

AN HISTORICAL CONFERENCE

Acts 15:1-35

Intro: Acts 15, the first 35 verses, marks an interlude between Paul's first missionary journey and his second journey. It identifies a problem which arose over the salvation of the Gentiles, the problem which became subject of the greatest controversy in the early Church: the relationship between the Law and the Gospel, or, in particular, whether or not the Gentiles should be forced to submit to the ordinances of the Law. Verse 1 of our chapter tells what was going on in Antioch; verse 5 shows that Barnabas and Paul faced the same problem when they got to Jerusalem. But, before we look at the details, it will be helpful for us to get the over-all view of our text.

Outline:FROM ANTIOCH TO JERUSALEM (Acts 15:1-5).

In Antioch (vv. 1, 2):

The problem (v. 1).

A determination (v. 2).

The trip to Jerusalem (v. 3).

In Jerusalem (vv. 4, 5).

THE CONFERENCE IN JERUSALEM (Acts 15:6-29).

Peter's remarks (vv. 6-11).

Barnabas and Paul's report (v. 12).

The outcome:

James' decision (vv. 13-21).

The delegation for Antioch: Judas and Silas (v. 22).

The letters (vv. 23-29).

IN ANTIOCH (Acts 15:30-35).

The letter read (vv. 30, 31).

The exhortation from Judas and Silas (vv. 32, 33).

The continuing ministry in Antioch (vv. 34, 35).

Obviously we are not going to take up this whole passage in detail, but there are three things about the passage that I want to concentrate on:

- 1) The first is the problem expressed in the words, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1).
- 2) The second is the solution to the problem -- and, specifically, how the early Church arrived at the answer to the difficulty.
- 3) Finally, I want us to notice what followed after the decision was made in Jerusalem.

These three points actually follow the divisions given in the outline above.

I. THE PROBLEM.

Note it again in Acts 15:1, and repeated in verse 5. (Read.)
From verse 5 we can see that it was not just a question of

circumcision alone, but of the relationship of the Gentiles to all of the Mosaic Law.

You can quickly see why this would be a problem when you stop to think how different it was for the door of faith to be opened, as it was, to the Gentiles. The doctrine of salvation had been perverted beyond recognition in our Lord's day, and in the days that followed, so it was not only necessary for the Gentiles to be taught the doctrine of salvation, but it was necessary for those Jews who were being saved to have their thinking about the Gospel straightened out!

Notice from verse 1 that the issue was the way of salvation. The "men . . . from Judea" were not just teaching that saved Gentiles should live according to the Law, but they was saying that this was the way to be saved.

Consequently, they were deceived, and were deceiving the Gentiles, about:

- 1) The place of work in salvation, and
- 2) The meaning of the work of Christ on the Cross.

While there certainly must have been differences among these Jewish teachers themselves, yet it is clear that human works had a major part in their thinking about salvation. They were openly contradicting the truth of Eph. 2:8, 9 and Titus 3:5. To them the Jew had a better standing with God, and a Gentile stood no chance of being saved unless he became as much like a Jew as he possibly could!

This probably was continually coming up -- as we can see from many of the NT Epistles. Every Epistle to the churches of the NT was written to a Gentile church -- from Romans through 2 Thessalonians, and even including the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Add to this the fact that Timothy was half Jew and half Gentile, and Titus was a Gentile. Cf. Acts 16:1 and Gal. 2:3.

The Apostles had been preaching that salvation was through Christ, and Christ alone. Personal merit was not a part of salvation. Ceremonies and ordinances were not a part. Even repentance and faith were a gift from God. The work of salvation, according to the Apostles, and according to the NT, is a work of God. Man can take no credit for it in any way. Salvation is by the grace and mercy of God.

Salvation cannot be partly of God and partly of man because the Word of God makes it very clear that it cannot be both ways. Cf. Gal. 5:4,

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. Or listen to this verse earlier in the same chapter, verse 2:

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.
So this is a question that is of the utmost importance. It cannot be Christ + the Law. It eventually has to come down to Christ OR the Law.

How was the problem to be solved?

The place to find the answer is given in verse 2 of our text: "Paul and Barnabas . . . should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question."

And so they went!

And when they got to Jerusalem they found the same problem there! See verses 4 and 5.

