith. On the contrary, they were fully qualified to instruct others in the truth, and they engaged in the work with great earnestness and success." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 89.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2024

6. What testimony is given in the holy word about Stephen? How did certain men transgress the ninth commandment to oppose him and destroy his influence?

ACTS 6:8-14 *And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. ⁹Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. ¹⁰And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. ¹¹Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. ¹²And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, ¹³And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy*

place, and the law: ¹⁴For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

“Stephen, the foremost of the seven deacons, was a man of deep piety and broad faith. Though a Jew by birth, he spoke the Greek language and was familiar with the customs and manners of the Greeks. He therefore found opportunity to preach the gospel in the synagogues of the Greek Jews. He was very active in the cause of Christ and boldly proclaimed his faith. Learned rabbis and doctors of the law engaged in public discussion with him, confidently expecting an easy victory. But ‘they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.’ Not only did he speak in the power of the Holy Spirit, but it was plain that he was a student of the prophecies and learned in all matters of the law. He ably defended the truths that he advocated and utterly defeated his opponents. To him was the promise fulfilled, ‘Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.’ Luke 21:14, 15.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 97.

SABBATH, FEBRUARY 17, 2024

7. How did his face appear to the men of the council? What deep impression did his death make on those who were present?

ACTS 6:15 *And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.*

“The martyrdom of Stephen made a deep impression upon all who witnessed it. The memory of the signet of God upon his face; his words, which touched the very souls of those who heard them, remained in the minds of the beholders, and testified to the truth of that which he had proclaimed. His death was a sore trial to the church, but it resulted in the conviction of Saul, who could not efface from his memory the faith and constancy of the martyr, and the glory that had rested on his countenance....

“The Saviour had spoken to Saul through Stephen, whose clear reasoning could not be controverted. The learned Jew had seen the face of the martyr reflecting the light of Christ’s glory-appearing as if ‘it had been the face of an angel.’ Acts 6:15. He had witnessed Stephen’s forbearance toward his enemies and his forgiveness of them. He had also witnessed the fortitude and cheerful resignation of many whom he had caused to be tormented and afflicted. He had seen some yield up even their lives with rejoicing for the sake of their faith.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 101, 116.

FOR MEDITATION

“After the death of Stephen, Saul was elected a member of the Sanhedrin council in consideration of the part he had acted on that occasion. For a time he was a mighty instrument in the hands of Satan to carry out his rebel-

lion against the Son of God. But soon this relentless persecutor was to be employed in building up the church that he was now tearing down. A Mightier than Satan had chosen Saul to take the place of the martyred Stephen, to preach and suffer for His name, and to spread far and wide the tidings of salvation through His blood." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 102.

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Please read the Missionary Report from Ethiopia on page 42

8

Sabbath, February 24, 2024

Violent Persecution

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake." Matthew 5:10, 11.

"After the death of Stephen there arose against the believers in Jerusalem a persecution so relentless that 'they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 103.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2024

SAUL

1. Who was Saul of Tarsus? How did he persecute the believers of the early church?

ACTS 8:1-3 *And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. ²And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. ³As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.*

"Saul 'made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.' Of his zeal in this cruel work he said at a later date: 'I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison.... And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.' That Stephen was not the only one who suffered death may

be seen from Saul's own words, 'And when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.' Acts 26:9-11." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 103.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2024

2. How did the Lord turn evil into good? How did those who were scattered, especially Philip, continue to spread the gospel?

ACTS 8:4-8 *Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. ⁵Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. ⁶And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. ⁷For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. ⁸And there was great joy in that city.*

"The persecution that came upon the church in Jerusalem resulted in giving a great impetus to the work of the gospel. Success had attended the ministry of the word in that place, and there was danger that the disciples would linger there too long, unmindful of the Saviour's commission to go to all the world. Forgetting that strength to resist evil is best gained by aggressive service, they began to think that they had no work so important as that of shielding the church in Jerusalem from the attacks of the enemy. Instead of educating the new converts to carry the gospel to those who had not heard it, they were in danger of taking a course that would lead all to be satisfied with what had been accomplished. To scatter His representatives abroad, where they could work for others, God permitted persecution to come upon them. Driven from Jerusalem, the believers 'went everywhere preaching the word.'

"Philip, one of the seven deacons, was among those driven from Jerusalem. He 'went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits ... came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 105, 106.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2024

PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN

3. Who instructed Philip to meet with the Ethiopian queen's officer on his way home? How did the apostle carry out this command?

ACTS 8:26, 27 *And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. ²⁷And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship.*

"While Philip was still in Samaria, he was directed by a heavenly messenger to 'go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza.... And he arose and went.' He did not question the call, nor did he hesitate to obey; for he had learned the lesson of conformity to God's will." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 107.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2024

4. What book was the Ethiopian reading out loud as he traveled? What did he say when Philip asked if he understood what he was reading?

ACTS 8:28-33 *Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. ²⁹Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. ³⁰And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? ³¹And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. ³²The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: ³³In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.*

"Philip was directed to go to the Ethiopian and explain to him the prophecy that he was reading." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 107.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2024

A YEARNING THAT SAVES

5. What great longing did the Ethiopian eunuch have? What beautiful passage from Isaiah was he reading?

ACTS 8:34, 35 *And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? ³⁵Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.*

"'And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.' 'The scripture that he was reading was the prophecy of Isaiah relating to Christ: He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth: in His humiliation His judgment was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 107.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2024

6. The heart of the Ethiopian man was touched. With what simple words did he ask to be baptized?

ACTS 8:36-38 *And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? ³⁷And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of*

God. ³⁸And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

"The man's heart thrilled with interest as the Scriptures were explained to him; and when the disciple had finished, he was ready to accept the light given. He did not make his high worldly position an excuse for refusing the gospel. 'As they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 108.

SABBATH, FEBRUARY 24, 2024

7. How do we know that such experiences are not coincidental when souls demonstrate their longing for the gospel?

ACTS 8:39 *And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.*

"This Ethiopian represented a large class who need to be taught by such missionaries as Philip—men who will hear the voice of God and go where He sends them. There are many who are reading the Scriptures who cannot understand their true import. All over the world men and women are looking wistfully to heaven. Prayers and tears and inquiries go up from souls longing for light, for grace, for the Holy Spirit. Many are on the verge of the kingdom, waiting only to be gathered in.

"An angel guided Philip to the one who was seeking for light and who was ready to receive the gospel, and today angels will guide the footsteps of those workers who will allow the Holy Spirit to sanctify their tongues and refine and ennoble their hearts. The angel sent to Philip could himself have done the work for the Ethiopian, but this is not God's way of working. It is His plan that men are to work for their fellow men." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 109.

FOR MEDITATION

"The unselfish labor of Christians in the past should be to us an object lesson and an inspiration. The members of God's church are to be zealous of good works, separating from worldly ambition and walking in the footsteps of Him who went about doing good. With hearts filled with sympathy and compassion, they are to minister to those in need of help, bringing to sinners a knowledge of the Saviour's love. Such work calls for laborious effort, but it brings a rich reward. Those who engage in it with sincerity of purpose will see souls won to the Saviour, for the influence that attends the practical carrying out of the divine commission is irresistible." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 109.

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MISSIONARY REPORT FROM ETHIOPIA

To be read on Sabbath, February 24, 2024

*The Special Sabbath School Offering
will be gathered on Sabbath, March 2, 2024*

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,
We wish to extend our most sincere greetings with Micah 4:1. "But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it."

Ethiopia is a country in the eastern part of Africa with a population of more than 120 million people. It has eleven administrative regions and two independently authorized cities. More than 86 languages are spoken throughout all of the regions; and as of 2020, there were five official working languages—Amharic, Afaan Oromo, Tigrinya, Somali, and Afar. Only a few people speak English as a foreign language.

Ethiopia is the only African country with its own alphabet and a calendar containing 13 months in a year. It is one of two African countries that has never been colonized. The basic food of virtually every Ethiopian meal is a delicious pancake called "injera," which accompanies tasty stews.

In the 2007 National Census, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church represented 43.5 percent of the population; Muslims, 33.9 percent; Protestants and Pentecostals, 18.6 percent; Catholics, 0.7 percent; traditional religions, 2.6 percent; and others, 0.8 percent.

The International Missionary Society, S.D.A. Church, Reform Movement, was first introduced in Ethiopia in 2006 by the late Pastor Parmenas N. Shirima, followed by Pastors Tzvetan Petkov and Idel Suarez, Jr. Ethiopia was blessed to receive many visitors from the General Conference and the African Division, as well as from different countries around the world.

The church is represented in five administrative regions and one federal city. The headquarters of the Ethiopian Union is in Addis Ababa. There are five fields and one mission field with a total membership of over 1,700 believers. Intensive missionary efforts are being put forth to enter a sixth administrative region, the northwestern part of the country.

Thanks to the efforts of one of our pastors, a piece of land was obtained from the government near the town of Hossana to establish a school. The town is the center for many southern Ethiopian tribes, and the area is developing quickly. All of the legal documents for the land

were obtained in 2013. The project was named “Ebedmelech School” by Elder Idel Suarez, Jr., the past president of the General Conference. Because it was not possible to get the project going quickly, the local government wanted to donate the land to another organization. This forced us to initiate the project with our own resources. With the support of the General Conference, the land was leveled and construction began on the school in 2017. Two classroom buildings were erected using local materials, such as sticks and mud, so the foundation was not made of stones and bricks. With the donors’ contributions, we could install doors and windows and put up a temporary fence around the school grounds. With additional help from the General Conference and the members’ support, an additional two-room building was added in 2021.

However, we were unable to finish the construction of the school because of financial limitations. Nevertheless, it began operation as the Ministry of Education continued to add more requirements—more buildings for classrooms, warehouses, library, teachers’ room, administrative offices, first aid, kitchen, bathrooms, security rooms, and school facilities, including books and desks for students and staff. Chairs, computers, printers, photocopiers, and whiteboards are also required. Sadly, the people of the area, who observe the slow progress of the work, mock us, as it is written: “... This man began to build, and was not able to finish.” Luke 14:30. This school can be an excellent means of presenting the truth to the children and also to help raise funds for missionary work and other purposes in Ethiopia.

Therefore, we call on all of our brothers and sisters around the world to join us in this wonderful plan to reach families with the present truth through the school. We hope and trust that this project will be completed through your generous donations to be collected next Sabbath. Finally, “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” Revelation 22:20, 21.

Your brothers in the Lord,

–Pastor Lencha Tekle
President of the Ethiopian Union

Pastor Tsegaye Obola
Secretary/Coordinator of the Ebedmelech School Project

SPECIAL SABBATH SCHOOL OFFERING FOR ETHIOPIA

God bless the contributions of His faithful, generous people!

9

Sabbath, March 2, 2024

From Persecutor to Disciple

"And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized." Acts 9:18.

"Prominent among the Jewish leaders who became thoroughly aroused by the success attending the proclamation of the gospel, was Saul of Tarsus. A Roman citizen by birth, Saul was nevertheless a Jew by descent and had been educated in Jerusalem by the most eminent of the rabbis. 'Of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin,' Saul was 'a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.' Philippians 3:5, 6. He was regarded by the rabbis as a young man of great promise, and high hopes were cherished concerning him as an able and zealous defender of the ancient faith. His elevation to membership in the Sanhedrin council placed him in a position of power." *-The Acts of the Apostles, p. 112.*

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2024

SAUL'S CONVERSION

1. For what purpose did Saul travel to Damascus? Who met him on the way in a glorious light from heaven, changing his perspective?

ACTS 9:1-6 *And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, ²And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. ³And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: ⁴And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? ⁵And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. ⁶And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

“But Saul understood the words that were spoken, and to him was clearly revealed the One who spoke—even the Son of God. In the glorious Being who stood before him he saw the Crucified One. Upon the soul of the stricken Jew the image of the Saviour’s countenance was imprinted forever. The words spoken struck home to his heart with appalling force. Into the darkened chambers of his mind there poured a flood of light, revealing the ignorance and error of his former life and his present need of the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit....

“A general slain in battle is lost to his army, but his death gives no additional strength to the enemy. But when a man of prominence joins the opposing force, not only are his services lost, but those to whom he joins himself gain a decided advantage. Saul of Tarsus, on his way to Damascus, might easily have been struck dead by the Lord, and much strength would have been withdrawn from the persecuting power. But God in His providence not only spared Saul’s life, but converted him, thus transferring a champion from the side of the enemy to the side of Christ. An eloquent speaker and a severe critic, Paul, with his stern purpose and undaunted courage, possessed the very qualifications needed in the early church.”
-*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 115, 124.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2024

2. What did the men who accompanied Saul experience?

ACTS 9:7 *And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.*

“Filled with fear, and almost blinded by the intensity of the light, the companions of Saul heard a voice, but saw no man.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 115.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2024

3. Meanwhile, whom had the Lord prepared in Damascus to instruct Saul, and what objections did he express to the divine instructions? How did he feel about being the instrument used by God to meet the terrible persecutor of God’s people?

ACTS 9:8-18 *And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. ⁹And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. ¹⁰And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. ¹¹And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, ¹²And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. ¹³Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: ¹⁴And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. ¹⁵But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear*

my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: ¹⁶For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. ¹⁷And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. ¹⁸And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

"Ananias could scarcely credit the words of the angel; for the reports of Saul's bitter persecution of the saints at Jerusalem had spread far and wide. He presumed to expostulate: 'Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to Thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy name.' But the command was imperative: 'Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.'

"Obedient to the direction of the angel, Ananias sought out the man who had but recently breathed out threatenings against all who believed on the name of Jesus; and putting his hands on the head of the penitent sufferer, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 121.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2024

DISTRUST

4. What did the believers think of Saul's conversion? How did they help him to escape from certain death?

ACTS 9:20-25 *And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. ²¹But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? ²²But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. ²³And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: ²⁴But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. ²⁵Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.*

"These days of close self-examination and of heart humiliation were spent in lonely seclusion. The believers, having been given warning of the purpose of Saul in coming to Damascus, feared that he might be acting a part, in order the more readily to deceive them; and they held themselves aloof, refusing him their sympathy....

"From Arabia Paul 'returned again unto Damascus' (Galatians 1:17), and 'preached boldly ... in the name of Jesus.' Unable to withstand the wisdom of his arguments, 'the Jews took counsel to kill him.' The gates of

the city were diligently guarded day and night to cut off his escape. This crisis led the disciples to seek God earnestly, and finally they 'took him by night, and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket.' Acts 9:25, R.V." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 117, 128.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2024

5. How did the apostles receive him in Jerusalem, and who interceded so that Paul would be accepted by them? What tumultuous experiences followed?

ACTS 9:26-31 *And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. ²⁸And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. ²⁹And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. ³⁰Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. ³¹Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.*

"Upon arriving in the city where he had once been well known as 'Saul the persecutor,' 'he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.' It was difficult for them to believe that so bigoted a Pharisee, and one who had done so much to destroy the church, could become a sincere follower of Jesus. 'But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.' Upon hearing this, the disciples received him as one of their number. Soon they had abundant evidence as to the genuineness of his Christian experience." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 128, 129.

FRIDAY, MARCH 1, 2024

A THREE-DAY TRIAL

6. How did Paul's original aim change? Why was he "lonely" in Damascus?

ACTS 9:2, 9 *And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.... ⁹And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.*

"On the morning of that eventful day, Saul had neared Damascus with feelings of self-satisfaction because of the confidence that had been placed in him by the chief priest. To him had been entrusted grave responsibilities. He was commissioned to further the interests of the Jewish reli-

gion by checking, if possible, the spread of the new faith in Damascus. He had determined that his mission should be crowned with success and had looked forward with eager anticipation to the experiences that he expected were before him....

