

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 1)

To understand the book of Acts, we have to start BEFORE the book of Acts, with a conversation Jesus has with His disciples ...

Matthew 16:13-21 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock **I will build my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ. From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

- This is the first time "CHURCH" is used in the New Testament.
- The church is built on the REVELATION of who Jesus is.
- That revelation cannot be understood – or obeyed – without the DEATH, BURIAL and RESURRECTION of Jesus Christ.
- The words "bind" and "loose" are perfect passive participles in the Greek, indicating things that have ALREADY been bound or loosed.
- We must build the church according to God's BLUEPRINT if we want His BLESSING, according to His PATTERN if we want His POWER.
- Ultimately, God does the building – "I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH."
- If Peter was given the KEYS of the kingdom of heaven, we need to obey what he says and do what he does in the book of Acts!

THE CHURCH IS THE ONLY THING GOD EVER HAD TO BUY.

God created everything else, but the church cost Him dearly! We are privileged beyond measure to be part of the Church of the Living God!

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

If a contractor builds a house for someone, he sticks to the blueprint, which is the will of the purchaser. If we want to build a church, we need to stick to the blueprint (Bible), which is the will of the purchaser (God).

ACTS is the blueprint for the First Century Church!

The Bible translators called this book "The Acts of the APOSTLES," but really it is "The Acts of the HOLY SPIRIT through the Apostles."

The author of the book of Acts is LUKE. His gospel talks about God WITH men (Emmanuel); Acts talks about God IN men (the Holy Ghost).

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, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It 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, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

THEOPHILUS means "lover of God," and Luke is instructing him in the basics of the faith. Luke is an eyewitness to these things, having traveled with the Apostle Paul (narrative changes from "they" to "we" in Acts).

Acts 1:1-3 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began **both to do and teach**, Until 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: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

Jesus' ministry was all about **DOING and TEACHING**. Jesus did not work miracles just for miracles' sake, but He used them to teach doctrine (i.e. healed blind man and taught "I am the light of the world," fed 5000 and taught "I am the bread of life"). He also did not teach just for teaching's sake, but "he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." (Matthew 7:29)

1 Timothy 4:16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

James 1:22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

John 4:24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

2 Corinthians 3:6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. What are the "commandments" that Jesus gave to the apostles just before He was "taken up" (Acts 1:2)?

Luke 24:44-49 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

Jesus said, "I will be crucified, be buried and then rise again" ... and because of this I want you to go out and preach REPENTANCE, BAPTISM ("remission of sins") in My name, and the baptism of the HOLY GHOST ("the promise of my Father").

THE VERY LAST THING JESUS DID ON EARTH WITH HIS DISCIPLES WAS TO EMPHASIZE HOW TO OBEY THE GOSPEL – AND PETER PREACHED THIS VERY SAME MESSAGE IN ACTS 2:38!

Jesus “shewed himself alive” for forty days after His resurrection, and gave His disciples “many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3). The official position of the Jews was that the disciples had merely stolen Jesus’ body – and if Jesus was dead, the gospel had no power. All of Jerusalem knew that Jesus had been crucified – few knew that He had risen from the dead.

The last the world saw of Jesus was on the cross, CRUCIFIED. The last the disciples saw of Jesus was on the Mount of Olives, RESURRECTED.

BY THEIR WORDS, THEIR WALK, AND THEIR WORKS, THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH PROVED THAT JESUS WAS ALIVE!

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. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

The Holy Ghost is the resurrection power of Jesus in every believer!

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

Acts 1:6-8 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. 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.

The Jews always had a wrong concept of the Kingdom of God, confining it to a nationalistic, materialistic, political and physical sense. Because Jesus did not come to establish that type of earthly kingdom, the crowd that cried “Hosanna!” eventually cried “Crucify him!” And even the disciples were impacted by this mentality – that’s why they argued over which one of them would be greater – but it was GOD’S kingdom!

IT IS NOT FOR YOU TO KNOW THE **TIMES (CHRONOS)** OR THE **SEASONS (KAIROS)**, WHICH THE FATHER HATH PUT IN HIS OWN **POWER (EXOUSIA)**, BUT YE SHALL RECEIVE **POWER (DYNAMIS)** ...

God has two words for TIME:

- CHRONOS – time governed by the clock
- KAIROS – special moments of visitation by God

Ephesians 5:15-16 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time (KAIROS), because the days are evil.

Galatians 6:9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season (KAIROS) we shall reap, if we faint not.

When the disciples asked when Jesus was going to “restore the kingdom” (send revival), He told them that it was not for them to distinguish between the “times” (CHRONOS) and the “seasons” (KAIROS), because only God controls times of supernatural visitation!

God has two words for POWER:

- EXOUSIA – authority, or “restraining” power
- DYNAMIS – ability, or “doing” power

Acts 4:33 And with great power (DYNAMIS) gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power (DYNAMIS) of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

1 Corinthians 4:20 For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power (DYNAMIS).

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power (DYNAMIS) may be of God, and not of us.

Only God has power (EXOUSIA = AUTHORITY) over the results of our prayer, our worship, our work, and our lives. But He has given us power (DYNAMIS = ABILITY) to be witnesses.

The key to revival is for the church to exercise its ABILITY until God exercises His AUTHORITY.

Luke 24:47 said this would happen “beginning at Jerusalem.”

Acts 1:8 says “ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

Acts is centered around TWO APOSTLES and TWO CITIES:

- Acts 1-12 is about Peter, the apostle to the Jews, and Jerusalem
- Acts 13-28 is about Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, and Antioch

Peter's ministry reaches Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.
Paul's ministry reaches the uttermost parts of the earth – even to Rome!

Rome, the world empire that crucified the Nazarene and stamped its seal on His tomb to prevent the resurrection, hadn't heard the end of JESUS!

If we want to know what Jesus intended preaching, or miracles, or repentance, or baptism, or receiving the Holy Spirit to look like, we must turn to the book of Acts. It is the BLUEPRINT for the church!

If we want to know how the disciples interpreted the Great Commission, we must turn to the book of Acts. It is the BLUEPRINT for the church.

YE SHALL BE WITNESSES (ACTS 1:8) = MARTYS (MARTYR).

A martyr is one who literally "lays down their life" for the gospel. This is not just being willing to DIE for the Lord, but also being willing to LIVE for Him in the face of opposition, persecution and tribulation.

WITNESS is a key word in Acts (29 times in 28 chapters), and is used as both a NOUN and a VERB. It is important to BE a witness with your LIFE, but it is equally important to GO witness with your TESTIMONY.

Proverbs 14:25 A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies.

ARE YOU A TRUE WITNESS?

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 2)

Matthew 16:18-19 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

• Peter was given the KEYS of the kingdom of heaven, we need to obey what he says and do what he does in the book of Acts!

THE CHURCH IS THE ONLY THING THAT CANNOT BE SHAKEN!

Individual saints and local assemblies may have problems, but the church is as solid as the rock of revelation it is built upon.

- The earth is to be shaken (Isaiah 2:19-21)
- The nation of Israel is to be shaken (Ezekiel 38:19-20)
- The heavens and the nations are to be shaken (Haggai 2:6-7)
- Everything that can be shaken will be shaken (Hebrews 12:26-29)

But the church cannot be shaken! The gates of hell cannot prevail against it, because JESUS IS BUILDING HIS CHURCH!

Acts 1:9-11 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which 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.

If Jesus hadn't ascended, we would not have the Holy Ghost.

John 16:7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

John 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

John 14:18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

COMFORTLESS (ORFANOS) = orphans, fatherless, bereaved
COMFORTER (PARAKLETOS) = one called alongside to assist
If Jesus hadn't ascended, His earthly work would not have been multiplied.

John 14:12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

Mark 16:20 And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

If Jesus hadn't ascended, He could not have begun His heavenly work.

Hebrews 4:14-16 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

1 John 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

ADVOCATE (PARAKLETOS) = COMFORTER! (used only by John)

Angels appear periodically in the book of Acts to work FOR the saints, but the Holy Ghost is constantly there working THROUGH the saints!

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

1 Peter 1:12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

HIS SAME JESUS ... SHALL SO COME IN LIKE MANNER!

Revelation 1:7-8 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

WHY STAND YE GAZING UP INTO HEAVEN?

(Peter and James and John, Don't just stand there ... go do something!)
Acts 1:12-14 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

This is likely the Upper Room where they held the Last Supper.

Notice the composition of the "Day of Pentecost" group:

- the eleven apostles (minus Judas)
- the women (who followed Jesus and his apostles – Luke 8:1-3)
- Mary the mother of Jesus
- Jesus' brethren, who didn't believe before his resurrection (John 7:5 – For neither did his brethren believe in Him.)

If your religion honors Peter or Mary above other disciples, please note that Scripture doesn't do this, and also note that both Peter and Mary were here in the Upper Room – they both repented, they both were baptized in Jesus' name, they both received the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in other tongues – how much do you honor them?!

How easy it would have been for someone to bring division into this beautiful assembly of humble people! The members of the Lord's family might have claimed special recognition. They could have criticized Peter for his cowardly denial of the Savior. John might have proudly reminded the others that he had faithfully stood at the cross, and had even been chosen by the Savior to care for His mother. But there was none of this. In fact, for the first time none of the disciples were arguing over who among them was the greatest!

THEY WERE IN "ONE ACCORD" (OCCURS SIX TIMES IN ACTS).

HOMOTHYMADON = compound word, literally meaning "one passion"

Psalm 133:1-3 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

"WITH ONE ACCORD IN PRAYER"

Prayer is everywhere in the Book of Acts!

The believers prayed for guidance in making decisions (Acts 1:15-26) and for courage to witness for Christ (Acts 4:23-31). In fact, prayer was a normal part of their daily ministry (Acts 2:42-47; 3:1; 6:4). Stephen prayed as he was being stoned (Acts 7:55-60). Peter and John prayed for the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17), and Sa of Tarsus prayed after his conversion (Acts 9:11). Peter prayed before he raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36-43). Cornelius prayed that God would show him how to be saved (Acts 10:1-4), and Peter was on the housetop praying when God told him how to be the answer to Cornelius' prayers (Acts 10:9). The believers in John Mark's house prayed for Peter when he was in prison, and the Lord delivered him both from prison and from death (Acts 12:1-11). The church at Antioch fasted and prayed before sending out Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:1-3) and upon ordaining elders (Acts 14:23). It was at a prayer meeting in Philippi that God opened Lydia's heart (Acts 16:13), and another prayer meeting in Philippi opened the prison doors (Acts 16:25). Paul prayed for his friends before leaving them (Acts 20:36; 21:5). In the midst of a storm, he prayed for God's blessing (Acts 27:35), and after a storm, he prayed that God would heal a sick man (Acts 28:8).

In almost every chapter in Acts you find a reference to prayer, and Acts makes it very clear that something happens when God's people pray! Prayer is both the thermometer and the thermostat of the local church; for the "spiritual temperature" goes up or down depending on prayer.

Acts 1:15-26 And 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,) 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. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now 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. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aeldama, that is to say, The field of blood. For 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. 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. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. Notice that this is the only time the early church ever makes a decision using LOTS, and that this is NOT A VOTE. With votes, you always have politics, and you always have winners and losers. So when faced with a decision, the early church drew straws and trusted the Lord to guide them rather than hold a vote!

Proverbs 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.

"FROM WHICH JUDAS BY TRANSGRESSION FELL" – TRAGEDY!

Some people claim the disciples made a mistake here in choosing Matthias. They feel that Paul was actually the one God chose for this role, and their argument is that Matthias was never heard of again after Acts 1. But except for Peter and John, none of the original twelve are mentioned by name in the book of Acts after chapter one!

Paul's apostleship was different – he wasn't an eyewitness of Jesus' earthly ministry like the original twelve – but he was still an Apostle!

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five

hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, and
And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

Acts 1:15 And 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.)

OVER 500 SAW JESUS ALIVE AFTER HIS RESURRECTION, BUT ONLY 120 MADE IT TO THE UPPER ROOM FOR PENTECOST.

MANY HAVE HEARD THE PREACHING OF ENDTIME REVIVAL, BUT WHO IS GOING TO BE HERE WHEN IT HAPPENS?!

PAUL – “**BORN OUT OF DUE TIME**” (EKTROMAH – a compound word meaning “untimely birth, miscarriage, or BORN WOUNDED”)

I WAS BORN AGAIN WITH A DISADVANTAGE, BUT I STILL BELIEVE!

John 20:29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 3)

Matthew 16:18-19 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

If Peter was given the KEYS of the kingdom of heaven, we need to obey what he says and do what he does in the book of Acts!

Acts 2:1-4 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

PENTECOST means "FIFTIETH" (fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits)

PASSOVER commemorated Israel's deliverance from Egypt through the death of the Passover Lamb.

FIRSTFRUITS commemorated the start of the barley harvest, when a priest used the first sheaf of grain for a wave offering, symbolizing that the entire harvest belonged to the Lord.

PENTECOST commemorated the end of the wheat harvest, when a priest waved two loaves of leavened bread, symbolizing the nation's thanks to God for the entire harvest.

PASSOVER – Jesus died as the Lamb of God

John 1:29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

1 Corinthians 5:7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

FIRSTFRUITS - Jesus was first of "harvest" to rise from the dead

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

PENTECOST – Birth of the church, made of both Jews and Gentiles

Ephesians 2:13-16 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

PENTECOST in the Old Testament also marked the day that Moses was given the Law on Mount Sinai, written on tables of stone.

PENTECOST in the New Testament marks the day that the Law of God is written in human hearts by the Holy Spirit!

2 Corinthians 3:3 Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

AND WHEN THE DAY OF PENTECOST WAS FULLY COME (2:1)

The phrase "was fully come" literally means "was being fulfilled." This Day of Pentecost would be different than every past Day of Pentecost!

Just as Pentecost couldn't have happened before Passover and Firstfruits on the calendar, the Holy Spirit couldn't have been poured out until Jesus first died, then was buried, and then rose from the dead.

John 7:37-39 In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

BELLY ("KOILIA") = "WOMB" / Holy Ghost associated with BIRTH!

WIND & FIRE sometimes accompanied God's presence in the Old Testament (Elijah at Mount Horeb – 1 Kings 19), but this time would rest individually on believers as a sign that Pentecost was being FULFILLED.

In Hebrew and Greek, the terms SPIRIT and WIND are the same word!

John 3:8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is

John 20:22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

Ezekiel 37:9-10 Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

The cloven tongues of fire (divided to individuals) symbolize the lighting of the lamps on the Golden Candlestick. The church is to be a LIGHT!

Revelation 1:12-16 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

Matthew 3:11-12 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Matthew 5:14-16 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

There was no electricity in Bible times – all of the light that man could use to dispel darkness was created by FIRE!

Hebrews 12:29 For our God is a consuming fire.

In Acts 1, we see Jesus leaving his disciples and going to Heaven; in Acts 2, we see Jesus returning to his disciples through the Holy Ghost!
GOSPELS = CHRIST WITH THEM // ACTS = CHRIST IN THEM!

Colossians 1:27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

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

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 4)

In Acts 1, we see Jesus leaving his disciples and going to Heaven; in Acts 2, we see Jesus returning to his disciples through the Holy Ghost!
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WHAT IS THE HOLY GHOST?

- It is called the Spirit of Christ.

Romans 8:10-13 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

- It is called a baptism.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

- It is called a birth.

John 3:5-8 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

- It is called living water.

John 4:13-14 Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

John 7:38-39 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

- It is called the comforter.

John 14:15-18 If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even 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. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

- It is called the spirit of adoption.

Romans 8:14-16 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

- It is called a seal, and the earnest of our inheritance.

Ephesians 1:13-14 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

- It is called power from on high.

Luke 24:49 And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

WHY DID GOD CHOOSE SPEAKING IN TONGUES?

- God is sovereign and can do what He wants to do (Isaiah 40:13-14)

The Bible says "from the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34)

- Our speech is our chief means of expression (Proverbs 18:20-21)
- Tongue is the most difficult part of the body to control (James 3:2-8)

- Speaking in tongues is a universal, external sign (Acts 11:15-17)
- God uses things that are "foolish" to do His will (1 Corinthians 1:25-29)
- Speaking in tongues reverses the confusion of the Tower of Babel.
- Speaking in tongues shows God's love for people of all nations.
- God regularly used outward signs to accompany His covenants.
- Speaking in tongues provides "certainty" at a definite point in time!