There have been many church councils since that time when major points of doctrine have been under consideration, but, because of the presence of the Apostles at this particular conference in Jerusalem, no conference has had the authoritative personnel that was at this conference, and no conference has been concerned with a greater issue.

But, from the way Luke has written the report of this Jerusalem conference, it seems very clear that the important thing that we are to see is the way in which the decision was reached.

So let us consider now

II. THE CONFERENCE IN JERUSALEM (Acts 15:6-29), or how those present arrived at THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM.

Let us begin by noting

A. The men who were there.

See v. 6 -- "the apostles and elders."

We learn also from v. 32 that "Judas and Silas" who eventually went back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas were "prophets"!

From this I want to remind you of a statement that Paul made in his Ephesian letter when he was speaking in particular about the Church, the body of Christ. He wrote that the Church was "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:20).

It is very important to know this as we consider that conference in Jerusalem. It means that those who were

gathered together to consider this question and come up with an answer were men who were endued with greater authority, divine authority, than any men who have ever lived from that day to this! Thus, these are not just an ordinary group of the Lord's servants; these were "apostles and prophets," men called of God to lay the doctrinal and practical foundation for the Church until our Lord shall return! My job as a teacher of the Word is not to originate my own ideas about the Church and about doctrine; my job is, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to interpret the teachings of the Apostles. They have been divinely authorized and empowered to give us the very Word of God.

So recognize this first of all.

Secondly we have

B. Peter's testimony (Acts 15:6-11).

Again let me remind you of another passage of Scripture -- this time from the words of our Lord in Matt. 16:18, 19, . . . thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell (hades) 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.

The Catholic church may have overemphasized this statement, but we have been inclined to ignore it. Peter had a special place in the plan of God for the Church, a place that no one else had -- and it is this Peter whose testimony we have before us. It cannot be accepted with anything but the highest authority.

He does three things that I want you to notice.

1. He points out the part that GOD had in his ministry. See vv. 7, 8, 9, 10.
2. He told them what had happened to the Gentiles. See v. 8, 9.
3. He told them what he had preached (v. 11), and what he had not preached (v. 10).

This alone was enough to settle the dispute for all time. but we have more.

C. The testimony of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:12). Note that they speak of GOD as Peter did.

To understand the point that Paul and Barnabas were making we need to go back to Acts 14, verse 3. You see, the miracles of God were proof that God approved of their preaching of "the word of his grace" (Acts 14:3). And if you go back to Acts 13:38, 39 you will see exactly what they were preaching.

Now, after this, there certainly would have been no need to call for any other witness. But we do have added testimony that puts the whole matter beyond any doubt.

D. The testimony of James (Acts 15:13-21).

Recently when I was speaking of Jude, the writer of the Epistle which bears that name, I expressed the possibility that, instead of being the half-brother of the Lord, he might have been the brother of James the son of Alphaeus, both of whom were Apostles.

The James that is referred to here could not have been James, the son of Zebedee, the brother of the Apostle John, because we had the record of his death at the hands of Herod in Acts 12:2. But I would like to suggest that this James in Acts 15:13 may not have been the half-brother of our Lord, but instead **James** the son of Alphaeus. It is only in the last century or two that support has been growing for the half-brothers of our Lord. The Church Fathers evidently felt that James and Jude, the writers of the two NT Epistles, were both apostles. This would certainly be more in line with the emphasis on authority that we find in the NT.

But, whoever this James was, he was the head of the church in Jerusalem, and spoke with real authority. His word was decisive, as v. 22 shows.

But what was his testimony?

It was the testimony of the prophet Amos -- Amos 9:11, 12. This is found in Acts 15:16, 17. But notice his comments beginning with v. 13 and going down through v. 18. (Read.)

Notice the expression, "all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called." The KJV of Amos 9:12 translates this phrase, " . . . and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this."

This is one of the Old Testament statements regarding election. What had been going on, the results that had been achieved, had not only been a work of God, but the very Gentiles who had been saved were those who had been

"known unto God . . . from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18).

God had saved them through the preaching of the Gospel of His grace, and He had saved the very Gentiles upon whom He had placed His Name "from the beginning of the world." They were to be encouraged to keep some aspects of the Law, but not in order to be saved, but because they were saved!