"He had no desire to appeal to the unconverted Jews, with whom he had planned to unite in persecuting the believers; for he knew that they would not even listen to his story. Thus he seemed to be shut away from all human sympathy. His only hope of help was in a merciful God, and to Him he appealed in brokenness of heart." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 117, 118.

SABBATH, MARCH 2, 2024

7. How did Paul experience the words of Jesus, "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted"?

MATTHEW 23:12 *And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*

"As Saul yielded himself fully to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, he saw the mistakes of his life and recognized the far-reaching claims of the law of God. He who had been a proud Pharisee, confident that he was justified by his good works, now bowed before God with the humility and simplicity of a little child, confessing his own unworthiness and pleading the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour. Saul longed to come into full harmony and communion with the Father and the Son; and in the intensity of his desire for pardon and acceptance he offered up fervent supplications to the throne of grace.

"The prayers of the penitent Pharisee were not in vain. The inmost thoughts and emotions of his heart were transformed by divine grace; and his nobler faculties were brought into harmony with the eternal purposes of God. Christ and His righteousness became to Saul more than the whole world." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 119, 120.

FOR MEDITATION

"In the record of the conversion of Saul important principles are given us, which we should ever bear in mind. Saul was brought directly into the presence of Christ. He was one whom Christ intended for a most important work, one who was to be a 'chosen vessel' unto Him; yet the Lord did not at once tell him of the work that had been assigned him. He arrested him in his course and convicted him of sin; but when Saul asked, 'What wilt Thou have me to do?' the Saviour placed the inquiring Jew in connection with His church, there to obtain a knowledge of God's will concerning him." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 120.

* * *

Nothing Is a Coincidence

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28.

“How carefully the Lord worked to overcome the prejudice against the Gentiles that had been so firmly fixed in Peter’s mind by his Jewish training! By the vision of the sheet and its contents He sought to divest the apostle’s mind of this prejudice and to teach the important truth that in heaven there is no respect of persons; that Jew and Gentile are alike precious in God’s sight; that through Christ the heathen may be made partakers of the blessings and privileges of the gospel.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 136.

SUNDAY, MARCH 3, 2024

THE CENTURION OF CAESAREA

1. What is recorded about the centurion in Caesarea? How did God show that He knew him?

ACTS 10:1, 2 *There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, ²A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.*

“Cornelius was a Roman centurion. He was a man of wealth and noble birth, and his position was one of trust and honor. A heathen by birth, training, and education, through contact with the Jews he had gained a knowledge of God, and he worshiped Him with a true heart, showing the sincerity of his faith by compassion to the poor. He was known far and near for his beneficence, and his righteous life made him of good repute among both Jews and Gentiles. His influence was a blessing to all with whom he came in contact....

“Believing in God as the Creator of heaven and earth, Cornelius revered Him, acknowledged His authority, and sought His counsel in all the affairs of life. He was faithful to Jehovah in his home life and in his official duties. He had erected the altar of God in his home, for he dared not attempt to carry out his plans or to bear his responsibilities without the help of God.

“Though Cornelius believed the prophecies and was looking for the Messiah to come, he had not a knowledge of the gospel as revealed in the life and death of Christ. He was not a member of the Jewish church and would have been looked upon by the rabbis as a heathen and unclean. But the same Holy Watcher who said of Abraham, ‘I know him,’ knew Cor-

nelius also, and sent a message direct from heaven to him." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 132, 133.

MONDAY, MARCH 4, 2024

2. In what manner was he called? What specific instructions was he given?

ACTS 10:3-6 *He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. ⁴And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. ⁵And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: ⁶He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.*

"The explicitness of these directions, in which was named even the occupation of the man with whom Peter was staying, shows that Heaven is acquainted with the history and business of men in every station of life. God is familiar with the experience and work of the humble laborer, as well as with that of the king upon his throne." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 133.

TUESDAY, MARCH 5, 2024

3. What vision did Peter have as he was waiting for his food to be served? What was the purpose of this vision?

ACTS 10:9-13 *On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: ¹⁰And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, ¹¹And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: ¹²Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. ¹³And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.*

"The angel, after his interview with Cornelius, went to Peter, in Joppa. At the time, Peter was praying upon the housetop of his lodging, and we read that he 'became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance.' It was not for physical food alone that Peter hungered. As from the housetop he viewed the city of Joppa and the surrounding country he hungered for the salvation of his countrymen. He had an intense desire to point out to them from the Scriptures the prophecies relating to the sufferings and death of Christ.

"In the vision Peter 'saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice

spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 135.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6, 2024

THE GOSPEL PREACHED ACTIVELY TO THE GENTILES

4. In giving Peter the vision, what did God want to teach all Christians? What does everyone need to understand about His purposes and sacred laws?

ACTS 10:34, 35 *Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: ³⁵But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*

"This vision conveyed to Peter both reproof and instruction. It revealed to him the purpose of God—that by the death of Christ the Gentiles should be made fellow heirs with the Jews to the blessings of salvation. As yet none of the disciples had preached the gospel to the Gentiles. In their minds the middle wall of partition, broken down by the death of Christ, still existed, and their labors had been confined to the Jews, for they had looked upon the Gentiles as excluded from the blessings of the gospel. Now the Lord was seeking to teach Peter the worldwide extent of the divine plan." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 135.

THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 2024

5. What similarities were there between the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples in the upper room and what happened in Cornelius' home?

ACTS 2:4; 10:44, 46 *And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance....^{10:44}While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.... ⁴⁶For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.*

"Suddenly the discourse was interrupted by the descent of the Holy Spirit. 'While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.'

"'As I began to speak,' he said, in relating his experience, 'the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 139, 141.

6. Of what did Peter have to convince those who accompanied him on the visit to the Gentiles in Caesarea? When they returned to Jerusalem, what questions did others who were of the circumcision ask Peter?

ACTS 10:47; 11:3 *Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?...^{11:3}Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.*

"When the brethren in Judea heard that Peter had gone to the house of a Gentile and preached to those assembled, they were surprised and offended. They feared that such a course, which looked to them presumptuous, would have the effect of counteracting his own teaching. When they next saw Peter they met him with severe censure, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

"Peter laid the whole matter before them. He related his experience in regard to the vision and pleaded that it admonished him to observe no longer the ceremonial distinction of circumcision and uncircumcision, nor to look upon the Gentiles as unclean. He told them of the command given him to go to the Gentiles, of the coming of the messengers, of his journey to Caesarea, and of the meeting with Cornelius. He recounted the substance of his interview with the centurion, in which the latter had told him of the vision by which he had been directed to send for Peter." *-The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 141.

SABBATH, MARCH 9, 2024

7. Did the disciples in Jerusalem eventually accept Peter's attitude toward the Gentile believers in Caesarea?

ACTS 11:18 *When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

"Peter laid the whole matter before them. He related his experience in regard to the vision and pleaded that it admonished him to observe no longer the ceremonial distinction of circumcision and uncircumcision, nor to look upon the Gentiles as unclean. He told them of the command given him to go to the Gentiles, of the coming of the messengers, of his journey to Caesarea, and of the meeting with Cornelius. He recounted the substance of his interview with the centurion, in which the latter had told him of the vision by which he had been directed to send for Peter.

"On hearing this account, the brethren were silenced. Convinced that Peter's course was in direct fulfillment of the plan of God, and that their prejudices and exclusiveness were utterly contrary to the spirit of the gospel, they glorified God, saying, 'Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.'" *-The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 141, 142.

FOR MEDITATION

"Today God is seeking for souls among the high as well as the lowly. There are many like Cornelius, men whom the Lord desires to connect with His work in the world. Their sympathies are with the Lord's people, but the ties that bind them to the world hold them firmly. It requires moral courage for them to take their position for Christ. Special efforts should be made for these souls, who are in so great danger, because of their responsibilities and associations." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 139.

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11

Sabbath, March 16, 2024

Scattered for the Sake of the Gospel

"But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come." Matthew 10:23.

"After the disciples had been driven from Jerusalem by persecution, the gospel message spread rapidly through the regions lying beyond the limits of Palestine; and many small companies of believers were formed in important centers." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 155.

SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 2024

1. What happened to those who were scattered because of the tribulation, even though they were dedicated to preaching only to the Jews?

ACTS 11:19-21 *Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.²⁰ And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.*

"The gospel was publicly taught in Antioch by certain disciples from Cyprus and Cyrene, who came 'preaching the Lord Jesus.' 'The hand of the Lord was with them,' and their earnest labors were productive of fruit. 'A great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 156.

MONDAY, MARCH 11, 2024

2. With a new vision and filled with the Holy Spirit, whom did the leading brethren send to strengthen the work in Antioch?

ACTS 11:22-24 *Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. ²³Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. ²⁴For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.*

"Upon arrival in his new field of labor, Barnabas saw the work that had already been accomplished by divine grace, and he 'was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 156.

TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2024

CHRISTIANS

3. Whom did Barnabas look for in Tarsus, and where did he take him to join in the ministry?

ACTS 11:25, 26, FIRST PART *Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: ²⁶And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people.*

"As the work developed, Barnabas felt the need of suitable help in order to advance in the opening providences of God, and he went to Tarsus to seek for Paul, who, after his departure from Jerusalem some time before, had been laboring in 'the regions of Syria and Cilicia,' proclaiming 'the faith which once he destroyed.' Galatians 1:21, 23. Barnabas was successful in finding Paul and in persuading him to return with him as a companion in ministry....

"God had abundantly blessed the labors of Paul and Barnabas during the year they remained with the believers in Antioch. But neither of them had as yet been formally ordained to the gospel ministry. They had now reached a point in their Christian experience when God was about to entrust them with the carrying forward of a difficult missionary enterprise, in the prosecution of which they would need every advantage that could be obtained through the agency of the church." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 156, 160.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2024

4. What were the believers first called in that place? Why?

ACTS 11:26, SECOND PART *And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*

"It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians. The name was given them because Christ was the main theme of their preach-

ing, their teaching, and their conversation. Continually they were recounting the incidents that had occurred during the days of His earthly ministry, when His disciples were blessed with His personal presence. Untiringly they dwelt upon His teachings and His miracles of healing. With quivering lips and tearful eyes they spoke of His agony in the garden, His betrayal, trial, and execution, the forbearance and humility with which He had endured the contumely and torture imposed upon Him by His enemies, and the Godlike pity with which He had prayed for those who persecuted Him. His resurrection and ascension, and His work in heaven as the Mediator for fallen man, were topics on which they rejoiced to dwell. Well might the heathen call them Christians, since they preached Christ and addressed their prayers to God through Him. It was God who gave to them the name of Christian. This is a royal name, given to all who join themselves to Christ." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 157.

THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 2024

5. What happens when a person is persecuted for being a Christian? Nevertheless, how should he feel about this because of the One who gave His life for man?

1 PETER 4:14, 16 *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye ; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.... ¹⁶Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*

"The example of the followers of Christ at Antioch should be an inspiration to every believer living in the great cities of the world today. While it is in the order of God that chosen workers of consecration and talent should be stationed in important centers of population to lead out in public efforts, it is also His purpose that the church members living in these cities shall use their God-given talents in working for souls. There are rich blessings in store for those who surrender fully to the call of God. As such workers endeavor to win souls to Jesus, they will find that many who never could have been reached in any other way are ready to respond to intelligent personal effort." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 158.

FRIDAY, MARCH 15, 2024

ORDINATION OF BARNABAS AND SAUL

6. Who laid their hands on Barnabas and Paul? But who actually chose them for their special work?

ACTS 13:1-3 *Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. ³And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.*

"The circumstances connected with the separation of Paul and Barnabas by the Holy Spirit to a definite line of service show clearly that the Lord works through appointed agencies in His organized church. Years before, when the divine purpose concerning Paul was first revealed to him by the Saviour Himself, Paul was immediately afterward brought into contact with members of the newly organized church at Damascus. Furthermore, the church at that place was not long left in darkness as to the personal experience of the converted Pharisee. And now, when the divine commission given at that time was to be more fully carried out, the Holy Spirit, again bearing witness concerning Paul as a chosen vessel to bear the gospel to the Gentiles, laid upon the church the work of ordaining him and his fellow laborer. As the leaders of the church in Antioch 'ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.'

"Paul regarded the occasion of his formal ordination as marking the beginning of a new and important epoch in his lifework. It was from this time that he afterward dated the beginning of his apostleship in the Christian church." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 162, 164.

SABBATH, MARCH 16, 2024

IMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH

7. What question did Saul ask Jesus when He appeared to him on the road to Damascus? Whom do independent-minded men despise?

ACTS 9:6 *And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

"He arrested him in his course and convicted him of sin; but when Saul asked, 'What wilt Thou have me to do?' the Saviour placed the inquiring Jew in connection with His church, there to obtain a knowledge of God's will concerning him. The marvelous light that illumined the darkness of Saul was the work of the Lord; but there was also a work that was to be done for him by the disciples. Christ had performed the work of revelation and conviction; and now the penitent was in a condition to learn from those whom God had ordained to teach His truth....

"There have ever been in the church those who are constantly inclined toward individual independence. They seem unable to realize that independence of spirit is liable to lead the human agent to have too much confidence in himself and to trust in his own judgment rather than to respect the counsel and highly esteem the judgment of his brethren, especially of those in the offices that God has appointed for the leadership of His people. God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for he who does this despises the voice of God." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 120, 121, 163.

FOR MEDITATION

“While the light of the gospel was shining brightly at Antioch, an important work was continued by the apostles who had remained in Jerusalem...

“Prominent among the apostles who engaged in this work were Peter, James, and John, who felt confident that God had appointed them to preach Christ among their countrymen at home. Faithfully and wisely they labored, testifying of the things they had seen and heard, and appealing to ‘a more sure word of prophecy’ (2 Peter 1:19), in an effort to persuade ‘the house of Israel ... that God hath made that same Jesus, whom’ the Jews ‘crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ Acts 2:36.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 165.

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12

Sabbath, March 23, 2024

Ministering Angels

“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” Hebrews 1:14.

“To the worker for God the record of these angel visits should bring strength and courage. Today, as verily as in the days of the apostles, heavenly messengers are passing through the length and breadth of the land, seeking to comfort the sorrowing, to protect the impenitent, to win the hearts of men to Christ. We cannot see them personally; nevertheless they are with us, guiding, directing, protecting.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 152.

SUNDAY, MARCH 17, 2024

MARTYRDOM OF JAMES

1. How was James, John’s brother, martyred? What plans did the same ruler have for Peter?

ACTS 12:1-4 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.² And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.³ And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)⁴ And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

“Herod also held the position of tetrarch of Galilee. He was professedly a proselyte to the Jewish faith, and apparently very zealous in carrying out the ceremonies of the Jewish law. Desirous of obtaining the favor of the Jews, hoping thus to make secure his offices and honors, he proceeded

to carry out their desires by persecuting the church of Christ, spoiling the houses and goods of the believers, and imprisoning the leading members of the church. He cast James, the brother of John, into prison, and sent an executioner to kill him with the sword, as another Herod had caused the prophet John to be beheaded. Seeing that the Jews were well pleased with these efforts, he imprisoned Peter also.

"It was during the Passover that these cruelties were practiced. While the Jews were celebrating their deliverance from Egypt and pretending great zeal for the law of God, they were at the same time transgressing every principle of that law by persecuting and murdering the believers in Christ." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 143, 144.

MONDAY, MARCH 18, 2024

2. In what stressful position was Peter bound? How did God use this opportunity to save His servant from greater danger?

ACTS 12:4-6 *And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. ⁵Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. ⁶And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.*

"Remembering the former escape of the apostles from prison, Herod on this occasion had taken double precautions. To prevent all possibility of release, Peter had been put under the charge of sixteen soldiers, who, in different watches, guarded him day and night. In his cell he was placed between two soldiers and was bound by two chains, each chain being fastened to the wrist of one of the soldiers. He was unable to move without their knowledge. With the prison doors securely fastened, and a strong guard before them, all chance of rescue or escape through human means was cut off. But man's extremity is God's opportunity.