It is critical to note that EVERY believer in the book of Acts received the Holy Ghost with the EVIDENCE of speaking in other tongues. There were NO EXCEPTIONS. There is no such thing in your Bible as a Christian who does not speak with tongues. There is no such thing in your Bible as a church that is not Spirit filled. We see this proved EVERYWHERE in Acts!

Later on in the Epistles, as the church matures and Paul gives them teaching on the GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT, he will speak of something called "**Divers Kinds of Tongues**" which is one of nine supernatural gifts given to the church. And in that teaching, he will say things like "**Do all speak with tongues?**" (1 Corinthians 12:30) Don't let anyone confuse you on this point – the "Gift of Tongues" is an utterance in an unknown language in a church meeting that must be interpreted into the language of the hearers by another Gift of the Spirit called "**Interpretation of Tongues.**" Not every member of the Body receives these supernatural gifts to use in the church – BUT EVERY BIBLE BELIEVER SPEAKS IN TONGUES!

1 Corinthians 12:10-11 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another **divers kinds of tongues**; to another the **interpretation of tongues**: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

1 Corinthians 14:27 If any man speak in an unknown **tongue**, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one **interpret**.

The SIGN of tongues is EVIDENCE that believers are filled w/ Holy Ghost.
The GIFT of tongues (w/ interpretation) is for EDIFICATION of the church.

Acts 2:5-13 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed and were in doubt, saying one to another, **What meaneth this?** Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

When the Holy Ghost was poured out, some observers were amazed, some doubted, and some mocked – JUST LIKE TODAY!

Their question to the Apostles was "WHAT MEANETH THIS?" (What is "**this**"? Obviously, it is the speaking in tongues that they are observing.) Peter then stands up to preach the very first sermon in church history – and he answers their question "WHAT MEANETH THIS?" with the words, "THIS IS THAT!" (What is "**that**"? Obviously, it is the outpouring of God's Spirit that the prophet Joel said would happen in the last days!) Joel never even mentioned speaking in tongues, but Peter connected the dots!

Since the early church had no "New Testament" yet, Peter appeals to the Old Testament – **his sermon starts with JOEL and ends with JESUS.**

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: 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: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

JOEL WASN'T THE ONLY OLD TESTAMENT PROPHET TO SEE IT!

Jeremiah 31:33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Hebrews 10:16-17 Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;

Isaiah 28:11-12 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

1 Corinthians 14:21 In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.

Pentecost was always in Jewish **history**, but now it was an **experience!**

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 5)

Matthew 16:18-19 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

If Peter was given the KEYS of the kingdom of heaven, we need to obey what he says and do what he does in the book of Acts!

Acts 2:1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

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

Since the early church had no "New Testament" yet, Peter appeals to the Old Testament – his sermon starts with JOEL and ends with JESUS.

Acts 2:16-17 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:

Acts 2:21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

To do this, we must know (1) WHO is Lord, and (2) HOW to call on Him.

Acts 2:22-24 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

The people in Peter's audience had heard about Jesus' miracle ministry. Although men crucified Jesus, it was all in the plan of God!

1 Corinthians 2:7-8 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
"pains" = "birth pains" // the TOMB became a WOMB of resurrection

Corinthians 15:17-20 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

Acts 2:25-31 For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.

Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-11, where David prophesied about the LORD, saying that it was impossible for Him to stay in the grave! Obviously, David couldn't have been talking about himself, because his body was still in a sepulcher in Jerusalem (adjacent to the upper room!). But David had a promise from God that the Messiah would come from his lineage.

2 Samuel 7:12-13 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

Acts 2:32-35 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore 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. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool.

Peter's point here is that Jesus said if He went back to Heaven He would send the Holy Ghost – so since the Holy Ghost had been poured out, Jesus must be alive and in Heaven! Jesus is in the place of authority!

1 Peter 3:22 Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. Once again, David can't be talking about himself, for he never did this! Peter quotes a PROPHECY of David in Psalm 110:1 ...

The LORD (JEHOVAH) said unto my Lord (ADONAI), Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool.

This is the same thing that happened in the Garden of Gethsemane, where the HUMANITY of Jesus submits to the DEITY of Jesus.

Matthew 22:41-45 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?

1 Corinthians 15:26-28 The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it

is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him, and when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

Jesus has conquered the "last (worst) enemy" FIRST, by rising from the dead! So ALL of His enemies have become his footstool!

Philippians 2:5-11 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Acts 2:36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

This is the punchline of Peter's sermon; it is both a declaration and an accusation. God came as your Messiah and YOU CRUCIFIED HIM!

The Jews didn't actually crucify Jesus – the Romans did! But they were just as guilty, because they didn't RECEIVE Him when He came to them. And today, WE are just as guilty if we don't receive Him!

John 1:10-13 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Peter has told them WHO the Lord is, and now he is going to tell them HOW to call on Him, so their sins can be forgiven. Since Peter was given the KEYS of the kingdom of Heaven, we'd better pay attention and do EXACTLY what he said if we want to be saved!

While many modern Christian groups preach the gospel (the "good news"), not many groups preach the Bible way to OBEY the gospel. Just like any other commandment in Scripture, to know it or even to believe in it is not enough – we must OBEY God's commandments.

The New Testament Greek word for "BELIEVE" doesn't mean just to mentally acknowledge something. It is a synonym for "COMMIT" – as in believing something so strongly that it causes you to DO something!

What is the Gospel anyway? The Apostle Paul defined it specifically and let us know that there are THREE PARTS to this "good news" ...

GOSPEL = DEATH, BURIAL, RESURRECTION

That's why in the very first church service in church history, after the very first sermon preached by one of the Apostles, after the very first time someone ever asked "what shall we do?" and at the very first "altar call" in the church age, Peter said to OBEY the Gospel by doing three things:

Acts 2:37-38 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? Then 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.

OBEYING THE GOSPEL = REPENTANCE, BAPTISM, HOLY GHOST

These are the KEYS – this is how you get into the KINGDOM!

Acts 2:39-41 For 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. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

The promise of the Father (v. 33) is for you (Jews) and your children (still Jews) – but also "to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (this is for the GENTILES, but it hasn't happened YET).

Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 2:18-19 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

v. 40 – "many other words" / "untoward generation" – this is not the end of Peter's preaching, because the new birth is just a BIRTH into the Kingdom of God – we still have to GROW UP and obey God's commandments to be saved from our own "untoward generation"!

Acts 2:42-47 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

The early church did more than make converts – they made disciples! These people literally invested everything they had into the church!

The Christians you meet in the Book of Acts were not content to meet once a week for "services as usual." They met daily (Acts 2:46), cared daily (Acts 6:1), won

souls daily (Acts 2:47), searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11), and increased in number daily (Acts 2:47),
once-a-week routine.

When we do what we're supposed to do EVERYDAY, then God does what only He can do EVERYDAY!

Have YOU called on the name of the Lord the way the Bible says?

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 6)

Peter has just preached the first sermon in church history, and multitudes are responding. Since the early church had no "New Testament" yet, he has appealed to the Old Testament – his sermon starts with JOEL and ends with JESUS. And he has preached (1) WHO the Lord is, and (2) HOW we are to call on Him for salvation.

Acts 2:21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

v. 40 – "many other words" / "untoward generation" – this is not the end of Peter's preaching, because the new birth is just a BIRTH into the Kingdom of God – we still have to GROW UP and obey God's commandments to be saved from our own "untoward generation"!

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When we do what we're supposed to do EVERYDAY, then God does what only He can do EVERYDAY!

Acts 3:1-3 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And 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; Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

This is a JEWISH prayer meeting, not an Apostolic prayer meeting!

Psalms 55:17 Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.

These events are a fulfillment of Acts 2:47 – EVERYDAY living for God!

In Acts 3 & 4, immediately after the Day of Pentecost, the emphasis is on the NAME of Jesus Christ. This is NOT a coincidence! A name is much more than just identification; it carries with it AUTHORITY and POWER. The first concern of the first Christians was to give glory to His NAME!

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, 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: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Peter and John are often found together in the Gospels. They were partners in the fishing business (Luke 5:10); they prepared the last Passover for Jesus (Luke 22:8); they ran to the tomb on the first Easter Sunday morning (John 20:3-4); and they would later minister to the Samaritans who believed on Jesus Christ (Acts 8:14). Now that they were filled with the Holy Spirit, the Apostles were no longer competing for greatness, but were at last working faithfully together to build the church.

They are on their way TO prayer, not on their way FROM prayer. But prayer meeting is not the only time that Christians pray! The lame man is expecting a good deed, but instead receives a great miracle.

Acts 3:4-11 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, 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; 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 unto him. And 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.

"Silver and gold have I none" = "and had all things common" (Acts 2:44)

John 10:23 – Jesus walked past this man but didn't heal him!

John 9:3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

The lame man went with them into the Temple (v. 8) – it is ALWAYS the purpose of miracles (and alms!) to bring people into church fellowship. We are only interested in CROWDS so we can PREACH the gospel!

Peter turns the temple into a courtroom and lays out all the evidence for everybody to see. How could two ordinary fishermen perform such a great miracle? Through the NAME of Jesus Christ!

Aots 3:12-16 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? The 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. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And 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.

"LOOK ON US" (v. 3) / "WHY LOOK YE ON US?" (v. 12) ... They are saying, "We will minister TO you, but we don't want the attention FROM you!" (Sometimes the modern church gets this backwards!)

v. 12 – it's not our own POWER, and it's not our own HOLINESS!

"WE didn't do this – HE did this!" / "HIS NAME through faith in His name"

Old Hebrew saying: "Himself is His Name and His Name is Himself."

Aots 3:17-18 And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

Numbers 15:28 And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the LORD, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him.

Luke 24:27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

**The disciples had a revelation of the ONENESS OF GOD!
HE IS (Aaron Jeffrey)**

In Genesis, He's the breath of life. In Exodus, the passover lamb.
In Leviticus, He's our high priest.
Numbers, fire by night. Deuteronomy, He's Moses voice.
In Joshua, He is salvation's choice.

Judges, lawgiver. In Ruth, the kinsmen redeemer.
First and Second Samuel, our trusted prophet.
In Kings and Chronicles, He's sovereign. Ezra, a true and faithful scribe.
In Nehemiah, He's the rebuilder of broken walls and lives.

In Esther, He is Mordecai's courage. In Job, the timeless redeemer.
In Psalms, He is our morning song.
In Proverbs, wisdom's cry. Ecclesiastes, the time and season.
In the Song of Solomon, He is the lover's dream.

In Isaiah, He's the prince of peace. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet.
In Lamentations, the cry for Israel.
Ezekiel, He's the call from sin. In Daniel, the stranger in the fire.
In Hosea, He is forever faithful.

In Joel, He is the Spirit's power. In Amos, the arms that carry us.
In Obadiah, He's the Lord our Savior.
In Jonah, He's the great missionary. In Micah, the promise of peace.
In Nahum, He is our strength and our shield.

In Habakkuk and Zephaniah, He's the leading for revival.
In Haggai, He restores the lost heritage.
In Zechariah, our fountain. In Malachi, He is
The Son of Righteousness rising with healing in His wings.

Aots 3:19-21 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; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

REPENTANCE is a "turning from" / CONVERSION is a "turning to"

1 Thessalonians 1:9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

Times of Refreshing: REVIVAL (first coming of Christ)

Times of Restitution: RESTORATION (second coming of Christ)

Isaiah 28:10-12 For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

Daniel 7:27 And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

Acts 3:22-24 For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

Peter is quoting Deuteronomy 18:15-22 (about Moses), and pointing to Jesus Christ as a prophet "like unto Moses." ALL the prophets pointed to Him! Later on, Peter will write these words about the prophets ...

1 Peter 1:10-12 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

Acts 3:25-26 Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. 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.

Peter says to the Jews: "If anyone should get this, it should be YOU!"

John 1:11-12 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

The best defense of Christianity is a CHANGED LIFE (the lame man)!
Do we say "I am increased with goods" or "Silver and gold have I none"?

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 7)

In Acts 3, Peter and John have created quite a stir in Jerusalem by healing a lame man on their way to prayer at the Temple. This happened on the way TO prayer meeting, not on the way FROM prayer meeting, because the early Christians prayed without ceasing!

Acts 3:6 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.

As a crowd gathers to see the former lame man "walking and leaping and praising God," Peter turns the temple into a courtroom and lays out all the evidence for everybody to see. How could two ordinary fishermen perform such a great miracle? Through the NAME of Jesus Christ!

Acts 3:16 And 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.

Hearing about the commotion, the ruling council of the Jews quickly has the disciples arrested and held overnight to appear at a hearing ...

Acts 4:1-4 And as they spake unto 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. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

The Sadducees dominated the ruling council of the Jewish religion, which was called the Sanhedrin. Unlike the Pharisees, they did NOT believe in the resurrection, so Peter's preaching is highly offensive! But even the disciples' arrest couldn't change the impact of this miracle – 2000 MORE people believed and were added to the church!

The early church had none of the "advantages" that we depend on today. Most of their ministers had jail records and would probably have a hard time today JOINING some of our churches, let alone LEADING them. But the early church knew how to PRAY so that God's hand would work!

In Acts 3 & 4, immediately after the Day of Pentecost, the emphasis is on the NAME of Jesus Christ. This is NOT a coincidence! A name is much more than just identification; it carries with it AUTHORITY and POWER. The first concern of the first Christians was to give glory to His NAME!

Acts 4:5-7 And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, And 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. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?

The Sanhedrin consisted of at least 70 members, with the High Priest as the leader. They had power under Rome to condemn a man, but not put him to death. Annas and Caiaphas had both shared in the trial of Jesus, and had Him condemned by false witnesses in illegal proceedings held in the dead of night. They thought they had put an end to Jesus!

The Sanhedrin was compromised in so many ways. It was filled with the sons and relatives of Annas. It was controlled by Rome, who kept changing High Priests even before they died. It had condemned Jesus out of envy, with the voices of the priest being loudest at His trial before Pilate, to sway the crowd. The Sadducees were the modernists of their day, and did not believe in angels, the spirit realm, or the resurrection. No wonder the ministry of Jesus shook their world – there had been "all of the above" ever since He arrived on earth!

Furthermore, Caiaphas had disqualified himself spiritually at the trial of Jesus from ever having any religious authority to lead the Sanhedrin:

Leviticus 21:10 And he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes;

Mark 14:61-64 But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.

AT THIS MOMENT THE HIGH PRIESTHOOD PASSED TO JESUS!

Hebrews 4:14-16 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

BY WHAT POWER, OR BY WHAT NAME, HAVE YE DONE THIS?!

A man who had been lame for 38 years has just been miraculously healed; in fact, he is outside right now in the Temple courtyard "walking, and leaping, and praising God" – and they want to punish the disciples who had a part in him receiving his miracle. That's spiritual blindness!

Mark 13:9, 11 But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them ... But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.

Matthew 10:22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

The followers of Jesus in the first century were persecuted by the religious establishment because of their insistence on using His NAME. Does that

Aots 4:8-12 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; 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.

WHOM YE CRUCIFIED ... WHOM GOD RAISED ... EVEN BY HIM!

Jesus is alive and is here backing up the use of His Name on the earth!

Psalm 118:21-24 I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

"Historia Scholastica" says that verses 22-23 describe a literal stone that was discarded by the builders of the Temple, until it was finally found to be perfectly fit for the most honorable place, coupling the sides of the walls together; this astonished the builders and Ezra wrote it in a Psalm!

JESUS IS THE CHIEF CORNER STONE – HE IS OUR SALVATION!

A CORNER IS WHERE TWO THINGS MEET! Jews & Gentiles, Bond & Free, Law & Grace, Heaven & Earth, Mercy & Truth, Righteousness & Peace (*Psalm 85:10 - Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*)

IN HEBREW, "HEAD" (OF THE CORNER) IS "ROSH" WHICH MEANS: head, chief, leader, prince, captain, point, top, first rank, best, highest, supreme, summit, sum, beginning, commencement, foremost, principal, source, zenith, total, most excellent, head cornerstone!

MOFFAT TRANSLATION OF PSALMS 118:22 - "The stone the builders cast aside is now the building's strength and pride."