Now we are ready to see what followed.

III. THE ACTION WHICH WAS TAKEN BY THE APOSTLES.

- A. First, a letter was written, copies of which were distributed throughout Syria and Cilicia as well as in Antioch.

Thus, the decision was given a definite statement. The Apostles went on record as to their decision.

- B. Second, a delegation of two prophets went back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas to confirm the decision. They were Judas Barsabas and Silas.

The OT principle applied, that "in the mouth of two or three witnesses . . ."

- C. Finally, verses 32, 34, and 35 make it clear that a great deal of teaching was done for some time afterwards.

Concl: This did not mean that the trouble was over, but it did mean that the Apostolic decree had been issued, and that there need not be any question regarding the truth throughout all of the years to come.

What can we say about all of this as to its meaning to us?

Several things:

- 1) There is no question as to the way of salvation. The doctrine in Scripture is absolutely clear.
- 2) We should see that our hope for salvation stands on good authority -- the highest possible. There is no reason for anyone to doubt who has placed his faith in Christ.
- 3) We can certainly see the importance of this doctrine, and that we, too, must do all that we can to preserve it in its purity.
- 4) Note that faith is strengthened by teaching.
- 5) Finally, the importance of living a holy life -- which is taught in much the the Law had to say.

THE WIDENING CIRCLE

Acts 15:36-16:15

Intro: Our text marks the beginning of Paul's second missionary journey. It was a time of consolidation as well as of expansion. There was a widening circle of ministry as Paul and his co-workers went to places where they had not gone before. This journey was to take them into Europe, as far as Macedonia. Thus, there was a widening circle of people who were being touched with the Gospel of Christ, and there was even a widening circle of the Lord's servants who were involved in the ministry.

Luke gives just a brief account here of how Paul and Silas, joined along the way by Timothy and Luke, went from Antioch in Syria all the way to Philippi in Macedonia! He does not give any great detail about any place until they got to Philippi, but the Spirit of God led Luke to give us at least one important thing concern each place that was meant to help us in the ministry of the Word today. In some cases we have more than one thing of importance. This is a much more valuable passage than it might appear to be at our first reading.

By the time we are finished with this section of Acts I trust that the very mention of the following people and places and words will recall for you the wealth of truth that is here. In fact, as I mention them, you might want to see if they mean anything to you before we start. I have reference to:

- 1) John Mark.
- 2) Timothy.
- 3) The decrees of the apostles and elders.
- 4) Asia and Bithynia.
- 5) The vision at Troas.
- 6) Philippi and Lydia.

Let us take them up in order and spend just a few minutes on each one. First of all,

I. THE DISPUTE OVER JOHN MARK (Acts 15:36-41).

After Paul and Barnabas had spent some time (we are not told how much) confirming the believers in Antioch, Paul felt that they should go visit the churches that had been established on their first journey, and Barnabas agreed, but he wanted to take his nephew, John Mark, with them.

Paul objected -- and we read in verses 39 and 40 what the result was.

It is always a sad thing when something like this happens, but it teaches us that there are always going to be problems in the Lord's work.

Paul's objection to John Mark was because of what happened

at Perga in Pamphylia on their first journey when John Mark left them and went back to Jerusalem. We are not told why he went back -- just that he did! Perhaps the hardships were too much for him. Maybe he got tired of the travel. Or he may have had something to do in Jerusalem that seemed more important to him at the moment. We do not know. But the point is that he manifested spiritual immaturity by leaving them, and Paul evidently was afraid that he would do it again.

We could take sides with either Paul or Barnabas in this case, but it seems that Paul must have been right in this case because of what we read about "the brethren" in Acts 15:40. They evidently approved of leaving John Mark and for Paul to take Silas instead.

What John Mark had lacked was commitment. He left when the going got hard, or when he felt that he had something more important to do, but, as one writer has said (Calvin, XIX, 88) that John Mark had no more right to leave than a man has to leave his wife, or a son has to leave his father -- and I would add, than a soldier has to desert his army! Faithfulness is absolutely essential to anyone who is going to serve the Lord. As Dr. Edman of Wheaton College used to tell his students, "It is always too soon to quit!"

But what about John Mark? Was he finished as a servant of the Lord? What happened to him after he went with Barnabas to Cyprus -- do we hear of him any more?