"While, upon various pretexts, the execution of Peter was being delayed until after the Passover, the members of the church had time for deep searching of heart and earnest prayer. They prayed without ceasing for Peter, for they felt that he could not be spared from the cause. They realized that they had reached a place where, without the special help of God, the church of Christ would be destroyed." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 145.

TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2024

3. Was Peter upset about his imprisonment? Whom did he trust?

ACTS 12:6 *And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.*

PSALM 4:8 *I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.*

"It is the last night before the proposed execution. A mighty angel is sent from heaven to rescue Peter. The strong gates that shut in the saint of God open without the aid of human hands. The angel of the Most High passes through, and the gates close noiselessly behind him. He enters the cell, and there lies Peter, sleeping the peaceful sleep of perfect trust." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 146.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2024

THE UNEXPECTED VISITOR

4. Who entered the prison amid terrible darkness? At what point did Peter grasp what Heaven was doing to help the church?

ACTS 12:7-11 *And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. ⁸And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. ⁹And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. ¹⁰When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. ¹¹And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.*

"He tried to recall the events of the past few moments. He remembered falling asleep, bound between two soldiers, with his sandals and outer garments removed. He examined his person and found himself fully dressed and girded. His wrists, swollen from wearing the cruel irons, were free from the manacles. He realized that his freedom was no delusion, no dream or vision, but a blessed reality. On the morrow he was to have been led forth to die; but, lo, an angel had delivered him from prison and from death. 'And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 148.

THURSDAY, MARCH 21, 2024

RELUCTANCE TO OPEN THE DOOR

5. After being freed, to whose house did Peter go and knock? What transpired after a young sister heard his voice as the church was praying for him?

ACTS 12:12-16 *And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. ¹³And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. ¹⁴And when she knew*

Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. ¹⁵And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. ¹⁶But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.

"The apostle made his way at once to the house where his brethren were assembled and where they were at that moment engaged in earnest prayer for him. 'As Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.'

"'But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison.' And Peter 'departed, and went into another place.' Joy and praise filled the hearts of the believers, because God had heard and answered their prayers and had delivered Peter from the hands of Herod." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 148.

FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2024

6. When morning arrived and the soldiers realized that Peter was gone, what took place in the prison?

ACTS 12:18, 19 *Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. ¹⁹And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode.*

"When the keepers before the door found that Peter had escaped, they were seized with terror. It had been expressly stated that their lives would be required for the life of their charge, and because of this they had been especially vigilant. When the officers came for Peter, the soldiers were still at the door of the prison, the bolts and bars were still fast, the chains were still secured to the wrists of the two soldiers; but the prisoner was gone.

"When the report of Peter's escape was brought to Herod, he was exasperated and enraged. Charging the prison guard with unfaithfulness, he ordered them to be put to death. Herod knew that no human power had rescued Peter, but he was determined not to acknowledge that a divine power had frustrated his design, and he set himself in bold defiance against God." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 149.

SABBATH, MARCH 23, 2024

7. Nevertheless, what horrible death did Herod meet?

ACTS 12:20-23 *And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country*

was nourished by the king's country. ²¹And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. ²²And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. ²³And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

"Clad in a robe sparkling with silver and gold, which caught the rays of the sun in its glittering folds and dazzled the eyes of the beholders, he was a gorgeous figure.... They further declared that while they had ever respected him as a ruler, henceforth they should worship him as a god....

"The same angel who had come from the royal courts to rescue Peter, had been the messenger of wrath and judgment to Herod. The angel smote Peter to arouse him from slumber; it was with a different stroke that he smote the wicked king, laying low his pride and bringing upon him the punishment of the Almighty. Herod died in great agony of mind and body, under the retributive judgment of God." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 149, 152.

FOR MEDITATION

"We need to understand better than we do the mission of the angels. It would be well to remember that every true child of God has the cooperation of heavenly beings. Invisible armies of light and power attend the meek and lowly ones who believe and claim the promises of God. Cherubim and seraphim, and angels that excel in strength, stand at God's right hand, 'all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.' Hebrews 1:14." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 154.

* * *

13

Sabbath, March 30, 2024

A Fearful Young Man

"And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister." Acts 13:5.

SUNDAY, MARCH 24, 2024

1. Who chooses men for the ministry? Who accompanied Barnabas and Paul as an assistant?

ACTS 13:1-5 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted,

the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. ³And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. ⁴So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

“Sent forth by the Holy Ghost,’ Paul and Barnabas, after their ordination by the brethren in Antioch, ‘departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.’ Thus the apostles began their first missionary journey!...

“Mark’s mother was a convert to the Christian religion, and her home at Jerusalem was an asylum for the disciples. There they were always sure of a welcome and a season of rest. It was during one of these visits of the apostles to his mother’s home, that Mark proposed to Paul and Barnabas that he should accompany them on their missionary tour. He felt the favor of God in his heart and longed to devote himself entirely to the work of the gospel ministry.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 166.

MONDAY, MARCH 25, 2024

2. Who requested Paul and Barnabas to come and share God’s word with him?

ACTS 13:7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

“And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus: which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man, who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God...’

“Thus it was when Sergius Paulus, the deputy of Cyprus, was listening to the gospel message. The deputy had sent for the apostles, that he might be instructed in the message they had come to bear, and now the forces of evil, working through the sorcerer Elymas, sought with their baleful suggestions to turn him from the faith and so thwart the purpose of God.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 167.

TUESDAY, MARCH 26, 2024

3. Why did John Mark leave Paul and Barnabas and return home?

ACTS 13:13 Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

“Paul and his company continued their journey, going to Perga, in Pamphylia. Their way was toilsome; they encountered hardships and privations, and were beset with dangers on every side. In the towns and cities through which they passed, and along the lonely highways, they were surrounded by dangers seen and unseen. But Paul and Barnabas had learned to trust God’s power to deliver. Their hearts were filled with fervent love for perishing souls. As faithful shepherds in search of the lost sheep, they gave no

thought to their own ease and convenience. Forgetful of self, they faltered not when weary, hungry, and cold. They had in view but one object—the salvation of those who had wandered far from the fold.

“It was here that Mark, overwhelmed with fear and discouragement, wavered for a time in his purpose to give himself wholeheartedly to the Lord’s work. Unused to hardships, he was disheartened by the perils and privations of the way. He had labored with success under favorable circumstances; but now, amidst the opposition and perils that so often beset the pioneer worker, he failed to endure hardness as a good soldier of the cross. He had yet to learn to face danger and persecution and adversity with a brave heart.” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 169.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 2024

4. How did the experienced apostles see the young man’s decision?

“As the apostles advanced, and still greater difficulties were apprehended, Mark was intimidated and, losing all courage, refused to go farther and returned to Jerusalem.

“This desertion caused Paul to judge Mark unfavorably, and even severely, for a time. Barnabas, on the other hand, was inclined to excuse him because of his inexperience. He felt anxious that Mark should not abandon the ministry, for he saw in him qualifications that would fit him to be a useful worker for Christ.” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 169, 170.

THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2024

PAUL AND BARNABAS PARTED WAYS

5. What arose between Paul and Barnabas when the latter wanted to invite John Mark to re-join them?

ACTS 15:36-40 *And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. ³⁷And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. ³⁸But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. ³⁹And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; ⁴⁰And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.*

“Barnabas was ready to go with Paul, but wished to take with them Mark, who had again decided to devote himself to the ministry. To this Paul objected. He ‘thought not good to take ... with them’ one who during their first missionary journey had left them in a time of need. He was not inclined to excuse Mark’s weakness in deserting the work for the safety and comforts of home. He urged that one with so little stamina was unfitted for a work requiring patience, self-denial, bravery, devotion, faith, and a willingness to sacrifice, if need be, even life itself.” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 202.

6. The positive result of the bitter dispute was that there were now two pairs to carry the gospel forward. Whom did they include? Finally, what occurred later with John Mark?

ACTS 15:39, 40 *And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; ⁴⁰And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.*

“So sharp was the contention that Paul and Barnabas separated, the latter following out his convictions and taking Mark with him. ‘So Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.’

“In after years his solicitude in Mark’s behalf was richly rewarded, for the young man gave himself unreservedly to the Lord and to the work of proclaiming the gospel message in difficult fields. Under the blessing of God, and the wise training of Barnabas, he developed into a valuable worker.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 170, 202.

SABBATH, MARCH 30, 2024

7. How did the apostle Paul’s opinion of Mark change?

COLOSSIANS 4:10 *Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister’s son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him).*

2 TIMOTHY 4:11 *Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.*

“Paul was afterward reconciled to Mark and received him as a fellow laborer. He also recommended him to the Colossians as one who was a fellow worker ‘unto the kingdom of God,’ and ‘a comfort unto me.’ Colossians 4:11. Again, not long before his own death, he spoke of Mark as ‘profitable’ to him ‘for the ministry.’ 2 Timothy 4:11.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 170.

FOR MEDITATION

“Since the earlier years of his profession of faith, Mark’s Christian experience had deepened. As he had studied more closely the life and death of Christ he had obtained clearer views of the Saviour’s mission, its toils and conflicts. Reading in the scars in Christ’s hands and feet the marks of His service for humanity, and the length to which self-abnegation leads to save the lost and perishing, Mark had become willing to follow the Master in the path of self-sacrifice. Now, sharing the lot of Paul the prisoner, he understood better than ever before that it is infinite gain to win Christ, infinite loss to win the world and lose the soul for whose redemption the blood of Christ was shed. In the face of severe trial and adversity, Mark continued steadfast, a wise and beloved helper of the apostle.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 455.

* * *

Preaching among the Gentiles

"But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren." Acts 14:2.

"In all their missionary endeavors Paul and Barnabas sought to follow Christ's example of willing sacrifice and faithful, earnest labor for souls. Wide awake, zealous, untiring, they did not consult inclination or personal ease, but with prayerful anxiety and unceasing activity they sowed the seed of truth. And with the sowing of the seed, the apostles were careful to give to all who took their stand for the gospel, practical instruction that was of untold value. This spirit of earnestness and godly fear made upon the minds of the new disciples a lasting impression regarding the importance of the gospel message." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 186.

SUNDAY, MARCH 31, 2024

ICONIUM

1. When Paul and Barnabas preached in Iconium, both Jews and Greeks believed the gospel. But what did the unbelieving Jews do?

ACTS 14:1, 2 *And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. ²But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.*

"The increasing popularity of the message borne by the apostles, filled the unbelieving Jews with envy and hatred, and they determined to stop the labors of Paul and Barnabas at once. By means of false and exaggerated reports they led the authorities to fear that the entire city was in danger of being incited to insurrection. They declared that large numbers were attaching themselves to the apostles and suggested that it was for secret and dangerous designs." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 178.

MONDAY, APRIL 1, 2024

2. How did the Lord support the disciples in dealing with falsehood? What happened among the people?

ACTS 14:3, 4 *Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and*

wonders to be done by their hands. ⁴But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

"In consequence of these charges the disciples were repeatedly brought before the authorities; but their defense was so clear and sensible, and their statement of what they were teaching so calm and comprehensive, that a strong influence was exerted in their favor. Although the magistrates were prejudiced against them by the false statements they had heard, they dared not condemn them. They could but acknowledge that the teachings of Paul and Barnabas tended to make men virtuous, law-abiding citizens, and that the morals and order of the city would improve if the truths taught by the apostles were accepted." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 178.

TUESDAY, APRIL 2, 2024

FACING CONFLICT

3. To what dangerous point did the opposition against the apostles escalate? Therefore, what did they do?

ACTS 14:5, 6 *And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, ⁶They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about.*

"So enraged were the leaders among the Jews by the turn that matters were taking, that they determined to gain their ends by violence. Arousing the worst passions of the ignorant, noisy mob, they succeeded in creating a tumult, which they attributed to the teaching of the disciples. By this false charge they hoped to gain the help of the magistrates in carrying out their purpose. They determined that the apostles should have no opportunity to vindicate themselves and that the mob should interfere by stoning Paul and Barnabas, thus putting an end to their labors.

"Friends of the apostles, though unbelievers, warned them of the malicious designs of the Jews and urged them not to expose themselves needlessly to the fury of the mob, but to escape for their lives. Paul and Barnabas accordingly departed in secret from Iconium, leaving the believers to carry on the work alone for a time. But they by no means took final leave; they purposed to return after the excitement had abated, and complete the work begun." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 178, 179.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3, 2024

4. What miracle occurred in Lystra through Jesus' power working in Paul and Barnabas?

ACTS 14:7-10 *And there they preached the gospel. ⁸And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: ⁹The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, ¹⁰Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.*

"At one time, while Paul was telling the people of Christ's work as a healer of the sick and afflicted, he saw among his hearers a cripple whose eyes were fastened on him and who received and believed his words. Paul's heart went out in sympathy toward the afflicted man, in whom he discerned one who 'had faith to be healed.' In the presence of the idolatrous assembly Paul commanded the cripple to stand upright on his feet. Heretofore the sufferer had been able to take a sitting posture only, but now he instantly obeyed Paul's command and for the first time in his life stood on his feet. Strength came with this effort of faith, and he who had been a cripple 'leaped and walked.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 181.

THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 2024

5. How did the people in Lystra react to this? What did they call Paul and Barnabas?

ACTS 14:11-18 *And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. ¹²And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. ¹⁴Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, ¹⁵And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: ¹⁶Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. ¹⁸And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.*

"The Lystrians reasoned that they had beheld with their own eyes the miraculous power exercised by the apostles. They had seen a cripple who had never before been able to walk, made to rejoice in perfect health and strength. It was only after much persuasion on the part of Paul, and careful explanation regarding the mission of himself and Barnabas as representatives of the God of heaven and of His Son, the great Healer, that the people were persuaded to give up their purpose." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 182.

FRIDAY, APRIL 5, 2024

6. Who stirred them up to stone Paul? After they left him for dead, what happened?

ACTS 14:19, 20 *And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. ²⁰Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.*

"The disappointment that the Lystrians had suffered in being refused the privilege of offering sacrifice to the apostles, prepared them to turn against Paul and Barnabas with an enthusiasm approaching that with which they had hailed them as gods. Incited by the Jews, they planned to attack the apostles by force. The Jews charged them not to allow Paul an opportunity to speak, alleging that if they were to grant him this privilege, he would bewitch the people. Soon the murderous designs of the enemies of the gospel were carried out. Yielding to the influence of evil, the Lystrians became possessed with a satanic fury and, seizing Paul, mercilessly stoned him. The apostle thought that his end had come. The martyrdom of Stephen, and the cruel part that he himself had acted upon that occasion, came vividly to his mind. Covered with bruises and faint with pain, he fell to the ground, and the infuriated mob 'drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.'

"What was their surprise when in the midst of their lamentations the apostle suddenly lifted up his head and rose to his feet with the praise of God upon his lips. To the believers this unexpected restoration of God's servant was regarded as a miracle of divine power and seemed to set the signet of Heaven upon their change of belief. They rejoiced with inexpressible gladness and praised God with renewed faith." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 183, 184.

SABBATH, APRIL 6, 2024

7. How did Paul and Barnabas view the things that they suffered in Lystra? What other cities were evangelized, and which ones were strengthened?

ACTS 14:21-28 *And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, ²²Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. ²³And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. ²⁴And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. ²⁵And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: ²⁶And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. ²⁷And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. ²⁸And there they abode long time with the disciples.*

ISAIAH 54:2 *Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes.*

"And so, undaunted by danger, 'they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith.' Many had accepted the glad tidings of the

gospel and had thus exposed themselves to reproach and opposition. These the apostles sought to establish in the faith in order that the work done might abide." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 185.