The image of GOD as our Rock is all through the Old Testament, and it continues on without missing a beat with JESUS in the New Testament!

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.

Matthew 21:42 Jesus saith unto them, 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 marvellous in our eyes?

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

Ephesians 2:20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

1 Peter 2:6-10 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

Matthew 16:16-18 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Aots 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

The Sanhedrin was commanding them not to teach or preach at all in the Name of Jesus, because **THE NAME MEANS THE PERSON!** The Name of the Lord Jesus Christ was not merely a theory, or a doctrine, or a theological argument in the early church. The Name was a PERSON who had all POWER because He had risen from the dead!

That's why we worship the NAME, and sing about the NAME, and pray for healing in the NAME, and preach in the NAME, and baptize in the NAME, and why the devil fears the NAME!

Colossians 3:17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

Aots 4:13-14 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. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

The Sanhedrin is in a real dilemma! They can't argue with the RESULTS of the message the disciples are preaching! The miracle didn't happen because of Peter and John, but because they had BEEN WITH JESUS!

Aots 4:15-18 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, Saying, 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. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

Once again, the concern of the Sanhedrin is to SILENCE THE NAME. They weren't seeking for truth, but simply for a way to silence the truth. That is the agenda of the devil and all of Hell. What do YOU do when the devil threatens you and tries to keep YOU silent about the NAME?

Acts 4:19-22 But 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. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. 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. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

Because they had no real case to offer, the council could only threaten the men and let them go. After all, when you have a living miracle before you, as well as an approving public around you, you must be careful!

Acts 4:23-28 And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. 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: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For 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, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

The church met to pray in order to defeat the enemy, and began to intercede with the words of Scripture in Psalm 2. Too often today, believers gather for prayer as though attending a concert or a party. There is little sense of urgency and danger because most of us are comfortable in our Christian walk. If more of God's people were witnessing for Christ in daily life, there would be more urgency, more blessing, and more power when the church meets for prayer!

Acts 4:29-31 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And 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 early church did not pray for their circumstances to be changed – they asked God to empower and embolden them to make the best use of their circumstances in order to bring glory to His Name!

The same people who were filled with the Holy Ghost in Acts 2 were filled again in Acts 4 – because the church PRAYED without ceasing!

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 8)

In Acts 3 & 4, immediately after the Day of Pentecost, the emphasis is on the NAME of Jesus Christ. This is NOT a coincidence! A name is much more than just identification; it carries with it AUTHORITY and POWER. The first concern of the first Christians was to give glory to His NAME!

Acts 3:6 In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

Acts 3:16 And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know

Acts 4:7 By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?

Acts 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Acts 4:18 and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

Acts 4:30 and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

The early church had REVIVAL because of this emphasis upon the NAME of Jesus, and because they had UNITY among themselves ...

Acts 4:32-37 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. 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, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

This is not manmade "communism," neither is it the many who would work supporting the few who wouldn't work, as we sometimes see today. This is a FAMILY, a BODY, a CHURCH, who are so sold out to the Great Commission that they put the church's message and ministry FIRST in every part of their lives, including their possessions. These are FREEWILL OFFERINGS, like were given for the building of the Tabernacle and Temple, and BARNABAS leads the way. The Lord knew that in AD 70 the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Romans and the people scattered. EVERYONE would lose EVERYTHING ... EXCEPT those who gave it to the church NOW!

THE DEVIL HATES (AND FEARS) UNITY! He has tried persecution of the church from without and that hasn't stopped them, so now he tries corruption from within. The enemy within the church is ALWAYS more deadly than the enemy without!

Acts 5:1-11 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, 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. But 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? Whiles 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. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then 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. Then 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. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

Ananias means "gracious" – but he presumed on the grace of God.
Sapphira means "beautiful" – but her heart was ugly with secret sin.

It should be noted that the Lord judges sin severely at the beginning of each new covenant He makes with His people, as a warning to them:

- Just after the tabernacle was finished, God killed Nadab and Abihu for trying to offer "strange fire" before the Lord (Leviticus 10)
- Just after Israel was banished to the wilderness for 40 years, God had a man killed for working on the Sabbath day (Numbers 15)
- Just after Israel entered the Promised Land, God had Achan killed for taking forbidden spoils from the city of Jericho (Joshua 7)

GOD IS SERIOUS ABOUT HIS COVENANTS AND COMMANDMENTS!

Ananias and Sapphira's sin was not having land or possessions, or refusing to give, or not giving the entire amount. Their sin was LYING TO THE HOLY GHOST, giving a false outward impression to the church in hopes that the inward reality wouldn't be detected. This is HYPOCRISY. It was pride that transformed Lucifer into Satan (Isaiah 14), and it was pride ("Ye shall be as God!") that caused Adam & Eve to sin (Genesis 3). **Pride opens the door to every other sin, for once we are more concerned with our reputation than our character, there is no end to the things we will do to make ourselves "look good" before others.**

God is jealous over His church, for it was purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28). The church is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15), while Satan is "a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). The devil will do anything he can to infiltrate the truth with a lie, in order to hinder and harass God's precious possession. Had Peter not received a Word of Knowledge, Ananias & Sapphira might have become influential people in the church, and the devil could have worked through them on the inside!

Their sin was the sin of presumption that Jesus faced in the wilderness:

Matthew 4:6-7 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their

hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

1 Corinthians 11:31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

Hebrews 10:28-31 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Their sin was not in robbing God of MONEY, but in lying to the Holy Spirit and thus robbing God of GLORY.

Acts 5:9 How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?

Who is it that you have "agreed together" with to do something that both of you know is against the Word of God? What a dangerous place to live!

The fall into sin does not happen overnight. Satan knows that the wages of sin is death, but his greatest desire is that we NOT receive the immediate consequences of our sin! Why? Because he knows the Bible!

Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

If you find yourself in a habitual pattern of sin, but you are not experiencing any consequences, fall on your knees immediately and REPENT! Why? Because Satan is setting you up for a fall!

At this point, we move from "great power" and "great grace" (Acts 4:33) to "great fear" (Acts 5:11), which falls on the church and the city. THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD ALWAYS BRINGS THE TRUE FEAR OF GOD.

Hebrews 12:28-29 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.

Acts 5:12-16 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. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) Insomuch 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. There 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.

v. 13 – "And of the rest durst no man join himself to them (APOSTLES); but the people magnified them."

v. 14 – "And believers were the more added to the Lord."

Verse 13 is not saying that the community was afraid to join the church, since verse 14 tells us exactly the opposite. It states that, as the church looked on their leadership with less familiarity and more reverence, and "magnified" the office God had given them, revival broke out again!

Billy Cole: "I can only minister to you to the degree that you respect me."

Hebrews 5:1-4 For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

If you want to loose a supernatural move of God in the church, then hold in high esteem the ministries that God has set in the church!

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 9)

Acts 4:32-33 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

The First Century Church was so sold out to the Great Commission that they put the church's message and ministry FIRST in every part of their lives, including their possessions.

THE DEVIL HATES (AND FEARS) UNITY! He has tried persecution of the church from without and that hasn't stopped them, so now he tries corruption from within, through Ananias and Sapphira. The enemy within the church is ALWAYS more deadly than the enemy without!

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Acts 5:17-25 Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. And 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. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, Saying, 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. Now 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. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

Just imagine the astonishment of the members of the Sanhedrin when they heard this report! Here they were trying to stop the miracles, but their actions against the Apostles only multiplied the miracles!

Acts 5:26-33 Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, 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. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

v. 28 – High Priest remembers what he orchestrated just weeks ago ...

REVIVAL ... NAME exalted, DOCTRINE spread, BLOOD proclaimed

v. 31 – How does GOD give repentance? Don't WE do that? Remember that you can only repent if God allows you to feel your need of it!

The council was educated, ordained, and approved, and yet they had no ministry of power. The Apostles were ordinary men, yet God's power was at work in their lives. The council was trying desperately to protect themselves and their dead traditions, while the Apostles were risking their lives to share the living Word of God.

v. 29 – If there's tension between obeying God and men, OBEY GOD!

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; And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For 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. After 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. And 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: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.** Gamaliel, a Pharisee, is held in such high respect that the Sadducee-dominated Sanhedrin listens to his advice. His perspective is that men and their movements come and go, so if the situation is simply left alone it will pass. He doesn't realize that this movement is not of men, but of God! And he also doesn't realize that God is using him and his words to protect the church!

2 Corinthians 13:8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

Acts 5:40-42 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. 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.

Matthew 5:10-12 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. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

v. 42 – DAILY!

Acts 6:1-7 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. 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. 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. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. 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: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. 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.

Grecians = Greek speaking Jews from other nations (new "strangers"!)

Spiritually immature people in the church have many more needs (and are much more likely to feel "neglected") than established saints.

v. 2 – "it is not reason" = "it is not fitting" (it is not a good "fit" for us)

SPIRITUAL LEADERS in the church must make the ministry of the WORD and PRAYER a priority! It is not that they are "too good" to serve tables, it's that serving tables would be a distraction to their priority!

This is not to suggest that serving tables is a menial task, because every ministry in the church is important. In fact, one of the men appointed here (Stephen) becomes the catalyst for the next phase of revival in the book of Acts! This is simply a matter of priorities; the Apostles were doing jobs that others could do just as well. Dwight Moody taught that it was better to put ten men to work than to try to do the work of ten men!

Church problems give us an opportunity to exercise our FAITH, not only faith in the Lord, but also faith in our leaders and in each other.

The early church was not afraid to adjust their STRUCTURE in order to make room for MINISTRY. It is tragic when churches actually destroy ministry and hinder growth because they refuse to modify their structure!

The Apostles were not afraid to share their authority and ministry with others because they realized that authority and ministry come from GOD.

v. 3 – The qualifications for any MINISTRY POSITION within the church: (1) honest, (2) wise, (3) full of the Holy Ghost!

v. 4 – **Your pastor's job description: "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."** IF YOU TRULY DESIRE TO HAVE AN APOSTOLIC CHURCH, YOU NEED TO DO ANYTHING YOU CAN POSSIBLY DO TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN!

Look at the list of deacons ("servants") appointed: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. THESE ARE ALL GREEK NAMES! And this teaches us two lessons:

1. The Hebrew part of the church did not hold on to any idea of "seniority" or "superiority," but let the most qualified people serve.

2. If you can identify a problem in the church, or have a burden for something to be done, God wants to use you to fix it!

And what is the result of the Apostles sharing ministry?

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
th.

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 10)

Acts 6:3-7 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. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. 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: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. 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.

Chapter 6 is one of the pivotal moments in the book of Acts, when the church experiences "growth pains." It is here that the leaders appoint the first seven "deacons" to shoulder some of the responsibility of ministry – because the church cannot grow effectively if we expect those who lead us and preach to us to also handle many other ministry responsibilities. These seven men are not specially gifted, nor are they politically empowered – in fact, the word "diakonos" simply means "a servant."

This passage is also pivotal because it gives us the background for what happens next in Acts – two of these laymen (Stephen & Philip) are about to be mightily used by God to preach the gospel, to work miracles, and to propel the church forward. The book of Acts pattern shows us that EVERY member of the church is to be anointed for ministry!

Acts 6:8-15 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Then 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. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

The emphasis in Stephen's life is on FULLNESS: he was full of the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom, full of faith, and full of power. In Scripture, to be "full of" means "to be controlled by." Stephen was a God-controlled man who had a huge impact on his church – and he was NOT one of the leaders! Jews who had returned from many nations resided in Jerusalem in their own "quarters," and some of these ethnic groups had their own synagogues. Remember that going to the synagogue didn't mean going to church – the synagogues were OPPOSED to the church! They didn't want to hear the message of a new covenant that would take the place of their own religion, which had now become little more than a ritual. Because of Stephen's powerful testimony, some of his own countrymen viciously opposed him, and set up false witnesses against him – but God used even these circumstances to build His Church!

John 15:18-21 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

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.

Chapter seven contains Stephen's response to the Jewish council; it is the longest address in the book of Acts. In it he reviews some of the highlights of Israel's history to show them that their forefathers at first rejected some of the very men they now claim to revere!

- Each of the people mentioned is a TYPE OF CHRIST in some way.
- Most were REJECTED by Israel the first time they appeared to them.
- Most were then EXALTED by God and eventually accepted by Israel.
- Each one reveals Israel's failure to listen to one SENT FROM GOD.
- The point is the significance of "THE SECOND TIME."

ABRAHAM

Acts 7:1-8 Then said the high priest, Are these things so? And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

The **FIRST TIME**, Abram's father Terah set out for Canaan, but only got as far as Haran and decided to live there until he died (Genesis 11:31).

The **SECOND TIME**, God spoke His great covenant to Abram and he set out for a land that he had never seen (Genesis 12:1-3).

JOSEPH

Acts 7:9-16 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, And were carried over into Sychem, and laid

The **FIRST TIME**, Joseph was rejected by his brethren, betrayed for pieces of silver, and falsely accused by Potiphar's wife.

The **SECOND TIME**, Joseph is exalted to the throne of Egypt, given a name (Zaphnathpaaneah / Jerome said it means "Savior of the World") to which every knee bows, and accepted by his brethren.

MOSES

Acts 7:17-36 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:

And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday? Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons. And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt. This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

The **FIRST TIME**, Moses narrowly escaped being slain with all the other children at the time of his birth, then his family was protected in Egypt until he grew. However, when he tried to help his fellow Israelites, he was rejected ("Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?").

The **SECOND TIME**, Moses appears to his brethren with the name he received at the burning bush ("I Am That I Am"), and he brings them out of Egypt with miracles, signs and wonders.

Now Stephen begins to show how everything under the Old Covenant – including their beloved Tabernacle and Temple – actually pointed to the fact that God was eventually going to do something GREATER!

Luke 24:27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

Acts 7:37-50 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the live, oracles to give unto us: To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon. Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?

Israel didn't listen to Moses – even after he delivered them, they still longed for Egypt in their hearts, and wanted to go back.

Israel didn't listen to Aaron – they made a golden calf, and gave that dead idol the credit for the blessings God had given.

Israel didn't listen to the prophets – they began to worship and serve the false gods of the heathen nations all around them.

And Israel missed the point that the Tabernacle, the Temple, the priesthood, the feast days, the law, and all the sacrifices, were actually just "rehearsals" pointing ahead to something much greater – because God could never be contained in a building!

Acts 7:51-53 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

Stephen tells the council that, although they may be circumcised in BODY, they are uncircumcised in HEART. Although they were GIVEN the covenant, they are living OUTSIDE the covenant. Although they pride themselves on being JEWS, spiritually they are like GENTILES.

The **FIRST TIME**, Israel resisted, persecuted and killed all of the prophets who pointed the way to the coming of the "Just One" – the same way they resisted, persecuted and killed JESUS who fulfilled all their prophecies. **JESUS WAS REJECTED THE "FIRST TIME"!**

But the **SECOND TIME**, Jesus will not be coming to earth as a baby – He will be returning as King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Acts 7:13 And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.

Zepharian 13:6 And one shall say unto him, what are these wounds in thine hands? When he shall answer, My friends,

Revelation 1:7-8 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

Hebrews 9:28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

How ironic that the people who should have been FIRST to accept Jesus will actually be the LAST to accept Him! The Jews had all of God's blessings to testify to them, and they missed it. **What about YOU?**

Acts 7:53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

1 Peter 1:10-12 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 11)

The emphasis in Stephen's life is on FULLNESS: he was full of the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom, full of faith, and full of power. In Scripture, to be "full of" means "to be controlled by." Stephen was a God-controlled man who had a huge impact on his church – and he was NOT one of the leaders!

Acts 7:51-53 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

At this point, their hatred for the name of Jesus explodes at Stephen:

Acts 7:54-56 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

The RIGHT HAND is a Hebrew idiom meaning "the place of power." This isn't saying that Jesus is "beside" God; this is saying that Jesus IS God!

Exodus 15:6 Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Hebrews 10:11-12 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;

JESUS STOOD UP FOR STEPHEN!

Acts 7:57-60 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Luke 23:34a Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

Luke 23:46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

"WHOSE NAME WAS SAUL" // Paul never forgot this event ...

Acts 22:20 And 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.

"HE FELL ASLEEP" // When Christians die, they "fall asleep." Jesus didn't call death, "death" – so the early church didn't either!

John 11:11 These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

Matthew 9:24 He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

Acts 8:1-4 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. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

Acts 22:4 And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

Jesus had made His prophetic statement in Acts 1:8, but the disciples never dreamed that it would be accomplished through circumstances that put them in uncomfortable places!

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.

Romans 8:28 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.

One of the Christians who was "scattered" abroad was Phillip, who like Stephen had been one of the seven deacons appointed in Acts 6. He ended up among the hated Samaritans and began preaching.

Acts 8:5-8 Then Philip 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, crying with loud voice, 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.

Philip is called an "evangelist" in Acts, not because he ministered to saints, but because he won sinners to the Lord! AND REMEMBER, PHILIP IS NOT EVEN ONE OF THE LEADERS! Give us evangelists!

Acts 21:8 And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.

Acts 8:9-13 But 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: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

"BUT WHEN THEY BELIEVED ... THEY WERE BAPTIZED ..."

Mark 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Acts 8:14-17 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

Note that the first century church DIDN'T believe that anyone had "received the Holy Spirit" just because they had believed – these Samaritans had all believed and been baptized, but the Bible is clear that they have not received the Holy Ghost.

Note that the first century church DID believe that the baptism of the Holy Ghost was absolutely essential to salvation – that's why the Apostles made the trip from Jerusalem (when they should have been in hiding!) to lay hands on them that they might receive.

Acts 8:18-25 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

This is where it turns with Simon, and he goes back to his old "sorcerer ways," wanting to have power over the people once again. Note that he didn't ask for power to do any of the miracles or signs he had seen – because he realized that being filled with the Holy Ghost was a greater power! What did he observe that made him want this power so much? Speaking in tongues! This is the New Testament pattern.

Acts 10:45-46a 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.

Simon the Sorcerer asked other people to pray for him, but we don't know if he ever prayed, or received the baptism of the Holy Ghost!

It is at this point Philip is directed by the Lord to leave the crowd at his "revival meetings" and go out into the desert to meet with one person. We are often willing to do the "big things" for God, but reluctant to do the "small things" – but this is not the spirit of the New Testament church. Every soul is important! AND REMEMBER, PHILIP IS NOT EVEN ONE OF THE LEADERS! "And these signs shall follow them that believe!"

Acts 8:26-29 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. And 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, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

You never know who you are witnessing to, or what God will eventually accomplish through the ONE person your testimony impacts:

- In Acts 8 it was one anonymous Ethiopian Treasurer
- In Acts 9 it was one Pharisee named Saul
- In Acts 9 it was one coat-maker named Dorcas
- In Acts 10 it was one Roman Centurion named Cornelius
- In Acts 14 it was one anonymous crippled man
- In Acts 16 it was one seller of cloth named Lydia
- In Acts 16 it was one anonymous Philippian jailer
- In Acts 18 it was one ruler of the synagogue named Crispus
- In Acts 18 it was one eloquent preacher named Apollos

Acts 8:30-35 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The 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: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself,

or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him.
Isaiah 53:7-8 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

BEGIN WHERE THEY ARE – AND PREACH JESUS! That's all Philip did, that's all the church in Acts did, and that's all you need to do!

Acts 8:36 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?
Isaiah 53 doesn't say anything about being baptized, or even about water (!), but please note that when they preached JESUS in the New Testament, that involved being BAPTIZED in Jesus' name!

Acts 8:37-40 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. 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. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

"THEY WENT DOWN BOTH INTO THE WATER" = IMMERSION!

The Ethiopian eunuch would always have been treated as a second-class citizen in the Jewish religion (Deuteronomy 23:1 says he was not allowed to enter into the congregation of the Lord) – and yet he was so hungry for God that he travelled many miles to the temple in Jerusalem. Thank God he found the New Testament church!

Galatians 3:27-29 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Philip experiences "supernatural transport," like the prophet Elijah. Have you ever noticed that MIRACLES, even outstanding ones, are not a "big deal" in the book of Acts? The MESSAGE they preach is the "big deal!" How often do we get that backwards in the 21st century?

Philip was the right man in the right place at the right time saying the right thing to the right person. AND REMEMBER, PHILIP IS NOT EVEN ONE OF THE LEADERS! You can be powerfully used by God!

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 12)

One of the Christians scattered by persecution was Philip, who like Stephen had been one of the seven deacons appointed in Acts 6.

Acts 8:5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

Philip is called an "evangelist," not because he ministered to saints, but because he won sinners to God! And he is not even one of the leaders!

Acts 21:8 And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.

At the height of his "revival meetings," Philip is directed by the Lord to leave the crowd and go out into the desert to meet with ONE person.

Acts 8:27-28 And 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, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

Acts 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

BEGIN WHERE THEY ARE – AND PREACH JESUS! That's all Philip did, that's all the church in Acts did, and that's all you need to do!

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Acts 9:1-2 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, 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.

Saul is an important man, highly respected in the Jewish religion, and the High Priest has invested him with authority to persecute the church. The various details of his testimony can be found in Acts 9, 22 and 26 ...

Acts 22:3-4 I 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. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

Acts 26:9-11 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, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.
Philippians 3:4-7 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

Some thirty years later, Paul would write that Christ had "apprehended him" – he was out to arrest others when the Lord arrested him!

Philippians 3:12-14 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul is saying, "Just as much as I pursued the church to persecute it, God was pursuing me to save me ... and I'm so grateful that I am now pursuing Christ with everything in me! I'm running after God's purpose!"

Acts 9:3-9 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And 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. 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. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. 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. And he was three days without sight, ar neither did eat nor drink.

"WHO ART THOU, LORD?" / "I AM JESUS!"

"It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Jesus is saying, "I have been pricking your heart with the goad of conviction, and if you don't repent it's going to be hard for you!" No doubt Saul was instantly convicted by the memories of all the Christians he had killed.

What wilt thou have me to DO? / It shall be told thee what thou must DO.

Saul isn't SAVED yet. This is the same question they asked in Acts 2:37.

Acts 9:10-16 And 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. And 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, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, 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 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: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Please note that the Lord told Saul, "It shall be told thee what thou must do," and yet the Lord doesn't tell Ananias what to tell Saul to do! Why? This "omission" only proves that, as a New Testament believer, Ananias already knew exactly what a sinner needed to do to be saved! Peter had preached it in Acts 2:38, and it was what the church continued to preach.

Acts 9:17-18 And 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. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

Saul has already repented, and now Ananias tells him to be baptized and that he will be filled with the Holy Ghost. Acts 9:18 simply states that he "arose, and was baptized." But later in Acts 22:16, Paul recounts the actual words that Ananias actually spoke to him:

Acts 22:16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

"What are you waiting for? Get up and get baptized, and have your sins washed away by having the name of the Lord called over you!"

Colossians 2:9-15 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Acts 9:19-25 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But 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? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

"And after that many days were fulfilled" ... As Paul records in his later writings, he spent many days alone in Arabia just seeking the Lord. Then he returned to Damascus to preach until persecution forced him from the city. He continued to preach in that region, and it was a full three years before he finally went to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:11-24). He also later records some of the persecutions he faced during his early ministry:

2 Corinthians 11:24-27 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

Paul was "unknown by face" (Galatians 1:22) to the church in Jerusalem. It was doubtful they would have accepted him at all, were it not for the recommendation of Barnabas.

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. 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. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. Then 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.

Never underestimate the impact of one obscure saint, like Ananias or Barnabas. And never underestimate the impact of one converted sinner, like Saul of Tarsus who became the Apostle Paul!

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 13)

The book of Acts isn't just about "superstar preachers" – in fact, it's largely about "ordinary" Christians who witness about Jesus Christ everywhere they go! Out of the seven deacons appointed in Acts 6, we read about the impact of Steven in Acts 7 and of Philip in Acts 8.

Acts 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

BEGIN WHERE THEY ARE – AND PREACH JESUS! That's all Philip did, that's all the church in Acts did, and that's all you need to do!

In Acts 9, we read about the dramatic conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who later becomes widely known as Paul the Apostle. But Paul wouldn't have experienced salvation if it hadn't been for Ananias, and wouldn't have been accepted by the New Testament church if it hadn't been for Barnabas. Never underestimate the impact of one "obscure" saint of God!

Acts 9:17 And 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.

Acts 9:27 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.

Paul essentially becomes the "main character" for the remainder of the book of Acts. But first, we revisit the ongoing ministry of Peter for a brief moment. Although he is not as "prominent" as Paul, please notice that it is Peter's ministry that is associated with all of the major "transitions" in Acts (using the "keys" to reach Jews in Acts 2, Samaritans in Acts 8, Gentiles in Acts 10).

Acts 9:32-35 And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwell at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. And all that dwell at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.

The Apostle Peter had been engaged in an itinerant ministry that took him to Lydda, a largely Gentile city about 25 miles from Jerusalem. The area had been evangelized by disciples who had been scattered by persecution, and Peter now joined them (Acts 8:25 – "in many villages"). No doubt Philip the evangelist had also ministered throughout the area (Acts 8:40 – "in all the cities"). And God worked with them!

Acts 9:36-43 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

Joppa (modern Jaffa) was located on seacoast, ten miles beyond Lydda. It was from here that the Prophet Jonah embarked when he tried to flee from God (Jonah 1:1-3). **Jonah went to Joppa to avoid going to the Gentiles, but Peter in Joppa received his call to go to the Gentiles!** Because Jonah disobeyed God, the Lord sent a storm that caused the Gentile sailors to fear. Because Peter obeyed the Lord, God sent the "wind of the Spirit" that caused the Gentiles to rejoice. What a contrast!

Peter was in Joppa on Divine assignment for several reasons. When Dorcas died, the believers in the city sent for him immediately. There is no record that any of the Apostles had raised the dead up to this point, but they had faith in the words of Jesus to His disciples:

John 14:12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

It was always God's will to have the Gentiles in His church, but the Jewish believers who were already saved didn't have the right mindset! Perhaps they were so busy trying to keep the church "clean" that they didn't think to reach out to those who were different. But God didn't mind "messing up" their comfortable church to see souls saved!

Proverbs 14:4 Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox.

It is ten years after the Day of Pentecost, and they are just beginning to move out of their comfort zone to the Samaritans. And if it hadn't been for direct Divine intervention, it probably would have taken another ten years to even think about reaching out to the pagan Gentiles!

Genesis 22:18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Isaiah 49:6 And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

Isaiah 60:1-3 Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

Malaiah 1:11 For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.

HOW IN THE WORLD DID THE CHURCH MISS THESE PROMISES?

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

But in the meantime, CORNELIUS WAS PRAYING ...

While Jesus was speaking forth the promise of the Holy Ghost ...
While the disciples were watching the Lord ascend up into Heaven ...
While the eleven were choosing Matthias to take the place of Judas ...
While the believers were waiting together in the Upper Room ...
While the Holy Ghost was falling and they were speaking with tongues ...
While Peter was preaching his sermon on the Day of Pentecost ...
While 3000 were added to the church and baptized in Jesus' name ...
While the lame man was leaping and dancing his way into the Temple ...
While Peter and John were standing their ground before the council ...
While Ananias and Sapphira were lying to the Holy Ghost ...
While the Apostles were being persecuted, arrested, jailed and beaten ...
While the place where the church had gathered for prayer was shaken ...
While seven deacons were appointed and began to serve the church ...
While Stephen was preaching his sermon and being stoned for it ...
While Simon the Sorcerer was trying to purchase the power of God ...
While Philip the Evangelist was baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch ...
While Saul was being apprehended by Jesus on the Damascus road ...
While Peter was praying and Dorcas was being raised from the dead ...

... CORNELIUS WAS PRAYING!

Acts 10:3-8 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. And 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. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

In the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, an angel appeared to the preacher and sent him to the inquirer. In the case of Cornelius, the angel appears to the inquirer, and tells him to send for the preacher. In both cases, the work of the angel was merely to bring the two men together, face-to-face ... because an angel can't preach the gospel, only human beings can!

1 Peter 1:12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

CORNELIUS IS VERY RELIGIOUS, BUT HE ISN'T SAVED YET! He is "ready" to be saved, but needs a preacher to tell him what to do. That's why God is working on both ends of the situation to bring them together!

Acts 10:9-18 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: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And 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 fourfooted 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 any thing 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. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

God's timing is always PERFECT – the 3 men from Caesarea arrived at the door just as Peter was pondering the meaning of the vision!
It's not enough just for God to prepare SINNERS ... if the PREACHERS aren't prepared for what God wants to do we will miss the opportunity! **AND WE ARE ALL "PREACHERS" OF THE GOSPEL!**

2 Corinthians 3:2-6 Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

So why did the angel instruct Cornelius to send for Peter, who was thirty miles away in Joppa, when Philip the Evangelist was already right there in Caesarea? Because it was Peter, not Philip, who had been given the KEYS to the Kingdom! It was necessary for every people group specified in Acts 1:8 to be brought into the Kingdom in exactly the same way!

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.

Matthew 16:18-19 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Acts 10:19-24 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

Acts 10:20 ... "doubting nothing" = "making no distinctions"

Acts 10:25-33 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou hast come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

Acts 10:29 ... "without gainsaying" = "without any questioning"

Acts 10:34-43 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Acts 10:43 ... Peter is making his way through the gospel like he did in Acts 2, preaching how Jesus DIED so that his hearers will REPENT ... then he just begins to preach BAPTISM ("through his name" ... "remission of sins") when the Holy Ghost interrupts the sermon!

(This event is our PRECEDENT for believers receiving the Holy Ghost before they are baptized – but they still MUST be baptized!)

Acts 10:44-48 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. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

There is no such thing in your Bible as a Christian who was not baptized in Jesus' name or a Christian who didn't receive the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues! It is the universal pattern in Acts ...

- When the church began on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples spoke in tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).
- Simon the Sorcerer observed "evidence" when the Samaritans received the Holy Ghost by laying on of hands (Acts 8:14-20).
- Paul had this experience (Acts 9:17-18), for he spoke with tongues more than anyone in the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 14:18).
- Believers who had only experienced John's baptism were re-baptized and spoke with tongues (Acts 19:1-6).
- Cornelius' household, who were gentiles, spoke with other tongues when they received the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:44-48). **There wouldn't be ANY Gentile Christians today if it hadn't been for speaking in tongues – that's the only reason the Jews let us in the church!**

Even though these believers have REPENTED and received the HOLY GHOST, Peter immediately returns to the fact that they need to be BAPTIZED in order to receive "remission of sins" ... "through his name." Why? Because these three steps are the KEYS that he used on the Day of Pentecost to unlock salvation for the Jews. BAPTISM is not an option ... "he COMMANDED them to be baptized in the name of the Lord."

Acts 2:38-39 Then 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. For 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.

Under the anointing, Peter preached something on the Day of Pentecost that he didn't even believe (not even ten years later)! But NOW he believes it, because he knows that "God is no respecter of persons."

AND GOD IS NO REPECTER OF PERSONS TODAY!

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 14)

Acts 10:44-48 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. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

Peter certainly never expected to be the one God would use to open the door of salvation to the Gentiles! He was as surprised as anyone else when they received the Holy Ghost as he began to preach the gospel – but he knew exactly what to command when they did – BAPTISM! Why? Because this is the New Testament PATTERN of obeying the gospel!

Acts 2:38 Then 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.

Sadly, one of the things Peter probably DID expect was the opposition of the Jewish believers toward these Gentiles experiencing the new birth. They just didn't believe God would actually do something like that!

Acts 11:1-3 And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

Notice that instead of rejoicing that "the Gentiles had also received the word of God," these men were upset with Peter, assuming that he had not kept the traditions of the Jewish law regarding eating certain foods! There is nothing inherently wrong with a "tradition" – unless it gets in the way of what God's Spirit wants to do!

Mark 7:1-16 Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brassen vessels, and of tables.

Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Harken unto me every one of you, and understand: There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

CORBAN: "a consecrated present; something brought near the altar"

Your tradition can bring you "near" to the altar, even while you are totally missing the POINT of the altar! Tradition makes the word of God have NO EFFECT, because your confidence is really in something else!

Acts 11:4-14 But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

Peter's "defense" to these men was basically "I DIDN'T DO THIS!"