FOR MEDITATION

"When men of promise and ability were converted, as in the case of Timothy, Paul and Barnabas sought earnestly to show them the necessity of laboring in the vineyard. And when the apostles left for another place, the faith of these men did not fail, but rather increased. They had been faithfully instructed in the way of the Lord, and had been taught how to labor unselfishly, earnestly, perseveringly, for the salvation of their fellow men. This careful training of new converts was an important factor in the remarkable success that attended Paul and Barnabas as they preached the gospel in heathen lands." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 186.

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15

Sabbath, April 13, 2024

The First Delegates' Meetings

"And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." Acts 15:1.

"At Jerusalem the delegates from Antioch met the brethren of the various churches, who had gathered for a general meeting, and to them they related the success that had attended their ministry among the Gentiles. They then gave a clear outline of the confusion that had resulted because certain converted Pharisees had gone to Antioch declaring that, in order to be saved, the Gentile converts must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 191.

SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 2024

JUDAIZERS SOWED CONFUSION

1. What were the newly converted Gentiles told by some Jews?

ACTS 15:1 *And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.*

"With great assurance these Judaizing teachers asserted that in order to be saved, one must be circumcised and must keep the entire ceremonial law.

“Paul and Barnabas met this false doctrine with promptness and opposed the introduction of the subject to the Gentiles. On the other hand, many of the believing Jews of Antioch favored the position of the brethren recently come from Judea.... The Jews feared that if the restrictions and ceremonies of their law were not made obligatory upon the Gentiles as a condition of church fellowship, the national peculiarities of the Jews, which had hitherto kept them distinct from all other people, would finally disappear from among those who received the gospel message.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 188, 189.

MONDAY, APRIL 8, 2024

2. What did the brethren recognize as necessary to solve this problem? Where were they sent to meet with the apostles and elders concerning it?

ACTS 15:2-6 *When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. ³And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. ⁴And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. ⁵But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. ⁶And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.*

“This question was warmly discussed in the assembly. Intimately connected with the question of circumcision were several others demanding careful study. One was the problem as to what attitude should be taken toward the use of meats offered to idols. Many of the Gentile converts were living among ignorant and superstitious people who made frequent sacrifices and offerings to idols. The priests of this heathen worship carried on an extensive merchandise with the offerings brought to them, and the Jews feared that the Gentile converts would bring Christianity into disrepute by purchasing that which had been offered to idols, thereby sanctioning, in some measure, idolatrous customs.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 191.

TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2024

PETER EXPLAINED WHAT TRANSPIRED WITH CORNELIUS

3. What event did Peter tell about to help provide a foundation for the discussions?

ACTS 15:7-11 *And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. ⁸And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto*

us; ⁹And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ¹¹But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

“Once before, Peter had reasoned with his brethren concerning the conversion of Cornelius and his friends, and his fellowship with them. As he on that occasion related how the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles he declared, ‘Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?’ Acts 11:17. Now, with equal fervor and force, he said: ‘God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?’ This yoke was not the law of Ten Commandments, as some who oppose the binding claims of the law assert; Peter here referred to the law of ceremonies, which was made null and void by the crucifixion of Christ.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 193.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10, 2024

4. What did Paul and Barnabas tell the assembly about their preaching to the Gentiles?

ACTS 15:12 *Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.*

“Peter’s address brought the assembly to a point where they could listen with patience to Paul and Barnabas, who related their experience in working for the Gentiles. ‘All the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.’” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 194.

THURSDAY, APRIL 11, 2024

AGREEMENT

5. What agreement did the assembly come to after listening to James?

ACTS 15:13-21 *And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: ¹⁴Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. ¹⁵And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, ¹⁶After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: ¹⁷That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. ¹⁸Known*

unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. ¹⁹Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: ²⁰But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. ²¹For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

"The Holy Spirit saw good not to impose the ceremonial law on the Gentile converts, and the mind of the apostles regarding this matter was as the mind of the Spirit of God. James presided at the council, and his final decision was, 'Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 194.

FRIDAY, APRIL 12, 2024

6. How was the final decision transmitted to the churches and groups?

ACTS 15:22-31 *Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: ²³And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: ²⁴Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: ²⁵It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. ²⁸For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; ²⁹That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. ³⁰So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: ³¹Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.*

"Paul and Barnabas were recommended to them as men who had hazarded their lives for the Lord. Judas and Silas were sent with these apostles to declare to the Gentiles by word of mouth the decision of the council: 'It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well.' The four servants of God were sent to Antioch with the epistle and message that was to put an end to all controversy; for it was the voice of the highest authority upon the earth." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 195.

7. After returning to Antioch, Paul asked Barnabas to join him for a journey to strengthen the new converts. What conflict arose, and what decision did they make

ACTS 15:37, 41 *And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark....⁴¹And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.*

“Barnabas was ready to go with Paul, but wished to take with them Mark, who had again decided to devote himself to the ministry. To this Paul objected. He ‘thought not good to take ... with them’ one who during their first missionary journey had left them in a time of need. He was not inclined to excuse Mark’s weakness in deserting the work for the safety and comforts of home. He urged that one with so little stamina was unfit for a work requiring patience, self-denial, bravery, devotion, faith, and a willingness to sacrifice, if need be, even life itself. So sharp was the contention that Paul and Barnabas separated, the latter following out his convictions and taking Mark with him. ‘So Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.’” *-The Acts of the Apostles, p. 202.*

FOR MEDITATION

“Notwithstanding the fact that Paul was personally taught by God, he had no strained ideas of individual responsibility. While looking to God for direct guidance, he was ever ready to recognize the authority vested in the body of believers united in church fellowship. He felt the need of counsel, and when matters of importance arose, he was glad to lay these before the church and to unite with his brethren in seeking God for wisdom to make right decisions. Even ‘the spirits of the prophets,’ he declared, ‘are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.’ 1 Corinthians 14:32, 33. With Peter, he taught that all united in church capacity should be ‘subject one to another.’ 1 Peter 5:5.” *-The Acts of the Apostles, p. 200.*

* * *

The Young Timothy

"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." 1 Timothy 4:12.

"In Timothy Paul saw one who appreciated the sacredness of the work of a minister; who was not appalled at the prospect of suffering and persecution; and who was willing to be taught." -The Acts of the Apostles, p. 203.

SUNDAY, APRIL 14, 2024

1. Whom did Paul ask to join him on his next journey? What did he do before proceeding with this challenge?

ACTS 16:1-5 *Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: ²Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. ³Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. ⁴And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. ⁵And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.*

"Paul saw that Timothy was faithful, steadfast, and true, and he chose him as a companion in labor and travel. Those who had taught Timothy in his childhood were rewarded by seeing the son of their care linked in close fellowship with the great apostle. Timothy was a mere youth when he was chosen by God to be a teacher, but his principles had been so established by his early education that he was fitted to take his place as Paul's helper. And though young, he bore his responsibilities with Christian meekness.

"As a precautionary measure, Paul wisely advised Timothy to be circumcised—not that God required it, but in order to remove from the minds of the Jews that which might be an objection to Timothy's ministrations. In his work Paul was to journey from city to city, in many lands, and often he would have opportunity to preach Christ in Jewish synagogues, as well as in other places of assembly. If it should be known that one of his companions in labor was uncircumcised, his work might be greatly hindered by the prejudice and bigotry of the Jews. Everywhere the apostle met determined opposition and severe persecution. He desired to bring to his Jewish brethren, as well as to the Gentiles, a knowledge of the gospel, and therefore he sought, so far as was consistent with the faith, to remove

every pretext for opposition. Yet while he conceded this much to Jewish prejudice, he believed and taught circumcision or uncircumcision to be nothing and the gospel of Christ everything." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 203, 204.

MONDAY, APRIL 15, 2024

2. What places did the Holy Spirit forbid Paul and his co-workers to enter? Why?

ACTS 16:6-8 *Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, ⁷After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. ⁸And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.*

"The time had come for the gospel to be proclaimed beyond the confines of Asia Minor. The way was preparing for Paul and his fellow workers to cross over into Europe." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 211.

TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 2024

MACEDONIA

3. What vision did the apostle Paul receive? What was his response to it?

ACTS 16:9, 10 *And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. ¹⁰And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.*

"At Troas, on the borders of the Mediterranean Sea, 'a vision appeared to Paul in the night: There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.'

"The call was imperative, admitting of no delay. 'After he had seen the vision,' declares Luke, who accompanied Paul and Silas and Timothy on the journey across to Europe, 'immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 211.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 2024

PHILIPPI

4. What did Paul and his companions experience in Philippi?

ACTS 16:14-18 *And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of*

Paul. ¹⁵And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us. ¹⁶And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: ¹⁷The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. ¹⁸And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

“On the Sabbath,’ Luke continues, ‘we went out of the city by a river-side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshiped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened.’ Lydia received the truth gladly. She and her household were converted and baptized, and she entreated the apostles to make her house their home.

“As the messengers of the cross went about their work of teaching, a woman possessed of a spirit of divination followed them, crying, ‘These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. This woman was a special agent of Satan and had brought to her masters much gain by soothsaying. Her influence had helped to strengthen idolatry. Satan knew that his kingdom was being invaded, and he resorted to this means of opposing the work of God, hoping to mingle his sophistry with the truths taught by those who were proclaiming the gospel message. The words of recommendation uttered by this woman were an injury to the cause of truth, distracting the minds of the people from the teachings of the apostles and bringing disrepute upon the gospel, and by them many were led to believe that the men who spoke with the Spirit and power of God were actuated by the same spirit as this emissary of Satan.” –*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 212.

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2024

5. Who was influenced by the masters of the young woman who had been released from devil possession?

ACTS 16:19-22 *And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, ²⁰And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, ²¹And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. ²²And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.*

“Many others in the city were interested in gaining money through satanic delusions, and these, fearing the influence of a power that could so effectually stop their work, raised a mighty cry against the servants of God. They brought the apostles before the magistrates with the charge: ‘These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach cus-

toms, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.'

"Stirred by a frenzy of excitement, the multitude rose against the disciples. A mob spirit prevailed and was sanctioned by the authorities, who tore the outer garments from the apostles and commanded that they should be scourged. 'And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 213.

FRIDAY, APRIL 19, 2024

PRISON VICTORIES

6. What experience did Paul and Silas make in prison when they prayed and sang? What amazing things took place?

ACTS 16:23-26, 30, 31 *And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: ²⁴Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. ²⁵And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. ²⁶And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.... ³⁰And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? ³¹And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*

"With astonishment the other prisoners heard the sound of prayer and singing issuing from the inner prison. They had been accustomed to hear shrieks and moans, cursing and swearing, breaking the silence of the night; but never before had they heard words of prayer and praise ascending from that gloomy cell. Guards and prisoners marveled and asked themselves who these men could be, who, cold, hungry, and tortured, could yet rejoice....

"All heaven was interested in the men who were suffering for Christ's sake, and angels were sent to visit the prison. At their tread the earth trembled. The heavily bolted prison doors were thrown open; the chains and fetters fell from the hands and feet of the prisoners; and a bright light flooded the prison....

"With deep humility he asked the apostles to show him the way of life. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house,' they answered; and 'they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.' The jailer then washed the wounds of the apostles and ministered to them, after which he was baptized by them, with all his household. A sanctifying influence diffused itself among the inmates of the prison, and the minds of all were opened to listen to the truths spoken by the apostles. They were convinced that the God whom these men served had miraculously released them from bondage." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 214, 215, 217.

7. What order was given by the jailer's superiors? Was Paul willing to leave Philippi incognito?

ACTS 16:35-39 *And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. ³⁶And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace. ³⁷But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. ³⁸And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. ³⁹And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.*

"The citizens of Philippi had been greatly terrified by the earthquake, and when in the morning the officers of the prison told the magistrates of what had occurred during the night, they were alarmed and sent the sergeants to liberate the apostles. But Paul declared, 'They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.'

"The apostles were Roman citizens, and it was unlawful to scourge a Roman, save for the most flagrant crime, or to deprive him of his liberty without a fair trial. Paul and Silas had been publicly imprisoned, and they now refused to be privately released without the proper explanation on the part of the magistrates. When this word was brought to the authorities, they were alarmed for fear that the apostles would complain to the emperor, and going at once to the prison, they apologized to Paul and Silas for the injustice and cruelty done them and personally conducted them out of the prison, entreating them to depart from the city. The magistrates feared the apostles' influence over the people, and they also feared the Power that had interposed in behalf of these innocent men." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 217.

FOR MEDITATION

"The early Christians were often called to meet the powers of darkness face to face. By sophistry and by persecution the enemy endeavored to turn them from the true faith. At the present time, when the end of all things earthly is rapidly approaching, Satan is putting forth desperate efforts to ensnare the world. He is devising many plans to occupy minds and to divert attention from the truths essential to salvation. In every city his agencies are busily organizing into parties those who are opposed to the law of God. The archdeceiver is at work to introduce elements of confusion and rebellion, and men are being fired with a zeal that is not according to knowledge." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 219.

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**Please read the Missionary Report
from New European Countries on page 84**

17

Sabbath, April 27, 2024

Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens

"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures." Acts 17:1, 2.

"After leaving Philippi, Paul and Silas made their way to Thessalonica. Here they were given the privilege of addressing large congregations in the Jewish synagogue. Their appearance bore evidence of the shameful treatment they had recently received, and necessitated an explanation of what had taken place. This they made without exalting themselves, but magnified the One who had wrought their deliverance." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 221.

SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2024

1. Arriving in Thessalonica, the apostles went to a Jewish synagogue. About what did Paul preach to the congregation?

ACTS 17:3 *Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.*

"In preaching to the Thessalonians, Paul appealed to the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Christ in His ministry had opened the minds of His disciples to these prophecies; 'beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.' Luke 24:27. Peter in preaching Christ had produced his evidence from the Old Testament. Stephen had pursued the same course. And Paul also in his ministry appealed to the scriptures foretelling the birth, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. By the inspired testimony of Moses and the prophets he clearly proved the identity of Jesus of Nazareth with the Messiah and showed that from the days of Adam it was the voice of Christ which had been speaking through patriarchs and prophets." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 221.

2. Why were the Jews envious of Paul and his companions? What uproar did the Jews foment?

ACTS 17:4, 5 *And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. ⁵But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.*

"As in the places formerly entered, the apostles met with determined opposition. 'The Jews which believed not' were 'moved with envy.' These Jews were not then in favor with the Roman power, because, not long before, they had raised an insurrection in Rome. They were looked upon with suspicion, and their liberty was in a measure restricted. They now saw an opportunity to take advantage of circumstances to re-establish themselves in favor and at the same time to throw reproach upon the apostles and the converts to Christianity." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 229.

TUESDAY, APRIL 23, 2024

3. When they did not find Paul and Silas at Jason's house, what did the mob do with Jason and other brethren?

ACTS 17:6-9 *And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; ⁷Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. ⁸And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. ⁹And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.*

"This they set about doing by uniting with 'certain lewd fellows of the baser sort,' by which means they succeeded in setting 'all the city on an uproar.' In the hope of finding the apostles, they 'assaulted the house of Jason;' but they could find neither Paul nor Silas. And 'when they found them not,' the mob in their mad disappointment 'drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.'

"As Paul and Silas were not to be found, the magistrates put the accused believers under bonds to keep the peace. Fearing further violence, 'the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 299, 230.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24, 2024

BEREA

4. When the apostles arrived in Berea, what wonderful quality did they find in the people of that place?

ACTS 17:10-12 *And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. ¹²Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.*

"The minds of the Bereans were not narrowed by prejudice. They were willing to investigate the truthfulness of the doctrines preached by the apostles. They studied the Bible, not from curiosity, but in order that they might learn what had been written concerning the promised Messiah. Daily they searched the inspired records, and as they compared scripture with scripture, heavenly angels were beside them, enlightening their minds and impressing their hearts." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 231.

THURSDAY, APRIL 25, 2024

ATHENS

5. While Paul was waiting for his traveling companions in Athens, what did he do? What was recorded about his experience?

ACTS 17:16-18 *Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. ¹⁷Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. ¹⁸Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babblers say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods:...*

"While waiting for Silas and Timothy, Paul was not idle. He 'disputed ... in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.' But his principal work in Athens was to bear the tidings of salvation to those who had no intelligent conception of God and of His purpose in behalf of the fallen race. The apostle was soon to meet paganism in its most subtle, alluring form.

"The great men of Athens were not long in learning of the presence in their city of a singular teacher who was setting before the people doctrines new and strange. Some of these men sought Paul out and entered into conversation with him. Soon a crowd of listeners gathered about them. Some were prepared to ridicule the apostle as one who was far beneath them both socially and intellectually, and these said jeeringly among themselves, 'What will this babblers say?' Others, 'because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection,' said, 'He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 234, 235.

FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 2024

6. What monument did Paul see at the Areopagus? What did he say about the inscription on it?

ACTS 17:22-31 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. ²³For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. ²⁴God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; ²⁵Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; ²⁶And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; ²⁷That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: ²⁸For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. ²⁹Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. ³⁰And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: ³¹Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

"Paul drew the minds of his idolatrous hearers beyond the limits of their false religion to a true view of the Deity, whom they had styled the 'Unknown God.' This Being, whom he now declared unto them, was independent of man, needing nothing from human hands to add to His power and glory.

"The people were carried away with admiration for Paul's earnest and logical presentation of the attributes of the true God: of His creative power and the existence of His overruling providence. With earnest and fervid eloquence the apostle declared, 'God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.' The heavens were not large enough to contain God, how much less were the temples made by human hands!" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 237, 238.

SABBATH, APRIL 27, 2024

7. What was the result of the apostle's preaching?

ACTS 17:32, 34 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. ³³So Paul departed from among them. ³⁴Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

"Among those who listened to the words of Paul were some to whose minds the truths presented brought conviction, but they would not humble themselves to acknowledge God and to accept the plan of sal-

vation. No eloquence of words, no force of argument, can convert the sinner. The power of God alone can apply the truth to the heart. He who persistently turns from this power cannot be reached. The Greeks sought after wisdom, yet the message of the cross was to them foolishness because they valued their own wisdom more highly than the wisdom that comes from above." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 239.

FOR MEDITATION

"Those who today teach unpopular truths need not be discouraged if at times they meet with no more favorable reception, even from those who claim to be Christians, than did Paul and his fellow workers from the people among whom they labored. The messengers of the cross must arm themselves with watchfulness and prayer, and move forward with faith and courage, working always in the name of Jesus. They must exalt Christ as man's mediator in the heavenly sanctuary, the One in whom all the sacrifices of the Old Testament dispensation centered, and through whose atoning sacrifice the transgressors of God's law may find peace and pardon." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 230.

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MISSIONARY REPORT FROM NEW EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

To be read on Sabbath, April 27, 2024

*The Special Sabbath School Offering
will be gathered on Sabbath, May 4, 2024*

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” Acts 16:9.

Dear brothers, sisters, and friends of the truth, Europe is rich in history. As a continent, it has been active from the beginning of Christianity in spreading the gospel, passing through the seven periods of church history. In every age, a faithful remnant continued on the original path of God’s people. Century after century, reformers gave their lives in the battle to preserve the purity of the church, remaining faithful to the holy word. Every drop of the martyrs’ blood was a seed bringing forth new believers who arose to walk in the glorious path of the apostolic church of Jesus Christ.

In the same way, the Reformation in Adventism was born and developed through the hard times of World Wars I and II in Europe, then spread out to the rest of the world up to our day. We praise God for many examples of faithful pioneers and martyrs for the faith of Jesus in different European countries.

However, with the increase of wealth and technological advancement over the last century, Christianity has lost strength in Europe. Humanism, philosophy, and scientific progress have taken over people’s hearts and minds, and all religious movements and denominations have experienced a decrease in membership and involvement. God’s church is no exception. Although the missionaries work overtime to search for souls and actively preach the gospel, there are still countries that have not been reached with the message of the Reform Movement and have no organized church. In central and eastern Europe, these include the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Serbia, and others that have yet to be evangelized. There were believers and churches in these countries in the past, but that is no longer the case. Also, the European continent presents a unique challenge, for each country has a different language. Approaching the people with the message and producing literature and materials take a great deal of effort and means because of the language barriers.

Aggressive efforts are needed to revive the work in these countries by translating literature, creating online programs, and send-

ing laborers into the fields. All of this requires financial resources. For many years, the European brethren have donated means, time, and missionaries for other countries and continents; they have been instrumental in spreading the gospel to the far ends of Africa, Asia, and other parts of the world. But now Europe is in need. We want to reciprocate and provide support to give impetus to the work in the European countries and to advance into new fields.

Your generous donations will not be in vain, and they will be recorded in the treasury of heaven. Let us pray that we may successfully evangelize more European countries so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified and the three angels' messages may reach many homes.

For the General Conference Executive Board,

-Pastor Tzvetan Petkov
General Conference President

SPECIAL SABBATH SCHOOL OFFERING FOR NEW EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

God bless and multiply your generous contribution!

18

Sabbath, May 4, 2024

Corinth

"After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth." Acts 18:1.

"During the first century of the Christian Era, Corinth was one of the leading cities, not only of Greece, but of the world. Greeks, Jews, and Romans, with travelers from every land, thronged its streets, eagerly intent on business and pleasure. A great commercial center, situated within easy access of all parts of the Roman Empire, it was an important place in which to establish memorials for God and His truth." *-The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 243.

SUNDAY, APRIL 28, 2024

CHRIST CRUCIFIED

1. What event brought Paul in touch with Priscilla and Aquila? What did these three Christians have in common?

ACTS 18:1-3 *After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; ²And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. ³And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.*

"Among the Jews who had taken up their residence in Corinth were Aquila and Priscilla, who afterward became distinguished as earnest workers for Christ. Becoming acquainted with the character of these persons, Paul 'abode with them.'" *-The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 243.

MONDAY, APRIL 29, 2024

2. Why did Paul decide to change his approach to preaching in Corinth?

ACTS 18:4, 5 *And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. ⁵And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.*

1 CORINTHIANS 2:2 *For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

"To the minds of multitudes living at the present time, the cross of Calvary is surrounded by sacred memories. Hallowed associations are connected with the scenes of the crucifixion. But in Paul's day the cross was regarded with feelings of repulsion and horror. To uphold as the Saviour of mankind one who had met death on the cross, would naturally call forth ridicule and opposition.

"In preaching the gospel in Corinth, the apostle followed a course different from that which had marked his labors at Athens. While in the latter place, he had sought to adapt his style to the character of his audience; he had met logic with logic, science with science, philosophy with philosophy. As he thought of the time thus spent, and realized that his teaching in Athens had been productive of but little fruit, he decided to follow another plan of labor in Corinth in his efforts to arrest the attention of the careless and the indifferent. He determined to avoid elaborate arguments and discussions, and 'not to know anything' among the Corinthians 'save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.' He would preach to them 'not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.' 1 Corinthians 2:2, 4." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 244, 245.

TUESDAY, APRIL 30, 2024

3. Who was one of the first to accept the apostle's message? What did the Jews do to try to destroy the influence of the miracles that Christ's messengers performed in the name of Jesus?

ACTS 18:8 *And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.*

"The hatred with which the Jews had always regarded the apostles was now intensified. The conversion and baptism of Crispus had the effect of exasperating instead of convincing these stubborn opposers. They could not bring arguments to disprove Paul's preaching, and for lack of such evidence they resorted to deception and malignant attack. They blasphemed the gospel and the name of Jesus. In their blind anger no words were too bitter, no device too low, for them to use. They could not deny that Christ had worked miracles; but they declared that He had performed them through the power of Satan; and they boldly affirmed that the wonderful works wrought by Paul were accomplished through the same agency." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 249.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 1, 2024

4. Although Paul had some degree of success, he was disheartened by the wickedness he saw and heard in Corinth. But what assurance did he receive before leaving for a more promising place? How did Gallio respond to the accusation made by the Jews against Paul?

ACTS 18:9-16 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: ¹⁰For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. ¹¹And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. ¹²And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, ¹³Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. ¹⁴And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: ¹⁵But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it ; for I will be no judge of such matters. ¹⁶And he drave them from the judgment seat.

"As he was planning to leave the city for a more promising field, and seeking earnestly to understand his duty, the Lord appeared to him in a vision and said, 'Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.' Paul understood this to be a command to remain in Corinth and a guarantee that the Lord would give increase to the seed sown. Strengthened and encouraged, he continued to labor there with zeal and perseverance....

"They expected that the authorities, as on former occasions, would side with them; and with loud, angry voices they uttered their complaints against the apostle, saying, 'This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.'

"The Jewish religion was under the protection of the Roman power, and the accusers of Paul thought that if they could fasten upon him the charge of violating the laws of their religion, he would probably be delivered to them for trial and sentence. They hoped thus to compass his death. But Gallio was a man of integrity, and he refused to become the dupe of the jealous, intriguing Jews. Disgusted with their bigotry and self-righteousness, he would take no notice of the charge. As Paul prepared to speak in self-defense, Gallio told him that it was not necessary." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 250, 252, 253.

THURSDAY, MAY 2, 2024

5. What wonderful results did the apostle experience?

ACTS 18:8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

"Paul's efforts in Corinth were not without fruit. Many turned from the worship of idols to serve the living God, and a large church was enrolled under the banner of Christ. Some were rescued from among the most dissipated of the Gentiles and became monuments of the mercy of God and the efficacy of the blood of Christ to cleanse from sin." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 252.

EPHESUS**6. While Priscilla and Aquila were in Ephesus, what places did Paul visit, and for what purpose?**

ACTS 18:19-23 *And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; ²¹But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. ²²And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch. ²³And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.*

“Aquila and Priscilla had accompanied him to Ephesus, and he left them there to carry on the work that he had begun.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 269.

SABBATH, MAY 4, 2024

7. What was recorded in the Scriptures about Apollos? What did Priscilla and Aquila do after they heard him speak?

ACTS 18:24-28 *And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. ²⁵This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. ²⁶And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. ²⁷And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: ²⁸For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.*

“While in Ephesus, Apollos ‘began to speak boldly in the synagogue.’ Among his hearers were Aquila and Priscilla, who, perceiving that he had not yet received the full light of the gospel, ‘took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.’ Through their teaching he obtained a clearer understanding of the Scriptures and became one of the ablest advocates of the Christian faith.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 270.

FOR MEDITATION

“The philosopher turns aside from the light of salvation, because it puts his proud theories to shame; the worldling refuses to receive it, because it would separate him from his earthly idols. Paul saw that the character of Christ must be understood before men could love Him or view the cross with

the eye of faith. Here must begin that study which shall be the science and the song of the redeemed through all eternity. In the light of the cross alone can the true value of the human soul be estimated." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 273.

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19

Sabbath, May 11, 2024

Ephesus

"And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus." Acts 19:1.

"Ephesus, the capital, was a great commercial center. Its harbor was crowded with shipping, and its streets were thronged with people from every country. Like Corinth, it presented a promising field for missionary effort." - *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 281.

SUNDAY, MAY 5, 2024

1. What question did Paul ask the men he met on his return to Ephesus? What did they answer, and what deep experience did they make?

ACTS 19:1-7 *And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, ²He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. ³And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. ⁴Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. ⁵When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. ⁷And all the men were about twelve.*

"Then the apostle set before them the great truths that are the foundation of the Christian's hope. He told them of Christ's life on this earth and of His cruel death of shame. He told them how the Lord of life had broken the barriers of the tomb and risen triumphant over death. He repeated the Saviour's commission to His disciples: 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' Matthew 28:18, 19. He told them also of Christ's promise to send the Comforter, through whose power mighty signs and wonders would be

wrought, and he described how gloriously this promise had been fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost.

"It was by cherishing a humble, teachable spirit that these men gained the experience that enabled them to go out as workers into the harvest field. Their example presents to Christians a lesson of great value. There are many who make but little progress in the divine life because they are too self-sufficient to occupy the position of learners. They are content with a superficial knowledge of God's word. They do not wish to change their faith or practice and hence make no effort to obtain greater light." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 282, 283.

MONDAY, MAY 6, 2024

IDOLATRY

2. What was the motive behind the efforts of the sons of the Jewish priest Sceva to drive evil spirits out of a demon-possessed man? What about Simon? What did he want to purchase for a sum of money, like the sons of the priest?

ACTS 19:14-16; 8:8-11, 18, 19 *And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. ¹⁵And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? ¹⁶And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.... ⁸⁻⁹And there was great joy in that city. ⁹But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: ¹⁰To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. ¹¹And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.... ¹⁸And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, ¹⁹Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.*

"But the One to whom all the spirits of evil are subject and who had given His servants authority over them, was about to bring still greater shame and defeat upon those who despised and profaned His holy name. Sorcery had been prohibited by the Mosaic law, on pain of death, yet from time to time it had been secretly practiced by apostate Jews. At the time of Paul's visit to Ephesus there were in the city 'certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists,' who, seeing the wonders wrought by him, 'took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus.' An attempt was made by 'seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests.' Finding a man possessed with a demon, they addressed him, 'We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.' But 'the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.'

“Thus unmistakable proof was given of the sacredness of the name of Christ, and the peril which they incurred who should invoke it without faith in the divinity of the Saviour’s mission. ‘Fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.’” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 287, 288.

TUESDAY, MAY 7, 2024

3. To what were other believers moved when they saw what happened to the sons of Sceva?

ACTS 19:17, 18 *And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. ¹⁸And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.*

“Facts which had previously been concealed were now brought to light. In accepting Christianity, some of the believers had not fully renounced their superstitions. To some extent they still continued the practice of magic. Now, convinced of their error, ‘many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds.’” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 288.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 2024

4. What decision did some people make? Why did they do this?

ACTS 19:19, 20 *Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.*

“Even to some of the sorcerers themselves the good work extended; and ‘many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.’

“By burning their books on magic, the Ephesian converts showed that the things in which they had once delighted they now abhorred. It was by and through magic that they had especially offended God and imperiled their souls; and it was against magic that they showed such indignation. Thus they gave evidence of true conversion....

“By retaining these books the disciples would have exposed themselves to temptation; by selling them they would have placed temptation in the way of others. They had renounced the kingdom of darkness, and to destroy its power they did not hesitate at any sacrifice. Thus truth triumphed over men’s prejudices and their love of money.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 288.

THURSDAY, MAY 9, 2024

UPROAR OVER THE GODDESS DIANA

5. What did the promoters of Diana, “the goddess of the Ephesians,” bring about?

ACTS 19:23-27 *And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. ²⁴For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; ²⁵Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. ²⁶Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: ²⁷So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.*

"Demetrius, a manufacturer of silver shrines, calling together the workmen of his craft, said: 'Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: so that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 292.

FRIDAY, MAY 10, 2024

6. Wanting to find the apostle Paul and attack him, but not finding him, whom did Demetrius and his followers take hostage?

ACTS 19:28, 29 *And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. ²⁹And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.*

"A report of this speech was rapidly circulated. 'The whole city was filled with confusion.' Search was made for Paul, but the apostle was not to be found. His brethren, receiving an intimation of the danger, had hurried him from the place. Angels of God had been sent to guard the apostle; his time to die a martyr's death had not yet come. Failing to find the object of their wrath, the mob seized 'Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel,' and with these 'they rushed with one accord into the theater.'