- GOD gave this vision to me (and did it three times)!
- GOD sent His angel to Cornelius to tell him to send for me!
- GOD told me He sent the three servants of Cornelius to my house!
- GOD told me to go with the men, nothing doubting ("no disputing")!
- GOD prepared the hearts of Cornelius and his family to receive!

The only thing PETER did was to take six witnesses with him – and it's a good thing he did, because they never would have believed it otherwise!

Please notice that it was not PETER'S VISION that resulted in the Gentiles coming into the church. Rather, it was the EVIDENCE OF SPEAKING IN TONGUES that let everyone know it was God's doing!

Acts 11:15-18 And as I began to speak, 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? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

"as on us at the beginning" = Acts 2:4

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

"then remembered | the word of the Lord" = Acts 1:5-8

Acts 1:5-8 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. 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.

Jesus had to remind them, "THIS IS NOT ABOUT YOU!" ... and they STILL had made their Holy Ghost experience all about them!

"God gave them the LIKE GIFT as he did unto us" = speaking in tongues!

WHAT WAS I, THAT I COULD WITHSTAND GOD ?!

"repentance unto life" – repentance is always the first step toward LIFE!

The church was promised POWER in Acts 1:8. The Holy Ghost was given primarily to empower an expansive evangelism effort that would impact their city and region (Judea) and then quickly expand to include a cross-cultural witness (Samaria) and – ultimately – a global presence. However, the narrative contained between Acts 1 and Acts 11 covers a period of more than ten years. During this time, the Jerusalem church was blessed with divine visitation, miracles of healing and holy boldness – and they grew in spite of persecution, opposition, and even internal disputes. Their growth rate is impressive by any standard – 3000 people in Acts 2:41, 5000 men in Acts 4:4, multitudes of men and women in Acts 5:14, and even a great company of Jewish priests in Acts 6:7.

But it all happened inside Jerusalem!

Jerusalem certainly enjoyed the rich blessings of the Lord during the church's first decade, and many souls within her walls did come to salvation during that span of time. But what about the 99.9% of people in the world of their day who did not live in that one city? And what about the other cultures that God specifically told them to reach? All of these issues beg us to answer a similar contemporary question: How many blessings does the church have to receive before she is ready and willing to wholeheartedly fulfill the Great Commission left by Jesus Christ?

One of the great dangers when we transition from a struggling small congregation or movement to a successful larger entity is that we tend to lose our cutting edge and even our dependence on God's power. We become self-centered instead of God centered, more reliant on human programs than biblical principles, and more focused on ease than on evangelism. In many of our conferences, campmeetings, conventions and church services, the attention then becomes centered on our "Jerusalem" – that it may grow and prosper so that it may continue to minister to us! We have "received power" (the first promise of Acts 1:8) but we have not "become witnesses" (the second promise of Acts 1:8): And the second promise is more significant than the first, because the real test of any visitation of God is whether it results in evangelism.

Mark 16:15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

This issue was at the heart of a philosophical and spiritual battle within the early church. They started out in obedience to Acts 1:8, but stopped too soon. They wanted to reach out in Jerusalem – *among their own kind* – but they did not really want to go to the ends of the earth, or even to Samaria for that matter! The Jerusalem church needed a complete reversal in its thinking. They wanted God to "restore again the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6) so they could sit in Jerusalem and have the nations come to them, but Jesus wanted them to leave their comfort zone!

Luke 14:23 And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

The seemingly natural desire of many Christians to stay within the warm confines of the church is not the will of God! On the contrary, He desires to lead us, even prod us and push us outside of our four walls to become His witnesses in the world. Statistics show a nearly universal trend for Christians to disconnect from unsaved people the longer they are around the church. But that's not the way the Jesus or Paul did it! They were not isolationists; they were compelled to impact their culture with the gospel.

Matthew 11:19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

1 Corinthians 9:22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

This is why God allowed their ten-year "honeymoon" to be shattered by the martyrdom of Stephen and the intense persecution led by Saul of Tarsus – suddenly, disciples were being scattered everywhere. But while things grew worse in Jerusalem, great things were beginning to happen in Judea and even in Samaria. In one swift act of persecution, God had forced obedience on His church and compelled them to mobilize. Stephen's death probably resulted in more obedience to the Great Commission than any other single event in the history of the early church, and was even a major factor in the conversion of Paul.

Acts 8:1 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.

God is not primarily committed to successful ministries or even great churches; He is primarily committed to the Great Commission. Thus, if we will not "GO" (Mark 16:15) God only has two alternatives ...

- PERSECUTION, to drive us out, or
- SUBSTITUTION, to find someone else who will go willingly!

It is not that the Jerusalem church rejected the Great Commission outright; it is just that they could not seem to manage the kind of vision required during this period of church history. So, God used persecution first (with some results) and then substitution when they continued to resist. Here is the firsthand account:

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. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

Antioch was a predominantly Gentile city, and it is *inconceivable* that the Christians who ended up preaching there should ignore all but a miniscule minority of Jews, assuming that they were the only ones God wanted to save. But that is exactly what they did, because their vision was limited only to the religious culture they already identified with. Thank God there was a second group (from Cyprus and Cyrene, not Jerusalem) that targeted their efforts to reach the Greek majority of Antioch's population – **and the hand of the Lord was with them!**

This was a moment of destiny, when the church at Antioch was born. It was not just a few transplants from the Jerusalem Jewish subculture, but some sinfully reverent, biblically illiterate Gentiles who came to know God. This moment is why the Apostolics would soon be known as those who "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6) in the first century; this moment is why there is a church at all in the twenty-first century.

Jerusalem never did know how to deal with revolutionary revivalists like the Apostle Paul, who continually jumped fences, ignored protocol, and broke tradition to win the lost. That's why they sent him back to Tarsus to "cool off" when he first appeared in Jerusalem with wild tales of a life-changing encounter with God and wild ideas about evangelizing those pagan Gentiles. And that's why Jerusalem never got to send out history's greatest missionary – instead, that honor fell to the church in Antioch because they had a missionary heart.

Acts 11:22-26 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. Who, 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. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And 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. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Thank God for BARNABAS, who again had VISION that others lacked! Although not one of the leaders, he was instrumental in bringing these GENTILES together with the APOSTLE PAUL – and the rest is history!

The Jerusalem church was unwilling to change to reach the culture of the world around it; instead, they demanded that the Gentiles essentially become Jewish before they could get saved. Sadly, the same thing happens today when churches insist that people speak their lingo, conform to their customs, like their music, agree with their politics, and observe a thousand unspoken traditions before they can "join the club."

The Jerusalem church was richly blessed and doctrinally sound, but God still turned His attention to Antioch because Jerusalem would not embrace His command to WITNESS. Jerusalem held on to their resources and blessings, but Antioch accepted that God had the right to demand of them anything or anyone He wanted to use. They accepted that the Great Commission was at the very TOP of the Lord's priority list.

There are really only two New Testament church models, the Jerusalem Church and the Antioch Church. We must choose to be one or the other!

C.T. Studd: "Some wish to live within the sound of church or chapel bell, I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."

The greatest danger is always at the edge (where the church meets the culture). But so is the greatest opportunity for rescue and redemption. The New Testament church lived "on the edge" – never safe, always one step from disaster if God didn't intervene! Jude felt the tension:

Jude 1:22-24 And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

Many Apostolic people have gotten too comfortable with the status quo. Church has become a comfortable place, a place that is always the same ... same friends, same events, same songs, same sermons, same faces, same size, same methods, and same results! That mentality is an affront to God, who called us to impact our culture with the gospel.

Acts 11:27-30 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

ANTIOCH ended up blessing the JERUSALEM church, and pulling all the assemblies of the first century headlong into the Great Commission!

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 15)

Acts 11 contained a moment of destiny, when the church at Antioch was born. This moment is why the Apostolics would soon be known as those who "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6) in the first century; it is why there is a church at all in the twenty-first century. The Jerusalem church never got to send out history's greatest missionary – that honor fell to the Antioch church because they had a missionary heart.

Acts 11:25-26 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And 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. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Acts 12:1-4 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) 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.

"about that time" = of course there will be opposition to great progress!

"Herod" = grandson of Herod the Great who slaughtered the infants in Bethlehem, nephew of Herod Antipas who beheaded John the Baptist

JAMES is called the "brother of John" to distinguish him from the other James, who is the author of the epistle of James. He was the first of the apostles to suffer death, and his brother John was the last.

Mark 10:35-41 And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.

"four quaternions" = 16 guards (this is Peter's third time in prison)

"after Easter" = after Passover

QUESTIONS:

- Why should Stephen be stoned to death, yet Paul will be stoned to death and then miraculously raised up to continue his ministry?
- Why should Philip be supernaturally transported to witness to one soul, and yet Paul has to travel thousands of weary miles to preach?
- Why should Peter and the Apostles be delivered by angels out of prison, yet Paul be left to die in prison writing letters to the churches?
- Why should God raise Dorcas from the dead and not Stephen?
- Why should God let James be beheaded, yet the same night Peter is to be beheaded send an angel to deliver him out of that same prison?

GOD IS SOVEREIGN!

Acts 12:5-11 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. 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. 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. And 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. And 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. When 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. 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.

BUT PRAYER WAS MADE WITHOUT CEASING OF THE CHURCH UNTO GOD FOR HIM ... the setbacks the church had experienced did not stop them from praying, and this time their prayer is the turning point!

Thomas Watson (Puritan preacher): "The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel."

Peter was SLEEPING soundly, even though he was to be executed the next day – that is having CONFIDENCE in God! He knew that the throne in Heaven was in control, not the throne on earth!

v. 11 – "delivered" = word Stephen used to describe Exodus (Acts 7:34)

Acts 12:12-19 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. And 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 he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place. Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And 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.

"It is his angel" = popular superstition of the day, that a man's guardian angel sometimes assumed his form

How many times do we pray without expecting an answer?!

Acts 12:20-25 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. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And 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. But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

Herod dared to lift his hand against the CHURCH. Now his words were stilled forever, but the WORD grew and multiplied!

Daniel 4:17 This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.

"Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem" = Acts 11:29-30

"John, whose surname was Mark" = Barnabas' cousin

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. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Until now, Jerusalem had been the center of ministry, and Peter had been the key apostle. But from this point on, Antioch would become the new center, and Paul the key apostle. The Gospel was on the move! The Antioch Church sends out history's first missionaries in Acts 13-14. In these two chapters, Luke describes Paul's ministry in several cities.

Acts 13:4-12 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. 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. And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: 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. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

Acts 4:36 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, **Romans 1:16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Acts 13:9 is the first place we find the name PAUL in the New Testament. As a Roman citizen, the apostle's full name was probably "Saul Paulus," for many Jews had both Jewish and Roman names.

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. "Barnabas and Saul" now becomes "Paul and his company" ... Barnabas has the spirit of John the Baptist ... "he must increase, I must decrease."

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 16)

The Antioch Church was blessed to send out history's first missionaries in Acts 13-14. Here Luke describes the ministry of PAUL in several cities:

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. By this point in the book of Acts, Antioch has become the central CHURCH, and Paul has become the central CHARACTER ... that's why "Barnabas and Saul" now becomes "Paul and his company" ... Barnabas has the spirit of John the Baptist ... "he must increase, I must decrease."

The team had been on the island of Cyprus, but as soon as they got back to the mainland, John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem.

WHY DID JOHN MARK DESERT HIS FRIENDS?

- Was he simply homesick?
- Was he uncomfortable among Gentile Christians?
- Was he afraid of the dangers they were facing?
- Was he unhappy Paul was leading instead of his cousin Barnabas?
- We don't know any more at this point ...

Acts 13:14-22 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot. And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

Since Paul is addressing a synagogue congregation, he uses Jewish history to establish common ground with them, and then uses the Old Testament Scriptures to support his arguments.

Acts 13:23-33 Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus: When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose. Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead: And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. And we declare unto you glad tidings, now that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

Psalm 2:7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.
"this day have I begotten thee" = not virgin WOMB but virgin TOMB

Revelation 1:5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

Acts 13:34-43 And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you. And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

Isaiah 55:3 Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. God had promised David that from him the Messiah would come! Because of his sin, David wasn't worthy of this promise – but God gave him SURE MERCIES!

Psalm 16:10 For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Paul quotes the same Messianic prophecy that Peter quoted in his message on the Day of Pentecost. It was clear that it couldn't apply to David, who was dead, buried and decayed. But it did apply to Jesus!

Habakkuk 1:5 Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you.

Paul quotes this Scripture to warn the Jews, lest while God is beginning to work marvelously among the Gentiles, they would miss out on it!

The Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia are so spiritually hungry that they are BEGGING for the Word.

Acts 13:44-52 And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples

were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.

These Jews are ENVIOUS that God is moving among the Gentiles!

Matthew 23:13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

Mark 6:11 And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.

AND THE DISCIPLES WERE FILLED WITH JOY! There will always be opposition, but we can rejoice in what God is doing regardless!

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 17)

The Antioch Church was blessed to send out history's first missionaries on their first missionary journey in Acts 13-14. At this point in the book of Acts, God is beginning to work marvelously among the Gentiles! In Antioch of Pisidia, they are so spiritually hungry that they literally BEG for the Word of God to be preached to them! But the Jews, who have history and heritage on their side, become ENVIOUS of what God is doing!

Acts 13:46 Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

The Jews stir up so much persecution against Paul and Barnabas that they are successful in expelling them out of the region. That brings them to Iconium, where the same thing happens all over again!

Acts 14:1-7 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. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. 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. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. 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, They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: And there they preached the gospel.

Persecution by the "unbelieving Jews" followed the missions team, because TRUTH ALWAYS DIVIDES. But even when they had to flee from persecution, it didn't stop them from preaching the gospel!

Acts 14:8-18 And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. 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. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, And 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: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless 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. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

In Lystra, the superstitious crowd interpreted events through their own mythology. They saw Barnabas as Jupiter (Zeus), chief of the gods; and Paul, the speaker, as Mercury (Hermes), messenger of the gods. Jupiter was the patron deity of the city, so this let the priest feel important. Paul could have tried to use this "honor" to lead people to truth, but Apostolics don't use lies to promote truth! Paul and Barnabas opposed what they were doing and boldly told the people that their gods were "vanities."

Earlier Paul had addressed synagogue congregations, so he used Jewish history to establish common ground with them, and then used the Old Testament Scriptures to support his arguments. However, this time Paul's message was not based on the Old Testament, because this was a pagan Gentile audience. He started with the witness of God in creation. **The starting point was different, but the ending point was the same!**

Once again, the JEALOUS JEWS follow the missions team, even stoning Paul and leaving him for dead! It's amazing that Paul then returns home through the same cities where they had experienced such persecution!

Acts 14:19-25 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. Howbeit, 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. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming 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. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia:

On their return trip to Antioch, the team did several important things:

- They made DISCIPLES ("taught many")
- They STRENGTHENED the believers ("confirming the souls")
- They encouraged them to CONTINUE in the faith ("exhorting them")
- They told them to expect TRIALS ("through much tribulation")
- They appointed ELDERS in every church ("ordained them elders")

And finally, they reported back to their "sending church" on the great work God had done. They had been gone at least a full year. This shows us the critical importance of accountability to the LOCAL CHURCH. **Antioch was not a PARKING LOT, but a LAUNCHING PAD for Paul!**

Acts 14:26-28 And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And 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. And here they abode long time with the disciples.

Bob Pierce (Youth For Christ): "Others have done so much with so little, while we have done so little with so much!" (Gentiles, Jews)

The door of faith had now been opened wide to the Gentiles, and the legalistic Jews didn't like it! **In Acts 15, twenty years after the Day of Pentecost, the church had to act decisively to keep that door open.**

Acts 15:1-6 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. 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. And 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. And 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. But 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. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

The law of circumcision was given to Abraham more than 400 years prior to Moses (Genesis 17:9-14), with no specific instruction other than doing it on the eighth day. To that basic commandment, the Jews had added many rules; as Jesus said, they taught as commandments the tradition of men (Mark 7:9). This is why the are concerned that circumcision be done "after the manner (i.e. detailed procedures) of Moses."

Mark 7:9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.

They are insisting that Gentile converts must become JEWS first, before they are even allowed to become CHRISTIANS ("ye cannot be saved")! Circumcision is just an excuse to push their real agenda, that Gentiles should be forced to keep the WHOLE Jewish law (v. 5).