"Paul's place of concealment was not far distant, and he soon learned of the peril of his beloved brethren. Forgetful of his own safety, he desired to go at once to the theater to address the rioters. But 'the disciples suffered him not.' Gaius and Aristarchus were not the prey the people sought; no serious harm to them was apprehended. But should the apostle's pale, care-worn face be seen, it would arouse at once the worst passions of the mob and there would not be the least human possibility of saving his life." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 293.

7. How did the riot finally come to an end?

ACTS 19:33-41 *And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. ³⁴But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. ³⁵And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? ³⁶Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. ³⁷For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. ³⁸Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. ³⁹But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. ⁴⁰For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. ⁴¹And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.*

"The decision of the recorder and of others holding honorable offices in the city had set Paul before the people as one innocent of any unlawful act. This was another triumph of Christianity over error and superstition. God had raised up a great magistrate to vindicate His apostle and hold the tumultuous mob in check. Paul's heart was filled with gratitude to God that his life had been preserved and that Christianity had not been brought into disrepute by the tumult at Ephesus.

"After the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 295.

FOR MEDITATION

"It is fondly supposed that heathen superstitions have disappeared before the civilization of the twentieth century. But the word of God and the stern testimony of facts declare that sorcery is practiced in this age as verily as in the days of the old-time magicians. The ancient system of magic is, in reality, the same as what is now known as modern spiritualism. Satan is finding access to thousands of minds by presenting himself under the guise of departed friends. The Scriptures declare that 'the dead know not anything.' Ecclesiastes 9:5. Their thoughts, their love, their hatred, have perished. The dead do not hold communion with the living. But true to his early cunning, Satan employs this device in order to gain control of minds." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 289.

* * *

Jerusalem

"And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there." Acts 20:22.

"Paul greatly desired to reach Jerusalem before the Passover as he would thus have an opportunity to meet those who should come from all parts of the world to attend the feast. Ever he cherished the hope that in some way he might be instrumental in removing the prejudice of his unbelieving countrymen, so that they might be led to accept the precious light of the gospel." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 389.

SUNDAY, MAY 12, 2024

PROPHECIES OF PERSECUTION

1. What warnings were given to the apostle Paul in the places where he passed? How did he respond to these things?

ACTS 21:4, 10-14 *And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem....¹⁰And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. ¹¹And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. ¹²And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁴And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.*

"But Paul would not swerve from the path of duty. He would follow Christ if need be to prison and to death. 'What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?' he exclaimed; 'for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' Seeing that they caused him pain without changing his purpose, the brethren ceased their importunity, saying only, 'The will of the Lord be done.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 397.

MONDAY, MAY 13, 2024

2. Arriving in Jerusalem, Paul and his companions lodged at the home of a Jew named Mnason. What did the brethren in Jerusalem tell Paul that the Jews were saying about his teachings?

ACTS 21:20, 21 *And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: ²¹And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.*

"The unconverted Jews who had followed so closely upon his track, had not been slow to circulate the most unfavorable reports at Jerusalem, both personally and by letter, concerning him and his work; and some, even of the apostles and elders, had received these reports as truth, making no attempt to contradict them, and manifesting no desire to harmonize with him." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 398.

TUESDAY, MAY 14, 2024

3. What advice did they give Paul?

ACTS 21:23, 24, 26 *Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; ²⁴Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. ²⁶Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.*

"The brethren hoped that Paul, by following the course suggested, might give a decisive contradiction to the false reports concerning him. They assured him that the decision of the former council concerning the Gentile converts and the ceremonial law, still held good. But the advice now given was not consistent with that decision. The Spirit of God did not prompt this instruction; it was the fruit of cowardice. The leaders of the church in Jerusalem knew that by non-conformity to the ceremonial law, Christians would bring upon themselves the hatred of the Jews and expose themselves to persecution. The Sanhedrin was doing its utmost to hinder the progress of the gospel. Men were chosen by this body to follow up the apostles, especially Paul, and in every possible way to oppose their work. Should the believers in Christ be condemned before the Sanhedrin as breakers of the law, they would suffer swift and severe punishment as apostates from the Jewish faith." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 404.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 15, 2024

A RAMPAGE

4. Despite everything, a riot ensued. What caused this? Whom did the Romans think Paul might be?

ACTS 21:27-31, 38 *And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, ²⁸Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law,*

and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. ²⁹(For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) ³⁰And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. ³¹And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.... ³⁸Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?

“By the Jewish law it was a crime punishable with death for an uncircumcised person to enter the inner courts of the sacred edifice. Paul had been seen in the city in company with Trophimus, an Ephesian, and it was conjectured that he had brought him into the temple. This he had not done; and being himself a Jew, his act in entering the temple was no violation of the law. But though the charge was wholly false, it served to arouse the popular prejudice. As the cry was taken up and borne through the temple courts, the throngs gathered there were thrown into wild excitement. The news quickly spread through Jerusalem, ‘and all the city was moved, and the people ran together.’...

“‘As they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.’ Claudius Lysias well knew the turbulent elements with which he had to deal, and he ‘immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.’ Ignorant of the cause of the tumult, but seeing that the rage of the multitude was directed against Paul, the Roman captain concluded that he must be a certain Egyptian rebel of whom he had heard, who had thus far escaped capture. He therefore ‘took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done.’ At once many voices were raised in loud and angry accusation; ‘some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.’” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 407.

THURSDAY, MAY 16, 2024

5. What did Paul request of the chief captain? What did the apostle explain to the Jewish listeners when he attracted their attention and they became silent?

ACTS 21:39, 40; 22:1-20 *But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. ⁴⁰And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying, ^{22:1}Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which*

I make now unto you. ²(And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) ³I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. ⁴And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. ⁵As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. ⁶And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. ⁷And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? ⁸And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. ⁹And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. ¹⁰And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. ¹¹And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. ¹²And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, ¹³Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. ¹⁴And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. ¹⁵For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. ¹⁶And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. ¹⁷And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; ¹⁸And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. ¹⁹And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: ²⁰And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

FRIDAY, MAY 17, 2024

6. The multitude was listening intently to Paul's every word, but what suddenly made them angry?

ACTS 22:21, 22 And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. ²² And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.

“Hitherto the people had listened with close attention, but when Paul reached the point in his history where he was appointed Christ’s ambassador to the Gentiles, their fury broke forth anew. Accustomed to look

upon themselves as the only people favored by God, they were unwilling to permit the despised Gentiles to share the privileges which had hitherto been regarded as exclusively their own. Lifting their voices above the voice of the speaker, they cried, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 409.

SABBATH, MAY 18, 2024

ROMAN CITIZENSHIP

7. What did the Roman commander order to be done with Paul, even without knowing why the people were rioting against him? What question did the apostle ask the centurion?

ACTS 22:23-29 *And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, ²⁴The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. ²⁵And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? ²⁶When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. ²⁷Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. ²⁸And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. ²⁹Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.*

FOR MEDITATION

"The men who, while numbered among those who were in charge of the work at Jerusalem, had urged that arbitrary measures of control be adopted, saw Paul's ministry in a new light and were convinced that their own course had been wrong, that they had been held in bondage by Jewish customs and traditions, and that the work of the gospel had been greatly hindered by their failure to recognize that the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile had been broken down by the death of Christ." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 402.

* * *

The Plot

"Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity." Psalm 64:2.

"While the Lord encouraged His servant, Paul's enemies were eagerly plotting his destruction. 'And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 413.

SUNDAY, MAY 19, 2024

1. What did the chief captain do the next day? Whom did he call to a meeting?

ACTS 22:30 *On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.*

"The apostle was now to be tried by the same tribunal of which he himself had been a member before his conversion. As he stood before the Jewish rulers, his bearing was calm, and his countenance revealed the peace of Christ." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 410.

MONDAY, MAY 20, 2024

2. Why did the high priest, Ananias, command Paul to be beaten? How did the apostle rebuke him?

ACTS 23:1-3 *And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. ²And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. ³Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?*

"'Earnestly beholding the council,' he said, 'Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.' Upon hearing these words, their hatred was kindled afresh; 'and the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.' At this inhuman command, Paul exclaimed, 'God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?'

"Instead of rebuking this cruel scheme, the priests and rulers eagerly agreed to it. Paul had spoken the truth when he compared Ananias to a whited sepulcher. But God interposed to save the life of His servant." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 411, 414.

TUESDAY, MAY 21, 2024

3. Paul was aware of who Ananias was and clearly exposed his hypocrisy. What did he say next, knowing that the Sanhedrin was divided?

ACTS 23:4-7 *And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? ⁵Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people. ⁶But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. ⁷And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.*

"The two parties began to dispute between themselves, and thus the strength of their opposition against Paul was broken. 'The scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 411.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 22, 2024

4. How were the Sadducees and the Pharisees different from each other?

ACTS 23:8 *For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.*

"In the confusion that followed, the Sadducees were eagerly striving to gain possession of the apostle, that they might put him to death; and the Pharisees were as eager in striving to protect him. 'The chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 412.

THURSDAY, MAY 23, 2024

5. What words of encouragement did the Lord give to Paul that night?

ACTS 23:11 *And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*

"And now he was in prison, and he knew that his enemies, in their desperate malice, would resort to any means to put him to death. Could it be that his work for the churches was ended and that ravening wolves were to enter in now? The cause of Christ was very near to Paul's heart, and with

deep anxiety he thought of the perils of the scattered churches, exposed as they were to the persecutions of just such men as he had encountered in the Sanhedrin council. In distress and discouragement he wept and prayed.

"In this dark hour the Lord was not unmindful of His servant. He had guarded him from the murderous throng in the temple courts; He had been with him before the Sanhedrin council; He was with him in the fortress; and He revealed Himself to His faithful witness in response to the earnest prayers of the apostle for guidance. 'The night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 412, 413.

FRIDAY, MAY 24, 2024

6. What plot did more than forty Jews devise against Paul? Who heard about what they were planning, and what did he do?

ACTS 23:12-21 *And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. ¹³And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. ¹⁴And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. ¹⁵Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him. ¹⁶And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. ¹⁷Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. ¹⁸So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. ¹⁹Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? ²⁰And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. ²¹But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.*

"Paul's sister's son, hearing of the 'lying in wait' of the assassins, 'went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 414.

7. What did the chief captain do to save the apostle from his avowed enemies? What were the Jews' real motives for wanting to kill the apostle Paul?

ACTS 23:23-30 *And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; ²⁴And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor. ²⁵And he wrote a letter after this manner: ²⁶Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. ²⁷This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. ²⁸And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: ²⁹Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. ³⁰And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.*

"Lysias at once decided to transfer Paul from his jurisdiction to that of Felix the procurator. As a people, the Jews were in a state of excitement and irritation, and tumults were of frequent occurrence. The continued presence of the apostle in Jerusalem might lead to consequences dangerous to the city and even to the commandant himself. He therefore 'called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; and provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.'..."

"The case of Paul was not the first in which a servant of God had found among the heathen an asylum from the malice of the professed people of Jehovah. In their rage against Paul the Jews had added another crime to the dark catalogue which marked the history of that people. They had still further hardened their hearts against the truth and had rendered their doom more certain." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 415, 416.

FOR MEDITATION

"The Saviour's words of reproof to the men of Nazareth applied, in the case of Paul, not only to the unbelieving Jews, but to his own brethren in the faith. Had the leaders in the church fully surrendered their feeling of bitterness toward the apostle, and accepted him as one specially called of God to bear the gospel to the Gentiles, the Lord would have spared him to them. God had not ordained that Paul's labors should so soon end, but He did not work a miracle to counteract the train of circumstances to which the course of the leaders in the church at Jerusalem had given rise." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 417.

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The Trial at Caesarea

“For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.” Acts 24:5, 6.

“Five days after Paul’s arrival at Caesarea his accusers came from Jerusalem, accompanied by Tertullus, an orator whom they had engaged as their counsel. The case was granted a speedy hearing. Paul was brought before the assembly, and Tertullus ‘began to accuse him.’” *—The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 419.

SUNDAY, MAY 26, 2024

1. Paul was taken to Antipatris. When the ambassador read the letter and learned that the accused was from Cilicia, what did he say about Paul?

ACTS 23:31-35 *Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris. ³²On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: ³³Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. ³⁴And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; ³⁵I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod’s judgment hall.*

MONDAY, MAY 27, 2024

TERTULLUS

2. When Paul’s accusers arrived, whom did they bring with them? What did the orator’s words reveal about his character and motives?

ACTS 24:1-6 *And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. ²And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, ³We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. ⁴Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. ⁵For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews*

throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: ⁶Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.

“Tertullus here descended to barefaced falsehood; for the character of Felix was base and contemptible. It was said of him, that ‘in the practice of all kinds of lust and cruelty, he exercised the power of a king with the temper of a slave.’... Those who heard Tertullus knew that his flattering words were untrue, but their desire to secure the condemnation of Paul was stronger than their love of truth.

“In his speech, Tertullus charged Paul with crimes which, if proved, would have resulted in his conviction for high treason against the government. ‘We have found this man a pestilent fellow,’ declared the orator, ‘and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: who also hath gone about to profane the temple.’ Tertullus then stated that Lysias, the commandant of the garrison at Jerusalem, had violently taken Paul from the Jews when they were about to judge him by their ecclesiastical law, and had thus forced them to bring the matter before Felix. These statements were made with the design of inducing the procurator to deliver Paul over to the Jewish court. All the charges were vehemently supported by the Jews present, who made no effort to conceal their hatred of the prisoner.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 419, 420.

TUESDAY, MAY 28, 2024

3. How different from those of the Jewish orator were the words that Paul used in his defense?

ACTS 24:10-14 *Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: ¹¹Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. ¹²And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: ¹³Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. ¹⁴But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets.*

“Felix had sufficient penetration to read the disposition and character of Paul’s accusers. He knew from what motive they had flattered him, and he saw also that they had failed to substantiate their charges against Paul. Turning to the accused, he beckoned to him to answer for himself. Paul wasted no words in compliments, but simply stated that he could the more cheerfully defend himself before Felix, since the latter had been so long a procurator, and therefore had so good an understanding of the laws and customs of the Jews. Referring to the charges brought against him, he plainly showed that not one of them was true. He declared that he had caused no disturbance in any part of Jerusalem, nor had he profaned the sanctuary. ‘They neither found me in the temple disputing with any

man,' he said, 'neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 420.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 29, 2024

HOPE IN GOD

4. What is the blessed hope that Paul spoke of?

ACTS 24:15, 16 *And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. ¹⁶And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.*

"While confessing that 'after the way which they call heresy' he had worshiped the God of his fathers, he asserted that he had always believed 'all things which are written in the law and in the prophets;' and that in harmony with the plain teaching of the Scriptures, he held the faith of the resurrection of the dead. And he further declared that the ruling purpose of his life was to 'have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 421.

THURSDAY, MAY 30, 2024

5. Why did Felix adjourn the meeting until the chief captain came? Meanwhile, what privileges did he grant to the apostle?

ACTS 24:22, 23 *And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. ²³And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.*

"The apostle spoke with earnestness and evident sincerity, and his words carried with them a weight of conviction. Claudius Lysias, in his letter to Felix, had borne a similar testimony in regard to Paul's conduct. Moreover, Felix himself had a better knowledge of the Jewish religion than many supposed. Paul's plain statement of the facts in the case enabled Felix to understand still more clearly the motives by which the Jews were governed in attempting to convict the apostle of sedition and treasonable conduct. The governor would not gratify them by unjustly condemning a Roman citizen, neither would he give him up to them to be put to death without a fair trial. Yet Felix knew no higher motive than self-interest, and he was controlled by love of praise and a desire for promotion. Fear of offending the Jews held him back from doing full justice to a man whom he knew to be innocent. He therefore decided to suspend the trial until Lysias should be present, saying, 'When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 421.

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUDGMENT**6. What did Paul preach to Felix and his wife? What words of fear did Felix express when he heard the deep truths?**

ACTS 24:24, 25 *And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. ²⁵And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

“He held up before Felix and Drusilla the character of God—His righteousness, justice, and equity, and the nature of His law. He clearly showed that it is man’s duty to live a life of sobriety and temperance, keeping the passions under the control of reason, in conformity to God’s law, and preserving the physical and mental powers in a healthy condition. He declared that there would surely come a day of judgment when all would be rewarded according to the deeds done in the body, and when it would be plainly revealed that wealth, position, or titles are powerless to gain for man the favor of God or to deliver him from the results of sin. He showed that this life is man’s time of preparation for the future life. Should he neglect present privileges and opportunities he would suffer an eternal loss; no new probation would be given him.

“Paul dwelt especially upon the far-reaching claims of God’s law. He showed how it extends to the deep secrets of man’s moral nature and throws a flood of light upon that which has been concealed from the sight and knowledge of men. What the hands may do or the tongue may utter, what the outer life reveals, but imperfectly shows man’s moral character. The law searches his thoughts, motives, and purposes. The dark passions that lie hidden from the sight of men, the jealousy, hatred, lust, and ambition, the evil deeds meditated upon in the dark recesses of the soul, yet never executed for want of opportunity—all these God’s law condemns.”
—The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 423, 424.

SABBATH, JUNE 1, 2024

7. Who succeeded Felix as Roman procurator? Why did he keep the apostle Paul in prison?

ACTS 24:26, 27 *He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. ²⁷But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix’ room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.*

“For two years no further action was taken against Paul, yet he remained a prisoner. Felix visited him several times and listened attentively to his words. But the real motive for this apparent friendliness was a desire for gain, and he intimated that by the payment of a large sum of money Paul might secure his release. The apostle, however, was of too noble a nature to free himself by a bribe. He was not guilty of any crime, and he would

not stoop to commit a wrong in order to gain freedom. Furthermore, he was himself too poor to pay such a ransom, had he been disposed to do so, and he would not, in his own behalf, appeal to the sympathy and generosity of his converts. He also felt that he was in the hands of God, and he would not interfere with the divine purposes respecting himself.

"Felix was finally summoned to Rome because of gross wrongs committed against the Jews. Before leaving Caesarea in answer to this summons, he thought to 'show the Jews a pleasure' by allowing Paul to remain in prison. But Felix was not successful in his attempt to regain the confidence of the Jews. He was removed from office in disgrace, and Porcius Festus was appointed to succeed him, with headquarters at Caesarea." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 426, 427.

FOR MEDITATION

"A ray of light from heaven had been permitted to shine upon Felix, when Paul reasoned with him concerning righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come. That was his heaven-sent opportunity to see and to forsake his sins. But he said to the messenger of God, 'Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.' He had slighted his last offer of mercy. Never was he to receive another call from God." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 427.

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23

Sabbath, June 8, 2024

Paul's Appeal to Caesar

"For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar." Acts 25:11.

"Festus knew nothing of the conspiracies of the Jews to murder Paul, and he was surprised at this appeal to Caesar. However, the words of the apostle put a stop to the proceedings of the court. 'Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 430.

SUNDAY, JUNE 2, 2024

FESTUS

- 1. What did Festus do soon after he assumed his new office? When the Jewish priests and leaders appeared, what did they ask the procurator to do?**

ACTS 25:1-5 Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.²Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, ³And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. ⁴But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. ⁵Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.

“In making this request they purposed to waylay Paul along the road to Jerusalem and murder him. But Festus had a high sense of the responsibility of his position, and courteously declined to send for Paul. ‘It is not the manner of the Romans,’ he declared, ‘to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have license to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.’ He stated that ‘he himself would depart shortly’ for Caesarea. ‘Let them there ... which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.’” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 428.

MONDAY, JUNE 3, 2024

2. A few days later in Caesarea, Paul was tried by Festus surrounded by his accusers. What did Festus do, even though he knew that the apostle was innocent?

ACTS 25:4-9 But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. ⁵Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him. ⁶And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought. ⁷And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove. ⁸While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all. ⁹But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?

“Festus discerned that the question in dispute related wholly to Jewish doctrines, and that, rightly understood, there was nothing in the charges against Paul, could they be proved, that would render him subject to the sentence of death, or even to imprisonment. Yet he saw clearly the storm of rage that would be created if Paul were not condemned or delivered into their hands. And so, ‘willing to do the Jews a pleasure,’ Festus turned to Paul, and asked if he was willing to go to Jerusalem under his protection, to be tried by the Sanhedrin.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 429.

3. Why did Paul appeal to Caesar? What did Festus do before authorizing Paul to go and appear before Caesar?

ACTS 25:10-12 *Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. ¹¹For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar. ¹²Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.*

"The apostle knew that he could not look for justice from the people who by their crimes were bringing down upon themselves the wrath of God. He knew that, like the prophet Elijah, he would be safer among the heathen than with those who had rejected light from heaven and hardened their hearts against the gospel. Weary of strife, his active spirit could ill endure the repeated delays and wearing suspense of his trial and imprisonment. He therefore decided to exercise his privilege, as a Roman citizen, of appealing to Caesar." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 430.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 5, 2024

AGRIPPA AND BERNICE

4. What distinguished personages came to greet Festus? Whom did he tell them about?

ACTS 25:13-18 *And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. ¹⁴And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: ¹⁵About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. ¹⁶To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. ¹⁷Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. ¹⁸Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed.*

"He outlined the circumstances that led to the prisoner's appeal to Caesar, telling of Paul's recent trial before him, and saying that the Jews had brought against Paul no accusation such as he had supposed they would bring, but 'certain questions ... of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 433.

THURSDAY, JUNE 6, 2024

5. Interested in what he heard, what did King Agrippa request?

ACTS 25:22 *Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.*

"As Festus told his story, Agrippa became interested and said, 'I would also hear the man myself.' In harmony with his wish, a meeting was arranged for the following day. 'And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 434.

FRIDAY, JUNE 7, 2024

6. The next day, who was in the audience to hear the apostle Paul?

ACTS 25:23, 24 *And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth. ²⁴And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.*

"In honor of his visitors, Festus had sought to make this an occasion of imposing display. The rich robes of the procurator and his guests, the swords of the soldiers, and the gleaming armor of their commanders, lent brilliancy to the scene. And now Paul, still manacled, stood before the assembled company. What a contrast was here presented! Agrippa and Bernice possessed power and position, and because of this they were favored by the world. But they were destitute of the traits of character that God esteems. They were transgressors of His law, corrupt in heart and life. Their course of action was abhorred by heaven." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 434.

SABBATH, JUNE 8, 2024

7. What did Festus say was the reason why he wanted King Agrippa to interview Paul?

ACTS 25:25-27 *But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. ²⁶Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. ²⁷For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.*

"Festus himself presented Paul to the assembly with the words: 'King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and

that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O King Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 435.

FOR MEDITATION

"King Agrippa now gave Paul liberty to speak for himself. The apostle was not disconcerted by the brilliant display or the high rank of his audience; for he knew of how little worth are worldly wealth and position. Earthly pomp and power could not for a moment daunt his courage or rob him of his self-control." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 435.

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24

Sabbath, June 15, 2024

"I Know You Believe!"

"King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest."
Acts 26:27.

"Deeply affected, Agrippa for the moment lost sight of his surroundings and the dignity of his position. Conscious only of the truths which he had heard, seeing only the humble prisoner standing before him as God's ambassador, he answered involuntarily, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 438.

SUNDAY, JUNE 9, 2024

NO EARTHLY ADVOCATE

1. Who was the apostle Paul's defender?

LAMENTATIONS 3:58 *O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life.*

ACTS 26:1 *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself.*

"King Agrippa now gave Paul liberty to speak for himself. The apostle was not disconcerted by the brilliant display or the high rank of his audience; for he knew of how little worth are worldly wealth and position. Earthly pomp and power could not for a moment daunt his courage or rob him of his self-control." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 435.

2. What did Paul mean when he said that he knew the king was well acquainted with the customs and issues of the Jews?

ACTS 26:2, 3, 26 *I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: ³Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.... ²⁶For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.*

“Though Agrippa was a Jew, he did not share the bigoted zeal and blind prejudice of the Pharisees.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 438.

PAUL TESTIFIED OF HIS CONVERSION

3. With what background explanation did Paul begin his speech?

ACTS 26:4, 5 *My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; ⁵Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.*

“Paul related the story of his conversion from stubborn unbelief to faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the world’s Redeemer. He described the heavenly vision that at first had filled him with unspeakable terror, but afterward proved to be a source of the greatest consolation—a revelation of divine glory, in the midst of which sat enthroned He whom he had despised and hated, whose followers he was even then seeking to destroy. From that hour Paul had been a new man, a sincere and fervent believer in Jesus, made such by transforming mercy.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 436.

4. Of what hope did he speak? Why could the Jews not believe that Jesus could rise from the dead?

ACTS 26:6-8 *And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: ⁷Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope’s sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. ⁸Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?*

“Why, Paul reasoned, should it seem incredible that Christ should rise from the dead? Once it had thus seemed to him, but how could he disbelieve that which he himself had seen and heard? At the gate of Damascus he had verily looked upon the crucified and risen Christ, the same who had walked the streets of Jerusalem, died on Calvary, broken the bands of death, and ascended to heaven. As verily as had Cephas, James, John,

or any others of the disciples, he had seen and talked with Him. The Voice had bidden him proclaim the gospel of a risen Saviour, and how could he disobey? In Damascus, in Jerusalem, throughout all Judea, and in the regions afar off, he had borne witness of Jesus the Crucified, showing all classes 'that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 436.

THURSDAY, JUNE 13, 2024

5. About what cruel actions of his own did Paul tell his hearers? How did he describe his meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus?

ACTS 26:9-18 *I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. ¹¹And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. ¹²Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, ¹³At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. ¹⁴And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. ¹⁵And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. ¹⁶But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; ¹⁷Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, ¹⁸To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.*

FRIDAY, JUNE 14, 2024

"YOU ARE CRAZY!"

6. How did Festus react to what Paul told him? What question did the apostle direct to King Agrippa?

ACTS 26:24-29 *And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. ²⁵But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. ²⁶For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. ²⁷King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. ²⁸Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. ²⁹And Paul*

said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

"The whole company had listened spellbound to Paul's account of his wonderful experiences. The apostle was dwelling upon his favorite theme. None who heard him could doubt his sincerity. But in the full tide of his persuasive eloquence he was interrupted by Festus, who cried out, 'Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 437.

SABBATH, JUNE 15, 2024

7. What conclusion did Paul's hearers reach after hearing his testimony? Why did they not set him free?

ACTS 26:31, 32 *And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.*
³²*Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.*

FOR MEDITATION

"Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice might in justice have worn the fetters that bound the apostle. All were guilty of grievous crimes. These offenders had that day heard the offer of salvation through the name of Christ. One, at least, had been almost persuaded to accept the grace and pardon offered. But Agrippa put aside the proffered mercy, refusing to accept the cross of a crucified Redeemer." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 438.

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Shipwreck

“And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.” Acts 27:44.

“Every man would have all he could do to save himself. Yet if any of the prisoners were missing, the lives of those who were responsible for them would be forfeited. Hence the soldiers desired to put all the prisoners to death. The Roman law sanctioned this cruel policy, and the plan would have been executed at once, but for him to whom all alike were under deep obligation. Julius the centurion knew that Paul had been instrumental in saving the lives of all on board, and, moreover, convinced that the Lord was with him, he feared to do him harm. He therefore ‘commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.’ When the roll was called, not one was missing.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 445.

SUNDAY, JUNE 16, 2024

LUKE AND ARISTARCHUS

1. Who accompanied Paul on his trip to Italy? Who was Julius, and how did he treat the apostle?

ACTS 27:1-3 *And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus’ band.²And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.³And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.*

“The apostle Paul was now called upon to endure the trying experiences that would fall to his lot as a prisoner in chains during the long and tedious voyage to Italy. One circumstance greatly lightened the hardship of his lot—he was permitted the companionship of Luke and Aristarchus. In his letter to the Colossians he afterward referred to the latter as his ‘fellow prisoner’ (Colossians 4:10); but it was from choice that Aristarchus shared Paul’s bondage, that he might minister to him in his afflictions.

“The voyage began prosperously. The following day they cast anchor in the harbor of Sidon. Here Julius, the centurion, ‘courteously entreated Paul,’ and being informed that there were Christians in the place, ‘gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.’ This permission was

greatly appreciated by the apostle, who was in feeble health." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 439, 440.

MONDAY, JUNE 17, 2024

FAIR HAVENS

2. Originally the crew and passengers left in a ship that was from Adramyttium, and later they changed to an Alexandrian ship. Why? What made the navigation extremely dangerous?

ACTS 27:4-10 *And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.⁵And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. ⁶And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. ⁷And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone; ⁸And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea. ⁹Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, ¹⁰And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.*

"Upon leaving Sidon, the ship encountered contrary winds; and being driven from a direct course, its progress was slow. At Myra, in the province of Lycia, the centurion found a large Alexandrian ship, bound for the coast of Italy, and to this he immediately transferred his prisoners. But the winds were still contrary, and the ship's progress was difficult....

"At Fair Havens they were compelled to remain for some time, waiting for favoring winds. Winter was approaching rapidly; 'sailing was now dangerous;' and those in charge of the vessel had to give up hope of reaching their destination before the season for travel by sea should be closed for the year. The only question now to be decided was, whether to remain at Fair Havens, or attempt to reach a more favorable place in which to winter.

"This question was earnestly discussed, and was finally referred by the centurion to Paul, who had won the respect of both sailors and soldiers. The apostle unhesitatingly advised remaining where they were. 'I perceive,' he said, 'that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 440, 441.

TUESDAY, JUNE 18, 2024

3. Why did the shipmaster not want to spend the winter there? What change in the weather precipitated their making the wrong decision?

ACTS 27:11-13 *Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. ¹²And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to*

Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west. ¹³And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.

"But 'the master and the owner of the ship,' and the majority of passengers and crew, were unwilling to accept this counsel. Because the haven in which they had anchored 'was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the southwest and northwest.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 441.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 19, 2024

EUROCLYDON

4. What difficulties arose shortly after they embarked? What did the crew have to do?

ACTS 27:14-19 *But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. ¹⁵And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. ¹⁶And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: ¹⁷Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. ¹⁸And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; ¹⁹And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.*

"Driven by the tempest, the vessel neared the small island of Clauda, and while under its shelter the sailors made ready for the worst. The lifeboat, their only means of escape in case the ship should founder, was in tow and liable to be dashed in pieces any moment. Their first work was to hoist this boat on board. All possible precautions were then taken to strengthen the ship and prepare it to withstand the tempest. The scant protection afforded by the little island did not avail them long, and soon they were again exposed to the full violence of the storm.

"All night the tempest raged, and notwithstanding the precautions that had been taken, the vessel leaked. 'The next day they lightened the ship.' Night came again, but the wind did not abate. The storm-beaten ship, with its shattered mast and rent sails, was tossed hither and thither by the fury of the gale. Every moment it seemed that the groaning timbers must give way as the vessel reeled and quivered under the tempest's shock. The leak increased rapidly, and passengers and crew worked continually at the pumps. There was not a moment's rest for any on board." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 441, 442.