WHY IS THIS SO DANGEROUS?

- It mixes Law and Grace
- It tries to pour new wine into old wineskins
- It stitches up the rent veil, blocking the new and living way to God
- It rebuilds the wall between Jew and Gentile torn down on the cross
- It puts a heavy Jewish yoke on Gentile shoulders
- It asks the church to move out of the sunlight back into the shadows
- It demands that Gentiles become Jews before they can be saved
- It says that obedience to the gospel is not enough

The Apostles and elders of the church gather in Jerusalem to discuss the matter, not because Jerusalem is their "headquarters," but because this problem was created by Jewish "Christians" out of Jerusalem! (Paul later calls them "false brethren" in Galatians 2:4.) **Three main speeches from this meeting are referred to in Acts 15 ...**

PETER

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. And 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? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

BARNABAS & PAUL

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.

JAMES

Peter, Barnabas & Paul give testimony of what God has been doing among the Gentiles; James anchors their testimony to the WORD.

Acts 15:13-18 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After 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: That 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. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

What happened at Cornelius' household through the ministry of Peter ("Simeon") was not just about one family ... God was beginning to visit the entire Gentile race, "to take out of them a people for his name." It had always been God's will for the Gentiles to be in His church! The Jewish prophet Amos had spoken of this day ...

Amos 9:11-12 In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this.

On the day of Pentecost, when the Jews came into the church, Peter quoted JOEL. Now, as the Gentiles come in, James quotes AMOS.

At one point in Israel's history, there were TWO TABERNACLES in existence at the same time – the tabernacle of Moses in Mount Gibeon, and the tabernacle of David in Mount Zion.

2 Chronicles 1:3-4 So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness. But the ark of God had David brought up from Kirjathjearim to the place which David had prepared for it: for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem.

The Ark of the Covenant, once it was taken out of the Tabernacle of Moses during the reign of Saul, never returned to that tabernacle (the glory had departed!). Instead, David brought the Ark back to Jerusalem and set it in a tent, the Tabernacle of David! The Tabernacle of Moses had an empty Holy of Holies, but the Tabernacle of David had a new order of worship ("sacrifices of praise") all centered around the Ark!

THE GENTILES WERE TO COME INTO THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID, NOT THE TABERNACLE OF MOSES! ACCESS TO THE ARK IS STILL AVAILABLE – BECAUSE THE DOOR IS STILL OPEN!

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 18)

The door of faith had been opened wide to the Gentiles, and the legalistic Jews didn't like it! They insisted that Gentile converts must become JEWS first, before they were allowed to become CHRISTIANS. In Acts 15, twenty years after the Day of Pentecost, the church had to act decisively to keep that door open. Peter, Barnabas & Paul give testimony of what God has been doing among the Gentiles; then James anchors their testimony to the WORD and gives his commendation.

Acts 15:13-18 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After 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: That 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. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

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David brought the Ark back to Jerusalem and set it in a tent, the Tabernacle of David! The Tabernacle of Moses had an empty Holy of Holies, but the Tabernacle of David had a new order of worship ("sacrifices of praise") all centered around the Ark!

THE GENTILES WERE TO COME INTO THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID, NOT THE TABERNACLE OF MOSES! ACCESS TO THE ARK IS STILL AVAILABLE – BECAUSE THE DOOR IS STILL OPEN!

Acts 15:19-21 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

The conclusion of the matter was that the Gentiles should NOT have to become Jews to become Christians. They should NOT have to come to God through the Jewish worship system. However, they SHOULD have to leave behind their pagan Gentile worship system! These things had always been "preached by Moses" – **but the Gentiles didn't know that!**

The four "commandments" given here are certainly not the ONLY commandments that the Gentiles will have to obey – that would be a ridiculous idea, in light of the Moral Law of God which is eternal, and in light of the rest of the New Testament. Rather, they are a "crash course" in the laws of God that speak specifically against pagan worship ...

POLLUTIONS OF IDOLS – sacrifices made to images in pagan temples
FORNICATION – prostitutes and sexual rites in pagan temple worship
THINGS STRANGLED – the "food of demons" in pagan rituals (Origen)
BLOOD – drinking blood (of sacrifices or even victims) in pagan rituals

Acts 15:22-27 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: And 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: Forasmuch 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: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.

1 John 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

Galatians 2:4-5 And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IS NOT LIKE YOUR OLD PAGAN WORSHIP!

"We're not asking for Gentiles to become Jews in order to become Christians – but we are asking you to leave your old Gentile lifestyle!"

Acts 15:28-35 For 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. Fare ye well. So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

What the first century church was really wrestling with in Acts 15 was the question, "Who is the church for?"

The natural "gravitational pull" of every church congregation is toward INSIDERS rather than OUTSIDERS. We have to guard against that! Churches that decide they are all about KEEPING the already saved never get too concerned about REACHING the unsaved. That's wrong!

Churches designed for church people are full of hypocrites, because you basically have to be a hypocrite to participate! Transparency and honesty are dangerous in a church for church people, so everyone becomes good at covering up their issues to keep in everyone else's good books.

The casualty of a church just for insiders is GRACE.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who declare that church is for everyone, regardless of belief or behavior. These churches value openness and tolerance more than they value obedience and truth! They end up picking which parts of the Bible they wish to embrace.

The casualty of a church just for outsiders is TRUTH.

What in the world do we do to manage the tension of this very difficult balancing act? We do what the first century church did! And, even more importantly, we do exactly what Jesus modeled in His earthly ministry!

Jesus was full of grace AND truth! He didn't try to "balance" between them; He was the full embodiment of BOTH of them!

John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John 1:17 For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

It's easy to create an ALL-TRUTH church model. It may be even easier to create an ALL-GRACE church model. But Jesus didn't leave either of those options open to us – we must be a GRACE AND TRUTH church!

John 8:11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

Acts 15:19 (NLT) And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.

Acts 15:36-41 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. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. 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; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

Barnabas once again wanted to take his cousin John Mark with them on their second missionary journey, but Paul refused because he had deserted them once before. And the contention was so sharp between them that they parted ways, and even picked new ministry partners!

Who was right? It doesn't matter! God now had two missionary teams!

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 takes Silas, while Barnabas departs with Mark back to the island of Cyprus, his home country where the first missionary journey started. However, years later in his very last epistle, Paul lets everyone know that his opinion of John Mark had changed dramatically ...

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.

Someone else's opinion of you (even a leader's opinion!) is not the final word on your life. Keep a good attitude, and stay faithful!

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 19)

Acts 15:36 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.

Not long after the "church council" in Jerusalem, Paul sets out on his second missionary journey, to revisit and strengthen the churches. He ends up traveling with Silas, not Barnabas, due to a disagreement.

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: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him 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. And 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. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

Paul will later write that Timothy is a third-generation Apostolic. Here he says that he is "well reported of" among the local believers. Timothy has proved his ministry locally before he begins to travel with Paul, and he is sent out by his local church. That is the Apostolic model!

2 Timothy 1:5 When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.

1 Timothy 4:14 Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Part of their assignment on this journey is to deliver the "decrees" from the elders in Jerusalem to all the churches. Remember that those decrees state that the Gentiles should not have to become Jews (and be circumcised!) before they can become Christians! Remember that Paul had steadfastly refused to have Titus circumcised. And remember that Paul said that circumcision was not of any spiritual benefit! So why now does he have Timothy circumcised? Isn't that inconsistent?

Galatians 2:3 But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:

Galatians 6:15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

Not at all! Titus was a pure Greek, but Timothy was half-Jewish already ("his father was a Greek"). The Judaizers were trying to pressure Titus to become Jewish, but Timothy was already a practicing Jew. So Timothy's circumcision was not motivated by pressure from inside the church, but by a missionary strategy outside the church! Timothy was circumcised only so he would not offend the Jews they were trying to reach!

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

In the twenty-first century, many people are offended by any little thing that is asked of them, that would please the Lord or remove a stumbling block for someone else. Not so in the first century! They willingly did anything and everything to please God and win others for the gospel!

Acts 16:6-10 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, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. 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. And 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.

Notice the language here ... "forbidden of the Holy Ghost" ... "the Spirit suffered them not" ... they are waiting on God for direction, really just feeling their way along until they get a "green light" from the Lord ... just like US, because they were just normal people sold out to God! But can you imagine how history might have been changed if Paul had continued ministering in Asia only, and followed this vision into Europe?

Two technical notes at this point that will help you as you read ACTS:

(1) Verse 10 says "after HE ... immediately WE" – when Luke says "we" it tells us that he has joined the missionary party at that point.

(2) Several of the cities referred to in Acts contain churches that later have epistles written to them by Paul ... it is very informative to read those epistles simultaneously with Acts (i.e. Philippi / Philippians)

Acts 16:11-15 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: and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the sabbath 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 worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And 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.

Notice that "BELIEVERS" in the book of Acts are always BAPTIZED! There are two households like that in this chapter – it is the Apostolic pattern! If you haven't been baptized in Jesus' name, you are not a Christian in the Biblical sense of the word!

Acts 16:16-24 And 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: The 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. And 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. 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, And

neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

No does God begin to move than Satan begins to try to hinder the work. Here he uses a demonized girl who had made her masters wealthy by telling fortunes. She repeatedly shouted after them, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who show us the way of salvation!" Paul did not want his message "promoted" by one of Satan's slaves, so he cast out the demon – because Satan may speak the truth one minute and a lie the next, and the unsaved wouldn't know the difference. Her masters didn't care about her, only the money they would lose. They accosted Paul and Silas, had them whipped and cast them into prison – simply for preaching the gospel! But it didn't even slow them down!

Acts 16:25-34 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And 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. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

- "at midnight" – the midnight hour, the blackest hour of the night, is very significant in Scripture!

Exodus 11:4 And Moses said, Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt:

Matthew 25:6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

- "they sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them" – God can give songs in the night if we will pray!

Job 35:10 But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night;

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

- "there was a great earthquake ... the foundations of the prison were shaken ... all the doors were opened ... every one's bands were loosed" – GOD CAN WORK A MIRACLE AT MIDNIGHT!

When the jailer asks, "What must I do to be saved?" you can be sure that he receives the same instruction from Paul as every other believer receives in the book of Acts. That's why there is a BAPTISM after midnight ("the same hour")! The word "believe" in the New Testament is a synonym for the word "commit" – when you believe, you will obey!

THOU SHALT BE SAVED, AND THY HOUSE! CLAIM THAT PROMISE!

Acts 16:35-40 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. And 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. But 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. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

Notice that Paul refuses to sneak out of town, because that would have placed a cloud of suspicion over his ministry. And notice how he uses his Roman citizenship, not to avoid persecution for himself (he could have!), but to bring protection to the church. It's all about the MESSAGE!

Acts 17:1-9 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, 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. 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. But 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. 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; Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

Once again, Paul takes the gospel "to the Jew first," going to the synagogue. Over the course of three weeks he "reasoned with them out of the scriptures" – "this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ!" Once again, there is great revival – and once again, there is great persecution.

"These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also!" Jason's experience here tells us that you may see spiritual opposition if you associate with an Apostolic ministry – but it is worth it! Everywhere the missionary team went there was either RIOT or REVIVAL, or BOTH!

Acts 17:10-15 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These 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. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

The Bereans were MORE NOBLE because they received the Word with a ready mind, and searched the Scriptures daily. They didn't just take the preacher's word for it – they wanted to know it for themselves!

Paul is sent ahead to Athens, and waits there for Silas and Timothy ...

Acts 17:16-21 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto

them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

Paul's spirit is stirred because of what he sees in the city – what about you? He again takes the gospel "to the Jew first," and to those who are "devout persons," then finally he meets with the intellectuals of Athens.

The Greek religion was a mere deification of human attributes and the powers of nature. It was a religion entirely destitute of moral power. The Greek myths spoke of gods and goddesses that, in their own rivalries acted more like humans than gods; and there were plenty of deities to choose from! One common saying from ancient times was, "In Athens it is easier to find a god than a man." The Greek gods were merely fictional characters that were unable to change men's lives. With all of their culture and wisdom, the people of Athens did not know the true God!

EPICURIANS: A sect of philosophers that sought truth through experience rather than reasoning. They were materialists and atheists, and their goal in life was to embrace PLEASURE.

STOICS: A sect of philosophers that rejected the idolatry of pagan worship and taught that there was one "World God." They were pantheists, and they emphasized personal discipline and self-control. They sought truth through reasoning and tried to be unmoved by inner feelings or outward circumstances. They believed that pleasure was evil, and their goal in life was to embrace PAIN.

The Epicureans said "Enjoy life!" and the Stoics said "Endure life!" but Paul was able to tell them how to find "Abundant life!"

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. For 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. 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 worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And 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; That 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: For 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. Forasmuch 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. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because 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.

The Areopagus on Mars' Hill was the highest court in Athens, and its council was responsible to watch over religion and education in the city. Notice that Paul's approach is different with these Gentiles than it is with the Jews. With the Jews, he always reasons out of Scripture, but with the Gentiles, he always reasons from Creation – because Creation also reveals God! He opens his mouth, STARTS WHERE THEY ARE, and preaches Jesus! They have an altar TO THE UNKNOWN GOD, which indicates spiritual hunger – so Paul tells them about the God he knows! **"You're looking for something, and I've already found it!"**

GOD IS NOT A DISTANT DEITY! "He be not far from every one of us" (verse 17). Here Paul quotes from the poet Epimenides: "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being." Then he adds a quote from two poets, Aratus and Cleanthes, "For we are also His offspring." He is using his knowledge of their culture to preach Christ. His point is that God made us in His image, so we are foolish to make gods in our own image!

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at" ... For centuries, God was patient with man's sin and ignorance, holding back His divine wrath. But then, in due time, God sent a Saviour, and now He commands all men to repent of their foolish ways.

Galatians 4:3-5 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Romans 5:6-8 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

The intellectual Athenians stumble over the resurrection of Jesus – some mock, some procrastinate any decision, some believe – just like today!

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. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

1 Corinthians 1:22-29 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But 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; And 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: That no flesh should glory in his presence.

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 20)

Paul is in the middle of the Second Missionary Journey recorded in Acts. Silas and Timothy temporarily stayed behind in Berea, while Paul travelled on to Athens and of course found a group to preach to ...

Acts 17:22-23 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. For 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.

“You're looking for something, and I've already found it!”

Acts 18:1-6 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And 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. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

Luke records Paul's ITINERARY, but Paul later records in 1 Corinthians the INSECURITY he felt when entering the city of Corinth (perhaps because of the rejection he experienced when preaching in Athens) ...

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Once again, the Jews refuse Paul's message and oppose his ministry. This is the first time he declares that he is going to turn his full attention to the Gentiles, and he quotes Ezekiel 33:3-4. To have blood on your hands means that you bear responsibility for someone else's destruction because you did not warn them. But to have blood on your head means that you are to blame for your own destruction.

Ezekiel 33:3-4 If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head.

Corinth was a city known across the empire for its wickedness. Later, Paul would write the book of Romans from here, and could look out his window and see chapter one fulfilled right in front of his own eyes. But great wickedness did not stop Paul from having great revival!

Romans 1:22-32 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

But that wasn't the end of the story!

Romans 5:20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

Acts 18:7-11 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. 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. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, 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. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. This time, Paul does not leave the city despite persecution, because he has a word from the Lord of PROTECTION ("I am with thee!") and PROMISE ("I have much people in this city!"). His ministry extended over eighteen months in Corinth, and left behind a powerful church. The Corinthian church was not made up of many mighty and noble people, but of sinners whose lives were transformed by the grace of God.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But 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; And 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: That no flesh should glory in his presence.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Acts 18:12-17 And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And 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: But 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. And he drave them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things.

Luke records this instance of divine protection where God used a pagan ruler to defend an Apostolic preacher! While the Jewish council had prohibited the Apostles to preach, there is no evidence that the Roman government ever did so. While there was some opposition, in cities like Philippi, Corinth and Ephesus the Roman officials were not only tolerant but almost cooperative.

Paul knew how to use his Roman citizenship wisely so that the government worked for him and not against him, and he was careful not to accuse the government or ignore its authority.