THURSDAY, JUNE 20, 2024

5. After the deadly storm continued for two weeks, what did Paul urge the weary travelers to do?

ACTS 27:22-25, 33, 34 *And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.*²³*For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,*²⁴*Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.*²⁵*Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.*³³*And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.*³⁴*Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.*

"It was on the fourteenth night of tossing on the black, heaving billows, that 'about midnight' the sailors, hearing the sound of breakers, 'deemed that they drew near to some country; and sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms. Then fearing,' Luke writes, 'lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.'" -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 443.

FRIDAY, JUNE 21, 2024

AN ATTEMPT AT DECEPTION

6. What did some sailors try to do? What did Paul warn the centurion?

ACTS 27:30-32 *And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,*³¹*Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.*³²*Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.*

"At break of day the outlines of the stormy coast were dimly visible, but no familiar landmarks could be seen. So gloomy was the outlook that the heathen sailors, losing all courage, 'were about to flee out of the ship,' and feigning to make preparations for casting 'anchors out of the foreship,' they had already let down the lifeboat, when Paul, perceiving their base design, said to the centurion and the soldiers, 'Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.' The soldiers immediately 'cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off' into the sea." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 443.

SABBATH, JUNE 22, 2024

7. Finally, the ship ran aground in "a place where two seas met." How did Paul encourage the passengers and crew members?

ACTS 27:41 *And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.*

"Taking advantage of a lull in the tempest, Paul stood forth on the deck and, lifting up his voice, said: 'Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And

now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.'

"At these words, hope revived. Passengers and crew roused from their apathy. There was much yet to be done, and every effort within their power must be put forth to avert destruction." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 444, 443.

FOR MEDITATION

"Paul and the other prisoners were now threatened by a fate more terrible than shipwreck. The soldiers saw that while endeavoring to reach land it would be impossible for them to keep their prisoners in charge. Every man would have all he could do to save himself." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 445.

"And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape." Acts 27:42.

* * *

Please read the Missionary Report from the Virtual Missionary School on page 126

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Sabbath, June 29, 2024

Rome

"And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him." Acts 28:16.

"At Rome the centurion Julius delivered up his prisoners to the captain of the emperor's guard. The good account which he gave of Paul, together with the letter from Festus, caused the apostle to be favorably regarded by the chief captain, and, instead of being thrown into prison, he was permitted to live in his own hired house. Although still constantly chained to a soldier, he was at liberty to receive his friends and to labor for the advancement of the cause of Christ." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 449.

SUNDAY, JUNE 23, 2024

IN MELITA

- 1. On the island, what happened to the apostle as he was putting wood on the fire? What opportunities did he take to be a blessing to the people who lived there?**

ACTS 28:1-9 *And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. ²And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. ³And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. ⁴And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. ⁵And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. ⁶Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god. ⁷In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. ⁸And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. ⁹So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed.*

"The shipwrecked crew were kindly received by the barbarous people of Melita. 'They kindled a fire,' Luke writes, 'and received us everyone, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.' Paul was among those who were active in ministering to the comfort of others. Having gathered 'a bundle of sticks,' he 'laid them on the fire,' when a viper came forth 'out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.' The bystanders were horror-stricken; and seeing by his chain that Paul was a prisoner, they said to one another, 'No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.' But Paul shook off the creature into the fire and felt no harm. Knowing its venomous nature, the people looked for him to fall down at any moment in terrible agony....

"During the three months that the ship's company remained at Melita, Paul and his fellow laborers improved many opportunities to preach the gospel. In a remarkable manner the Lord wrought through them. For Paul's sake the entire shipwrecked company were treated with great kindness; all their wants were supplied, and upon leaving Melita they were liberally provided with everything needful for their voyage." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 445, 446.

MONDAY, JUNE 24, 2024

2. What privilege was given to Paul when the procession stopped at Appii Forum?

ACTS 28:14, 15 *Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. ¹⁵And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.*

"In this place there were a few Christians, and they entreated the apostle to remain with them for seven days, a privilege kindly granted by the centurion. Since receiving Paul's epistle to the Romans, the Christians of

Italy had eagerly looked forward to a visit from the apostle. They had not thought to see him come as a prisoner, but his sufferings only endeared him to them the more. The distance from Puteoli to Rome being but a hundred and forty miles, and the seaport being in constant communication with the metropolis, the Roman Christians were informed of Paul's approach, and some of them started to meet and welcome him....

"At last the travelers reach Appii Forum, forty miles from Rome. As they make their way through the crowds that throng the great thoroughfare, the gray-haired old man, chained with a group of hardened-looking criminals, receives many a glance of scorn and is made the subject of many a rude, mocking jest....

"Few realize the significance of those words of Luke, that when Paul saw his brethren, 'he thanked God, and took courage.' In the midst of the weeping, sympathizing company of believers, who were not ashamed of his bonds, the apostle praised God aloud. The cloud of sadness that had rested upon his spirit was swept away. His Christian life had been a succession of trials, sufferings, and disappointments, but in that hour he felt abundantly repaid. With firmer step and joyful heart he continued on his way. He would not complain of the past, nor fear for the future. Bonds and afflictions awaited him, he knew; but he knew also that it had been his to deliver souls from a bondage infinitely more terrible, and he rejoiced in his sufferings for Christ's sake." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 447-449.

TUESDAY, JUNE 25, 2024

3. Once the prisoners and guards arrived in Rome, where was the apostle permitted to stay? What was it like to be constantly guarded by a soldier?

ACTS 28:16 *And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.*

"At Rome the centurion Julius delivered up his prisoners to the captain of the emperor's guard. The good account which he gave of Paul, together with the letter from Festus, caused the apostle to be favorably regarded by the chief captain, and, instead of being thrown into prison, he was permitted to live in his own hired house. Although still constantly chained to a soldier, he was at liberty to receive his friends and to labor for the advancement of the cause of Christ." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 449.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26, 2024

PREACHING IN ROME

4. When did many gather at Paul's house? What was the result of his preaching?

ACTS 28:23-29 *And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.²⁴ And some believed*

the things which were spoken, and some believed not. ²⁵And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, ²⁶Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: ²⁷For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. ²⁸Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. ²⁹And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

“Paul declared that in his unconverted state he had known Christ, not by personal acquaintance, but merely by the conception which he, in common with others, cherished concerning the character and work of the Messiah to come. He had rejected Jesus of Nazareth as an impostor because He did not fulfill this conception. But now Paul’s views of Christ and His mission were far more spiritual and exalted, for he had been converted. The apostle asserted that he did not present to them Christ after the flesh. Herod had seen Christ in the days of His humanity; Annas had seen Him; Pilate and the priests and rulers had seen Him; the Roman soldiers had seen Him. But they had not seen Him with the eye of faith; they had not seen Him as the glorified Redeemer. To apprehend Christ by faith, to have a spiritual knowledge of Him, was more to be desired than a personal acquaintance with Him as He appeared on the earth. The communion with Christ which Paul now enjoyed was more intimate, more enduring, than a mere earthly and human companionship.

“As Paul spoke of what he knew, and testified of what he had seen, concerning Jesus of Nazareth as the hope of Israel, those who were honestly seeking for truth were convinced. Upon some minds, at least, his words made an impression that was never effaced. But others stubbornly refused to accept the plain testimony of the Scriptures, even when presented to them by one who had the special illumination of the Holy Spirit. They could not refute his arguments, but they refused to accept his conclusions.” -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 452.

THURSDAY, JUNE 27, 2024

5. How did the apostle utilize the time of his imprisonment? How did he take advantage of the means of communication that existed then?

ACTS 28:30, 31 *And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, ³¹Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.*

“In the providence of God this delay resulted in the furtherance of the gospel. Through the favor of those who had Paul in charge, he was per-

mitted to dwell in a commodious house, where he could meet freely with his friends and also present the truth daily to those who came to hear. Thus for two years he continued his labors, 'preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, will all confidence, no man forbidding him.'

"During this time the churches that he had established in many lands were not forgotten. Realizing the dangers that threatened the converts to the new faith, the apostle sought so far as possible to meet their needs by letters of warning and practical instruction. And from Rome he sent out consecrated workers to labor not only for these churches, but in fields that he himself had not visited. These workers, as wise shepherds, strengthened the work so well begun by Paul; and the apostle, kept informed of the condition and dangers of the churches by constant communication with them, was enabled to exercise a wise supervision over all." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 453.

FRIDAY, JUNE 28, 2024

6. What was written about his inseparable traveling companions, who voluntarily took care of him in prison and were able to write about his experiences?

COLOSSIANS 4:12-14 *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. ¹³For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis. ¹⁴Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.*

"Among Paul's assistants at Rome were many of his former companions and fellow workers. Luke, 'the beloved physician,' who had attended him on the journey to Jerusalem, through the two years' imprisonment at Caesarea, and upon his perilous voyage to Rome, was with him still. Timothy also ministered to his comfort. Tychicus, 'a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord,' stood nobly by the apostle. Demas and Mark were also with him. Aristarchus and Epaphras were his 'fellow prisoners.' Colossians 4:7-14." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 454.

SABBATH, JUNE 29, 2024

DYING IN CHRIST IS ETERNAL GAIN

7. When Paul was taken from his brethren, what did the believers realize? What were his final words?

2 TIMOTHY 4:6, 7 *For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*

"Thus, while apparently cut off from active labor, Paul exerted a wider and more lasting influence than if he had been free to travel among the churches as in former years. As a prisoner of the Lord, he had a firmer hold upon the affections of his brethren; and his words, written by one

under bonds for the sake of Christ, commanded greater attention and respect than they did when he was personally with them. Not until Paul was removed from them, did the believers realize how heavy were the burdens he had borne in their behalf. Heretofore they had largely excused themselves from responsibility and burden bearing because they lacked his wisdom, tact, and indomitable energy; but now, left in their inexperience to learn the lessons they had shunned, they prized his warnings, counsels, and instructions as they had not prized his personal work. And as they learned of his courage and faith during his long imprisonment they were stimulated to greater fidelity and zeal in the cause of Christ....

"Paul was taken in a private manner to the place of execution. Few spectators were allowed to be present; for his persecutors, alarmed at the extent of his influence, feared that converts might be won to Christianity by the scenes of his death. But even the hardened soldiers who attended him listened to his words and with amazement saw him cheerful and even joyous in the prospect of death. To some who witnessed his martyrdom, his spirit of forgiveness toward his murderers and his unwavering confidence in Christ till the last, proved a savor of life unto life. More than one accepted the Saviour whom Paul preached, and ere long fearlessly sealed their faith with their blood." -*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 454, 509.

FOR MEDITATION

"Well-nigh a score of centuries have passed since Paul the aged poured out his blood as a witness for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. No faithful hand recorded for the generations to come the last scenes in the life of this holy man, but Inspiration has preserved for us his dying testimony. Like a trumpet peal his voice has rung out through all the ages since, nerving with his own courage thousands of witnesses for Christ and wakening in thousands of sorrow-stricken hearts the echo of his own triumphant joy: 'I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.' 2 Timothy 4:6-8." -*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 513.

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MISSIONARY REPORT FROM THE VIRTUAL MISSIONARY SCHOOL

To be read on Sabbath, June 29, 2024

*The Special Sabbath School Offering
will be gathered on Sabbath, July 6, 2024*

Dear members and visitors in the worldwide church, "True education is missionary training. Every son and daughter of God is called to be a missionary; we are called to the service of God and our fellow men; and to fit us for this service should be the object of our education." —*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 395.

We extend our heartfelt greetings to all who have been an integral part of God's church, sharing in the joy of spreading the teachings of the Lord to every corner of the globe. Today, we come before you with a humble request, seeking generous contributions to support an important initiative that holds immense potential for the future of God's cause.

In this fast-paced, ever-changing world, virtual and online study methods have been developed and are very advantageous. Recognizing the significance of this shift toward digital education, we are grateful to be able to introduce the virtual missionary school module in English, which is designed to meet international educational standards. It offers a comprehensive curriculum comparable to study modules in the United States. We are excited to announce that the successful completion of the program will result in the issuance of certificates by the esteemed Berea Academy of the United States. To ensure easy accessibility, this initiative is facilitated through the Kibaha Berea Adventist Institute in Tanzania, allowing aspiring missionaries worldwide to receive a high-quality education and prepare for important service. More details are available at the Institute's website at <https://www.kibaha-sda1844.org/>.

The curriculum encompasses a comprehensive range of subjects, including Bibliology, Prophecy, Church Administration, Human Resources Development, Hermeneutics, Homiletics, Public Speaking, Canvassing, Missionary and Evangelistic Outreach, and other spiritual and practical disciplines. These subjects are vital for individuals who desire to deepen their understanding of the faith and improve their ability to communicate the gospel message effectively to others. Another area in which many students require training is English language proficiency, and the Institute intends to start an English language program very soon to add to the curriculum.

Embracing the power of technology, this program is accessible to individuals across borders, thus removing geographical barriers and creating a global platform for spiritual education. In this interconnected age, we believe that the virtual format of this missionary school will make it possible to reach and inspire individuals from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and countries. It will foster a united community dedicated to serving the Lord by spreading His message of love and salvation, making it possible for individuals to serve as missionaries, Bible workers, ministers, and elders in their respective locations.

The need for qualified workers is increasingly important. In many African countries, governments require all who serve as ministers and elders to possess specific qualifications in religious professions to ensure their local congregations' spiritual growth and development. This is necessary in other parts of the world as well. Another big advantage is that the required fees for virtual missionary school studies can also be subsidized, thus providing an opportunity to those who are called to serve but have few resources to obtain the necessary education and training.

However, to make this initiative come to reality, financial support is needed. Generous contributions will make it possible to offer the program to individuals who are eager to devote their lives to spreading the teachings of the Lord but who need financial support to pursue formal education. By investing in this endeavor, you will help to foster a new generation of committed disciples equipped with the skills and knowledge to make a lasting impact on the lives of others.

We implore you to open your hearts and contribute to this worthy cause. Your support will not only uplift those in need but also strengthen the foundation of God's church, thus fulfilling the sacred responsibility of spreading the love and message of Christ to the farthest reaches of the earth. Together, we can create a global network of passionate individuals who are united in their mission to serve the Lord. Remember the gospel commission assigned by the Saviour: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:..." Matthew 28:19, 20.

Let us embrace this opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others, empower those who are called to serve, and bring hope and salvation to countless souls. Regardless of its size, your contribution will significantly impact this program's success.

"This object should ever be kept in view by Christian parents and teachers. We know not in what line our children may serve. They may spend their lives within the circle of the home; they may engage in life's common vocations, or go as teachers of the gospel to heathen

lands; but all are alike called to be missionaries for God, ministers of mercy to the world." -*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 395.

May the Lord bless you abundantly as you consider joining this vital endeavor by sharing your blessings through sacrifice for next week's Special Sabbath School offering for the virtual missionary school project. Let us each sow the seeds of knowledge, compassion, and faith for the support of God's church in the world.

In Christ's service,

For the General Conference Executive Board,

-Pastor Douglas Francis

American Union Headquarters

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1047 West 164th Street
Gardena, CA 90247
562-331-7540

CA, Huntington Park Church

2877 E. Florence Avenue
Huntington Park, CA 90255
323-583-5444

CA, Riverside Church

7631 Philbin Ave.
Riverside, CA 92503-1971
908-578-4156

CA, Sacramento Church

For information call:
916-690-4847
(Gretchen Schendel)

CA, San Francisco Bay Area Church

For information call:
408-775-1984
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For information call:
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Denver, CO 80247-1927
303-361-9999

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Church"
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Miami, FL 33125
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FL, Orlando Church

Church of the Nazarene
1670 N. Chickasaw Trail
Orlando, FL 32825
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FL, Tampa Church

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Cedartown, GA 30125
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Rome, GA 30161
201-281-7533

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678-294-6972

GA, Norman Park Church

Hope Chapel, Admin. Bldg.
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Norman Park, GA 31771
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