Acts 18:18 And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

The "vow" referred to here is from "euche," the same word used in James 5:15 for the "prayer" of faith. Paul did not shave his head because he was finishing a Nazarite vow (Number 6:18), for the New Testament church did not practice that. Rather, he had just been delivered from the court of Gallio, so he needed to cut ("kiero") his hair because he was going to prayer. Paul knew that God cared what his hair looked like!

Acts 18:19-22 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; But 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. And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.

Paul desired to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost, not because it was necessary to keep the Jewish feasts, but because the city would be full of people that he would be able to preach to! Verse 22 marks the end of his second missionary journey, and he reported back to his home church in Antioch – he had been away for nearly two years for this journey!

Acts 18:23-28 And 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. And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This 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. And 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. And 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: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

As Paul begins his third missionary journey, Luke gives considerable detail about the time he spent in Ephesus. Because it was such a strategic city, Paul spent three years of his ministry there (Acts 20:31) – the longest he stayed in any city. Ephesus had a large harbor that made it a wealthy city, and a massive temple to the goddess Diana that made it a religious city, steeped in idolatry and the occult. It also had REVIVAL! Before Paul even arrives in Ephesus, God starts putting people in place for what He wants to do – one of them is an eloquent preacher named Apollos. He knows the Old Testament scriptures well, and he is "fervent in the spirit," but he has an incomplete message! His message only got as far as John the Baptist and then stopped! He knew nothing about Calvary, the resurrection of Jesus, or the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He had zeal, but he lacked knowledge. Apollos knew about the promises of God, but he didn't know about their fulfillment.

His message was not inaccurate or insincere, merely incomplete.

But thankfully, he came in contact with Aquila and Priscilla who knew the full revelation of God's truth for the church. They could have CONDEMNED him for not having full truth, or simply COMPROMISED and accepted him as he was – but that is not the approach the Apostolics took in the book of Acts! Instead, they took him aside and TAUGHT him the Gospel in its fullness! Then, once he received that revelation, they COMMENDED his ministry.

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, He 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. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then 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. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve.

Something similar happened once Paul arrived in Ephesus. He found a group of disciples who were perhaps some of Apollos' early converts, because they also had an incomplete understanding – they had not even heard about the Holy Ghost! Notice what the Apostolics did any time they encountered someone lacking a full revelation of truth – they opened their mouth, started where they were, and preached unto them Jesus!

This passage in Acts 19 sets a Biblical precedent for anyone who has been baptized in any way other than in the name of Jesus, which is the only saving name (Acts 4:12). Verse 5 tells us that they were (re)baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus." Furthermore, verse 6 once again shows us what the Apostolics expected to happen every time believers received the baptism of the Holy Ghost in the book of Acts – "and they spake with tongues, (and prophesied)."

Acts 19:8-12 And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

1 Corinthians 16:8-9 But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.

"All they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus!"

Notice that once again MIRACLES are happening to draw people's attention to the MESSAGE – that is the Apostolic pattern!

Acts 19:13-20 Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And 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. 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. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. 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.

“Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are YOU?”

The total value of the occult books that they burned here was equivalent to the total salaries of 150 men working for a whole year! These people had a real conversion that involved real repentance, and God responded.

“So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.”

Watch the pattern in the book of Acts ... when the WORD prevails, the CHURCH prevails ... and it still works the same way today!

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 21)

As Paul begins his third missionary journey, Luke gives considerable detail about the time he spent in Ephesus. Because it was such a strategic city, Paul spent three years of his ministry there (Acts 20:31) – the longest he stayed in any city. Ephesus had a large harbor that made it a wealthy city, and a massive temple to the goddess Diana that made it a religious city, steeped in idolatry and the occult. It also had REVIVAL!

Acts 19:10 And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

1 Corinthians 16:8-9 But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.

Acts 19:21-29 After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and 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. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And 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.

This is the first mention of Paul's plan to go to Rome, and that process will occupy essentially the last third of the book of Acts.

Romans 1:15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

Romans 15:26 For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. Paul sends Timothy and Erastus ahead, because they collecting an offering from Macedonian churches for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. In Ephesus, Demetrius and his silversmiths were promoting idolatry and immorality by selling shrines, and they hated Paul's preaching because it as people were converted it was cutting into their livelihood. Demetrius made use of the two things the Ephesians loved the most – the honor of their city and the greatness of their goddess Diana and her temple – to stir up an angry riot of thousands against Paul. Since the mob couldn't find Paul, they seized two of his helpers, Gaius and Aristarchus.

Acts 19:30-41 And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. 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. But 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. And 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? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore 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. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For 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. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

Paul, of course, wanted to enter the theater (what an opportunity for preaching the Gospel!) but the believers and some of the city leaders counseled him to stay away. Before long, a Jew named Alexander tried to address the crowd, probably just to explain to them that the Jews did not endorse Paul's message. But his very presence only aroused the mob even more, and they shouted for two more hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" It was the city clerk who finally got matters under control, using the same tactics that the silversmiths used to arouse the mob – the greatness of their city and of their goddess. Throughout the Book of Acts, Luke makes it clear that the persecution of the Christian church was incited by the unbelieving Jews and not primarily by the Romans.

Acts 20:1-6 And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia. And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece, And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia. And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. These going before tarried for us at Troas. And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.

Acts 20:7-12 And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.

Acts 20:13-16 And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot. And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus. For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.

Miletus, while waiting for the next ship, Paul calls for the Ephesian elders to come so he can deliver to them his farewell message ...

Acts 20:17-21 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul did not hide from them the fact that he was bound in his spirit to go to Jerusalem. even though he knew that danger and possible death awaited him there.

The Holy Spirit had witnessed this message to him in city after city. A lesser man would some way to escape, but not Paul. He was too gripped by his calling and his devotion to Jesus Christ to look for some safe and easy way out.

Acts 20:22-27 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

Acts 20:28-38 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.

The church is the only thing God ever had to PURCHASE, so it is of utmost value to Him. That's why Paul ends with a WARNING ... We must beware of dangers AROUND us ("wolves"), dangers AMONG us ("of your own selves"), and dangers WITHIN us ("unto yourselves").

Paul names five destructive sins: Carelessness, Shallowness, Covetousness, Laziness, Selfishness. He also quotes words from Jesus that are not even in the gospels (they came from oral tradition).

Acts 21:1-7 And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden. And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again. And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.

Paul now begins to get messages from his friends that his visit to Jerusalem will be difficult and dangerous. In Tyre, the believers "kept on saying to him" (Greek) that he should not set foot in Jerusalem.

Although Paul had never been with the Christians in Tyre before, it is touching to see how much they came to love him after only a week!

Acts 21:8-12 And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And 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. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.

In Caesarea, the men stayed with Philip, one of the original deacons. While there, the prophet Agabus gave Paul a second warning message. He bound his own hands and feet with Paul's girdle and told the apostle that he would be bound in Jerusalem. Of course, the believers in Caesarea then begged Paul not to go. But Paul told them that he was prepared to die if necessary! After all, Agabus did not forbid Paul to go to Jerusalem; he only told him what to expect if he did go!

Acts 21:13-14 Then 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. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

"I'm not going to play it safe – I'm going to do the will of God!"

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 22)

Paul has by now received messages from several of his friends that his visit to Jerusalem will be difficult and dangerous. Most recently in Caesarea, the prophet Agabus bound his own hands and feet with Paul's girdle and told the apostle that he would be bound in Jerusalem. Of course, the believers have begged Paul not to go. But Paul told them that he was prepared to die for the name of Jesus if necessary!

Acts 21:13-14 Then 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. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

"I'm not going to play it safe – I'm going to do the will of God!"

Acts 21:15-22 And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem. There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge. And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. 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: And 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. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.

The brethren received Paul gladly, and glorified God for what was happening among the Gentiles ... BUT they were still yielding to pressure from the Judaizers in Jerusalem! There were thousands of Jews who now believed in Jesus ... BUT this group was still more concerned about whether the Law of Moses was being honored than about how many Gentiles were entering the Kingdom!

The same GRACE that gave the Gentiles freedom to ABSTAIN from the Law of Moses also gave the Jews freedom to OBSERVE the Law of Moses, as long as they didn't trust in the Law for salvation ... BUT that wasn't enough for the Judaizers! They wanted to "police" the Apostle Paul, and had effectively mobilized the "rumor mill" against him before he even got back to Jerusalem. And the elders in the Jerusalem church were so concerned about possible division that they enlisted Paul's help.

Acts 21:23-29 Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; Them 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. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. Then 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. 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, Crying 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. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

The elders asked Paul to accompany four men who were taking a vow of purification in the Temple, so the rumors about Paul dishonoring the Law of Moses will be proven false. Even though Paul knows and teaches that the Old Testament Law has been fulfilled, he agrees to inconvenience himself and submit to their request because of a higher principle:

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

However, despite the elders' good intentions, their plan was a miserable failure. The Judaizers didn't intend to stop spreading rumors, and they were watching for any excuse to trap the Apostle Paul. In the temple stood a wall beyond which no Gentile was allowed to go, bearing this solemn inscription: "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught so doing will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." Some Jews from Asia saw Paul in the temple and immediately jumped to the conclusion that he had polluted their sacred Temple by bringing past the barricade the Gentiles who had accompanied him to Jerusalem. It was totally untrue, but it was totally effective ... and it resulted in a riot! By the way, it is this "wall of partition" that Paul later refers to when he writes the book of Ephesians ...

Ephesians 2:8-22 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

"by grace are ye saved through faith" isn't an alternative to Acts 2:38, but an explanation of why we don't have to keep Old Testament law!
"not of works" isn't telling us that we don't do good works, because the next verse tells us we are created in Christ Jesus "unto good works!"
- "the middle wall of partition between us" refers to the old barrier that stood between Gentiles and Jews in the Jerusalem Temple
- not only can we ENTER the Temple, we now ARE the Temple of God

The mob seized Paul and would have killed him had the Roman guards not intervened in the nick of time. Thankfully, at least 1,000 soldiers were stationed in the Antonia Fortress at the northwest corner of the temple area at any given time. When the captain tried to interrogate the crowd, most of them didn't even know the cause of their agitation, so he removed Paul from immediate danger and took him into the fortress. He at first thought Paul was an Egyptian rebel who was wanted

by the Romans for making a revolt, but once Paul explained his background he actually allowed the Apostles to stand out way on the stairs and address the crowd below. Paul always took every opportunity to preach!

Acts 21:30-40 And 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. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Who 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. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. And 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. And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? 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. And 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,

This is the second of three times in Acts that we have testimony of Paul's dramatic conversion, and this is certainly a dramatic setting for sharing it!

Acts 22:1-10 Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) I 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. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As 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. And 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. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And 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. Note how Paul lists his Jewish credentials: he was a Jew, a native of Tarsus, brought up in Jerusalem, trained by Gamaliel, a follower of the Law, a zealous persecutor of the church, and a representative of the Sanhedrin. How could his countrymen not respectfully listen to a man with that kind of record! Instead of accusing them of participating in a riot, he commended them for being "zealous toward God." He admitted that he too had been guilty of having people arrested and bound, and even killed. He had them so spellbound by this point that they continued to listen even when he began to speak about his conversion.

Acts 22:11-21 And 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. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And 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. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And 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. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.

The Lord had told Paul to leave Jerusalem quickly, because the people would not receive his witness. But first, Paul debated with the Lord! He wanted to show the Jews that he was a new person and tell them that Jesus was the Messiah, and He was alive. If Paul won some of them to the Lord, it would perhaps help to compensate for all the damage he had done. But the Lord's command was, "Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles!" Paul was about to explain but the crowd would not listen to anything else he said after he uttered the word "Gentiles."

Many in the crowd were Jewish believers, holding Moses in one hand and Jesus in the other. They were so prejudiced that ...

- They didn't care that the Gentiles didn't know the one true God
- They didn't care that the prophets foretold the Gentiles coming in
- They didn't care that God was visiting the Gentiles by His Spirit
- They didn't care that they were persecuting God's messenger
- They didn't care that God was grieved by their actions and attitude

Acts 22:22-30 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. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, The 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. And 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? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. Then 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. 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.

When the captain saw the riot was starting again, he took Paul into the barracks for "examination by torture." The apostle had not yet mentioned his citizenship, but it was unlawful for a Roman citizen to be scourged. Once Paul exercised his rights, he was considered "innocent until proven guilty" – so the captain commanded the Jewish council to hear the case and decide if he had broken their law or if he was worthy of punishment.

When Paul was converted, God gave Ananias a prophetic word about this former persecutor of the church, that his ministry would include great suffering, and would take him before Gentiles, Jews and even Kings. At this point in Acts, the fulfillment of that word begins to accelerate ...

Acts 9:15-16 But 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: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Acts 23:1-5 And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then 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? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then 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. History records that this particular high priest was one of the most corrupt men ever to hold the office. He stole tithes from the other priests and did all he could to increase his authority. He was known as a brutal man who cared more for Rome's favor than for Israel's welfare. In calling the high priest a "whited wall," Paul was

Acts 23:6-10 But 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. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry: and 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. And when there arose a great dissension, 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.

Paul now wisely inserted a doctrinal issue into his testimony, declaring that the real reason he was being persecuted was his faith in the doctrine of the Resurrection. Paul knew that the Pharisees and Sadducees violently disagreed over this issue, and that it would divide the council and get the members disputing among themselves. So violent was the response that the captain and his men had to rush down to the floor of the council chamber and rescue their prisoner for the second time!

Paul wasn't just "playing politics" – he was absolutely right when he said that the real issue was the doctrine of the Resurrection. He wasn't referring to "resurrection" in general, but the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The entire testimony of the book of Acts centers on the Resurrection!

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.

Paul has received a word from the Lord before, during times of danger or discouragement. Here, Jesus lets him know that no matter what happens in Jerusalem, he will eventually get to preach the gospel in Rome. God is always walking with us, even if our difficulties seem insurmountable!

Acts 23:12-22 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. And 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. Now 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. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he 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. Then 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? And 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. But 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. So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.

Paul's life had been in danger from the very beginning of his ministry, when he witnessed for Christ in Damascus (Acts 9:22-25). During his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, the Hellenistic Jews tried to kill him (Acts 9:29). The Jews drove him out of Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:50-51) and threatened to stone him in Iconium (Acts 14:5). Paul was stoned in Lystra (Acts 14:19-20); and in Corinth, the Jews tried to get him arrested (Acts 18:12-17). In Ephesus, the Jews had a plot to kill him (Acts 20:19), and they even planned to kill him at sea (Acts 20:3). Paul truly suffered many things at the hands of his own countrymen – and now, more than forty of them have vowed not to eat until they kill him!

What are the chances that Paul's nephew would overhear this plot?!

It doesn't appear from history that Paul's sister and her son were even Christians, but God used them to protect Paul. He also used a pagan Roman captain, who didn't want to lose a prisoner in his custody, so he decided to send Paul to Caesarea and place him under the authority of the Roman Governor Felix. And in light of the evil plot that had been discovered against Paul's life, the captain even decided to give him an official military escort to protect him from the conspirators!

Acts 23:23-35 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; And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor. And he wrote a letter after this manner: Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. This 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. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. And 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. Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris. On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

Paul has now been delivered to Antonius Felix, the procurator of Judea, and he is under arrest until his accusers come to Caesarea to appear at his hearing. It is a frustrating waiting game, to say the least, and he has no idea how it will end. It would seem that his entire fate at this point is in the hands of unsaved men who may just decide to kill him on a whim.

But wait a minute! Paul traveled the sixty-five miles to Caesarea accompanied by a bodyguard of 2 centurions, 200 hundred soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen – a total of 472 people. And Paul didn't even have to walk this time – they gave him a beast to ride on. God knows how to protect you physically, and even more so spiritually!

David wrote these words in his "diary" when he was fleeing from Saul:

Psalm 34:1-8 I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

And Paul uttered these words when all the other Christians were afraid:

Acts 20:24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 23)

When Paul was converted, God gave Ananias a prophetic word about this former persecutor of the church, that his ministry would include great suffering, and would take him before Gentiles, Jews and even Kings.

Acts 9:15-16 But 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: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Most recently, Paul has been arrested on false charges of profaning the Temple in Jerusalem. He has been taken to Caesarea, the headquarters of Antonius Felix, the procurator of Judea, and he is under arrest until his accusers make the journey to Caesarea to appear at his hearing. It looks like his fate is in the hands of wicked men – but Paul knows better! In a few days, the high priest, some Jewish elders, and a lawyer appear ...

Acts 24:1-9 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. And 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, We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. 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. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.

The charges were ludicrous. Paul had been back in the city of Jerusalem less than two weeks, so he certainly didn't have time to stir up sedition and rebellion among the Jews. He hadn't even preached in the city! And when he went to the Temple, he simply went to worship; the records would show that he had paid the costs for four Jews who had taken a Nazarite vow, at the suggestion of James. Furthermore, he had brought with him an offering from various churches to benefit some of Jerusalem's citizens. Paul was keeping the law, not breaking it! The real issue is that he has been preaching the resurrection. The Pharisees believe this doctrine, but refuse to admit that Jesus rose from the dead!

Acts 24:10-21 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. Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But 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: 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. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.

Although Felix realizes that Paul is innocent of these trumped-up charges, he leaves him in custody and has repeated interviews with him over the next two years, hoping that eventually he will receive a bribe to secure Paul's freedom. Felix is convicted by these conversations, but not changed – he waits for a more convenient time, but it never comes.

Acts 24:22-27 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. And 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. 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. And 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 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. But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

2 Corinthians 6:2 (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)

After two years, Antonius Felix is recalled by Rome, and Porcius Festus takes his place. He appears to be more proactive than his predecessor – after only three days in office he makes an official trip to Jerusalem to meet with the Jewish council.

Acts 25:1-6 Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him. And 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.

The corrupt high priest asks if Paul can be returned to Jerusalem for a hearing, hoping to revive their two-year-old plot to assassinate him en route. But Festus tells the council that if they want to have another hearing, they can make the journey back to Caesarea.

Acts 25:7-12 And 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. While 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. But 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? 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. 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. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.

At this new hearing, the Jews merely repeated the same unproven accusations against Paul, who reaffirmed his innocence. When Festus saw that he wasn't making any progress, he asked Paul if he would be willing to move the hearing to Jerusalem. He was trying to please the Jews, and probably didn't realize that he would be placing the life of his prisoner in jeopardy. However, Paul for the second time exercised one of his rights as a Roman citizen – he appealed his case to

Paul's case, which took it out of the hands of the Jews for good. And it also would provide transportation to Rome, at the expense of the Roman Empire. Festus had one remaining problem – he couldn't send such a notable prisoner to Caesar with no legal charges against him. So when he had an official state visit from King Agrippa and his sister Bernice, he seized the opportunity to get help understanding the Jewish perspective.

Acts 25:13-21 And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. And 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: About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. To 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. Therefore, 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. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar.

Herod Agrippa II was the great-grandson of Herod the Great who killed all the babies in Bethlehem, and the son of Herod Agrippa I who killed James in Acts 12. Rome also had given him jurisdiction over the Temple, so it was a logical choice to ask for his opinion on the matter. Besides, he wanted to hear from this man who had stirred up the Jewish nation.

Acts 25:22-27 Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him. 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. And 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. 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.

In his flowery introduction before King Agrippa, Festus indicated that he wanted the king to examine Paul, but there is no record that he ever did. He only makes one statement: "Thou art permitted to speak for thyself." Paul certainly did defend himself, but at the same time he presented the truth of the Gospel in the longest of his speeches found in Acts. This is the third and final time Paul will give his testimony in Acts, and before it is over, we get the distinct impression that Paul has become the judge, and Festus, King Agrippa, and Bernice have become the defendants!

Acts 26:1-3 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: 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: Especially 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.

FIVE KEY STATEMENTS SUMMARIZE PAUL'S DEFENSE ...

"I LIVED A PHARISEE"

Acts 26:4-11 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; Which knew me from the beginning if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion **I lived a Pharisee**. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: Unto 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. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? 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, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

"I SAW IN THE WAY A LIGHT"

Acts 26:12-13 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, At 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.

"I HEARD A VOICE"

Acts 26:14-18 And 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. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But 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; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

The word minister in Acts 26:16 means "an under-rower" and refers to a lowly servant on a galley ship. Paul had been accustomed to being an honored leader, but after his conversion he became a subordinate worker; and Jesus Christ became his Master. No doubt it was a surprise to Paul after his conversion to hear that the Lord was sending him to the Gentiles. He had a great love for his own people and would gladly have lived and died to win them to Christ (Rom. 9:1-3), but that was not God's plan. Paul would always be "the apostle to the Gentiles."

"I WAS NOT DISOBEDIENT"

Acts 26:19-21 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, **I was not disobedient** unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

In spite of repeated discouragements and dangers, Paul had remained obedient to the call and the vision that Jesus Christ gave him. "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear ..." (Acts 20:24)

"I CONTINUE UNTO THIS DAY"

Acts 26:22-23 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

is one thing to have a great beginning, with visions and voices, but quite another thing to keep on going, especially when the going is tough. Such was the termination of the Apostle Paul!

This is everyone's testimony in a nutshell ...

I lived a Pharisee ... I saw in the way a light ... I heard a voice ...
I was not disobedient ... I continue unto this day ...

Paul had been addressing King Agrippa, but the strong conviction in the room caused the governor Festus to cry out ...

Acts 26:24-26 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For 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.

"THIS THING WAS NOT DONE IN A CORNER" ... If the resurrection of Jesus had been false, the message of the church would never have been able to gain a foothold in Jerusalem. And Festus knew this!

Acts 26:27-32 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And 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. And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

When Paul asked if Agrippa believed the prophets, he was forcing him to take a stand. Certainly the king would not repudiate what every Jew believed! But Agrippa knew that if he affirmed his faith in the prophets, he must then face the question, "Is Jesus of Nazareth the one about whom the prophets wrote?" So Agrippa tried to evade the question!

"ALMOST THOU PERSUADEST ME"

ALMOST. Agrippa went to hell for one word. **ALMOST.** If you remove that one word from Agrippa's confession it changes everything, but there's no such thing as an "Almost Christian." Can you imagine Agrippa in hell uttering one word over and over throughout eternity? **ALMOST ...**

Almost now is always never:
Almost Heaven is always Hell.
Almost saved is always lost.

ALMOST PERSUADED

"Almost persuaded" now to believe;
"Almost persuaded" Christ to receive;
Seems now some soul to say,
"Go, Spirit, go Thy way,
Some more convenient day
On Thee I'll call."

"Almost persuaded," come, come today;
"Almost persuaded," turn not away;
Jesus invites you here,
Angels are lingering near,
Prayers rise from hearts so dear;
O wanderer, come!

"Almost persuaded," harvest is past!
"Almost persuaded," doom comes at last!
"Almost" cannot avail;
"Almost" is but to fail!
Sad, sad, that bitter wail —
"Almost," but lost!

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 24)

Many scholars believe that Luke wrote the book of Acts as "evidence" for Paul's eventual trial before Caesar Nero. That's why he continually accumulates "official statements" to prove Paul was innocent.

Paul's appeal to Antonius Felix:

Acts 23:29 Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

Pereus Festus to King Agrippa:

Acts 25:25 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.

After Paul's final trial:

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. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

Paul's appeal to Caesar is what finally allowed him to go to Rome!

Acts 27:1-8 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. And 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. And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself. And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. And 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; And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.

Luke ("we") and Aristarchus rejoined Paul for his voyage to Rome. Although there is no evidence that either of them had been arrested, they were allowed to accompany him, giving up their liberty and no doubt risking their lives to help him. Later, Paul would even refer to Aristarchus as his "fellow prisoner" in Colossians 4:10. Of course, Paul was not the only prisoner that Julius and his soldiers were taking to Rome.

The centurion Julius found a coastal ship leaving Caesarea, so they embarked and covered the eighty miles to Sidon in one day. In Sidon, Paul was permitted to visit his friends. From Sidon to Myra, the voyage became difficult because of the contrary winds. At Myra, Julius found a ship going to Italy; so he abandoned the lower coastal ship and put Paul and the others on board this large grain ship from Egypt that carried 276 passengers (Acts 27:37-38). The strong winds again hindered their progress so that "many days" were required to cover the remainder of the journey. The ship finally made it to a port called Fair Havens.

Acts 27:9-13 Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, And 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. Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And 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. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.

The centurion now had to decide whether to winter at Fair Havens or set sail and try to reach the port of Phenice on the southern coast of Crete, about forty miles away. Paul admonished them to stay in Fair Havens. They had already encountered adverse winds, and it was now the start of the stormy season. "The fast" (v. 9) refers to the Day of Atonement, which was in the Fall; every sailor knew that sailing was difficult during the Fall months, and impossible during the Winter months. Paul had already experienced three shipwrecks (2 Cor. 11:25), so he was certainly speaking from experience. However, Julius gave little value to Paul's warning, and lived to regret it. Instead, he listened to the captain and owner of the ship who wanted to get to Phenice's more sheltered harbor. They had already lost a lot of time (v. 9), the winds were favorable at the moment (v. 13), and after all, it was only forty miles away!

However, the "soft wind" soon became "tempestuous" (from the same root word as "typhoon." Sailors called this kind of storm "Euroclydon" which means "a northeasterner." It was impossible to steer the ship, so the crew simply had to let it drift – and the winds pushed it many miles off course. The crew did everything they could – they pulled in the small boat being towed behind, they wrapped ropes around the hull, they took down the sails, they threw their wheat cargo overboard, and finally they even started throwing the ships furnishings overboard. They couldn't see the sun or stars to even determine their position, and their situation looked absolutely hopeless.

Acts 27:14-20 But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. And running under a certain island which is called Claudia, we had much work to come by the boat: Which 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. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

Sometimes we get ourselves into storms for the same reasons:

- Impatience
- accepting 'expert' advice that is contrary to God's will
- following the majority
- trusting 'ideal' conditions

Acts 27:21-26 But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and 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.

Paul began this journey as a prisoner, and ended up as a leader! He took over when it became obvious that nobody else knew what to do. But Paul had a word from God! After two weeks adrift, the ship was now more than 500 miles off course, and they were still not out of danger. But God had given Paul a promise, and everything was going to be all right!

Acts 27:27-32 But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen 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 lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day. 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, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off. At this point, the crew discovered that the water was getting shallower, indicating that land was near – and it appeared that the ship was headed straight for the rocks. In order to keep the prow headed toward the shore, they dropped four anchors from the stern. Some of the crew also tried to save themselves by fleeing in the small boat. However, Paul admonished the centurion that only those who stayed with the big ship would be saved, so they cut the smaller boat free before anyone could use it.

Acts 27:33-38 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. 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. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

In their final attempt to get the ship to land safely, they ate something to keep up their strength, then threw the remaining cargo overboard to make the ship as light as possible, and headed toward the shoreline. However, the ship ran aground and began to break apart.

Acts 27:39-44 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore. 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. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and 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.

Even the worst storms in life cannot hinder the purposes of God. Although Paul's COMFORT was definitely affected by the decisions and the unbelief of others, his ultimate DESTINY remained unchanged. And in the middle of the storm, God used him as a witness to all those around him. In fact, all of the prisoners would have died at the hands of the soldiers, had it not been for the influence of Paul. So, just as Paul had prophesied, every soul on board was spared, and they washed up on the shores of the island of Malta.

Acts 28:1-10 And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. And 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. And 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. And 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. And he shook off the beast into the fire and felt no harm. Howbeit 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. In 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. And 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. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.

To the Greeks, anybody who did not speak Greek was a "barbarian," but these island people proved to be kind and sympathetic. They were also superstitious, first believing that their gods had punished Paul by having a snake bite him, then believing him to be a god when he didn't fall dead. Over the next 3 months, the whole island experienced Paul's ministry.

Acts 28:11-16 And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. And 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. 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.

We don't know for sure if all 276 people boarded the Alexandrian ship, or just Julius and his prisoners. In Greek mythology, "Castor and Pollux" were the names of the twin sons of Zeus and were revered as the protectors of men on the sea. Many Roman ships bore their image. This time a "south wind" was exactly what the ship needed in order to make the voyage quickly and safely. Once they got to Puteoli, the centurion allowed Paul to stay with some believers for a week before continuing.

Somehow, word had gotten to the believers in Rome that Paul was coming. Julius and his party took the famous Appian Way and traveled 125 miles from Puteoli to Rome. One group of Christians met Paul at the Forum of Appius, and a second group met him at the Three Taverns, and Paul was greatly encouraged by their presence. While many of the prisoners were simply delivered to a common prison, because Paul was something of a "political prisoner" he was put under "house arrest" while he awaited his trial before Caesar Nero.

Acts 28:17-22 And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.

Paul called for the Jewish elders in Rome and explained that his appeal to Caesar was not an indictment against his nation, merely a defense against the false accusations made by some of the Jews in Jerusalem. They hadn't heard about Paul's troubles, but they had certainly heard about the new sect of people called "Christians." They wanted to know Paul's opinion, and arranged a time to have him address a larger group.

Acts 20:20-21 And when they had appointed a day, Paul came to them, and began to say, Men, I have seen many signs and wonders, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And 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, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For 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. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. After an entire day explaining that Jesus was the fulfillment of everything written in the Law of Moses and the writings of the prophets, some of the Jews believed and some refused Paul's message. And that's when Paul quoted Isaiah's prophecy about the Jewish nation having dull ears, closed eyes, and unbelieving hearts. Because the Jews for the most part wouldn't receive their own Messiah, God was now sending His salvation message to the Gentiles – and Paul said, "they will hear it!"

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

The book of Acts ends awkwardly and abruptly, because Paul is left under house arrest, guarded by soldiers, waiting again for more than two years for his case to be tried by Caesar. And we know from history that Nero will eventually have him beheaded. Certainly not a happy ending!

AKOLUTOS: In the Greek language, Acts ends with this single word. Biblical scholar I. Howard Marshall writes that "all the emphasis lies on that last phrase." The word means "unhindered," "unpreventable" and even "unstoppable." It suggests a wide-open field of opportunity.

Let's get this straight – Paul is chained to a Roman soldier, forcibly confined to his lodgings, and has been awaiting trial for several years – and Luke writes that he is "unstoppable"? **Is this God's idea of irony?** Paul immobilized by Roman chains doesn't exactly seem like a promising strategy for accomplishing the mission of the church!

Unstoppable?! He can't even leave his house! And meanwhile, Christians are being martyred wholesale in the city by the Emperor Nero who is on one of his rampages. Paul will soon be included in the killings, beheaded for the name of Jesus. **Unstoppable?!** Many of the newer Bible translations pick up on this term by saying something like "no one tried to stop him." But that is not the point – no one COULD stop Paul, because God was with him even though he was in chains!

Luke understands something that you need to understand. All of the judicial foot-dragging that has Paul mired in prison, the religious blindness that has caused the Jews to reject their own Messiah, even the massacres that are filling Rome's coliseums with Christian corpses ... none of these qualify as hindrances against the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because the church in Acts was **UNSTOPPABLE**. You could fight those Christians, persecute them, throw them to the lions, burn them at the stake, fill the catacombs with their bones – but you could not stop them! They were determined to turn the world upside down, and they did. They absolutely changed the world – and we are called to follow in their steps. We believe the same gospel, we preach the same message, we have the same commission and the same Holy Spirit as Peter, Paul, James, John, Barabbas, Silas, Timothy and the rest. We can do what they did! And so, "**UNSTOPPABLE**" stands as the last word on the subject!

Philippians 6:20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Philippians 1:12-14 But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

"If Paul can live for God in prison, then I can live for God in my situation!"

In his final letter, written to his young protégé Timothy, Paul lets us know that he doesn't expect a miraculous deliverance this time ...

2 Timothy 4:6-8 For 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.

However, years of trials, trouble and persecution have not soured Paul's attitude about the power of the gospel that he preaches ...

2 Timothy 2:9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.

There is another reason that the book of Acts ends awkwardly and abruptly ... it's because the book of Acts is not supposed to have an ending! The church that God purchased with His own blood, the church that the gates of hell cannot prevail against, the church that began on the Day of Pentecost, has never been killed or even defeated.

Paul died, but the church didn't die. His story ends in Acts 28, but the church's story continues today, because WE are in the same church!

You and I are writing "ACTS 29" with our lives. Let's make it good!