Yes, we do hear of him, and the outcome should encourage all of us. Let me mention three things:

- 1) Both Colossians and Philemon indicate not only that John Mark was with Paul in Rome during his first imprisonment, but that John Mark was one of those who had been "a comfort" (Col. 4:10, 11) to Paul.
 - 2) When Paul wrote his last letter to Timothy, he said this about John Mark:

. . . Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

 Obviously the situation with John Mark was completely changed. (The above verse is 2 Tim. 4:11b.)
- But there is one other point of special importance:
- 3) John Mark was honored by the Holy Spirit as the writer of the Gospel which bears his name.

We must never give up on anybody who knows the Lord -- on ourselves, or anyone else! How easy it would have been to give up on Moses, or David, or Peter! God can make us profitable when we have been unprofitable.

But let us go on to what Paul has to say about Timothy.

We cannot spend a lot of time here, but we do need to note what is said about

II. THE CIRCUMCISION OF TIMOTHY (Acts 16:1-3).

Even though his mother was a Jewess, he apparently had not been circumcised because his father, a Greek, would not permit it.

But now Timothy is grown. Perhaps his father was dead. And not as a matter of compromise (a word which was not in Paul's vocabulary), but as a matter of principle, Paul has Timothy circumcised.

The principle is stated in 1 Cor. 9:19, 20a, 22b:

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 . . . I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

The point is this: We must never let minor issues stand in the way of our testimony for Christ. Being a needless offense to people can close doors that otherwise might remain open.

The third thing in this passage we have seen before so we do not need to spend much time on it except to notice that it is here. It is one of the most important things about the ministry of the Apostles. It has to do with what is said about

III. THE DECREES OF THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS (Acts 16:4, 5).

This is the equivalent of saying that they preached the Word of God.

It is important ^{to see} that even Paul did not choose his own message, but was bound to the Word of God.

But it is important also to note the result in verse 5. The saints will never be "established in the faith," nor will the number of the saints be "increased" apart from the faithful teaching of Scripture!

The fourth point has to do with a matter that is often overlooked today. It has to do with

IV. THE CLOSED DOOR TO ASIA AND BITHYNIA (Acts 16:6, 7).

Will you notice Who closed it? The Holy Spirit did. He opened some doors; He closed others. Cf. Acts 14:27. And as hard as this might be for us to understand, the Holy

Spirit sovereignly kept the people in these areas from hearing the Gospel at this time. WHY?

The answer is to be found in the heart of God alone.

But one thing is certain: It points out that it never has been the Lord's intention to save everyone. If that were His intention, everyone would be saved!

Nor can you say that the Holy Spirit knew that people in that area would not be receptive to the Gospel, because people in and of themselves are never receptive to the Gospel. The Lord does not work on the basis of what He knows men will do, but according to His eternal purposes.

We are commanded to preach the Gospel to all men, but let us not be surprised if God closes certain doors. He knows what He is doing, and we need to be looking at His plans, not at ours.

(On this point, Calvin has an excellent section in Vol. XIX, pp. 96-98.)

Look at what happened next.

V. THE VISION AT TROAS (Acts 16:8-10).

After closing one door, the Lord opened another.

This is a famous vision. Missionaries often speak of it. It meant that the Gospel was going to Europe for the first time.

But there is one word in the call that I want you to see. It is the word, "help" -- "Come over into Macedonia, and help us."

Apart from the different way the Lord guided in this particular case, it is highly instructive for us to notice this word "help" in view of what people are saying these days about wanting their needs to be met.

People think that they know how they can be helped. Many professing Christians talk about this constantly -- and they go from church to church to find a place where their needs can be met! But what are they looking for? Usually they are looking for some kind of a program, or some kind of an opportunity for themselves, or for a husband, or for a wife. But how did the Lord indicate to Paul and Silas that they could help the Macedonians? Just one way: BY THE PREACHING AND TEACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD. And there is no other way for people to have their needs met today. Let us not be turned away to other things!

One more point:

VI. PHILIPPI AND LYDIA (Acts 16:11-15).

I could speak about how disappointed Paul and Silas and Timothy and Luke must have been when they got to Philippi. They did not find that people were standing in line to hear the Gospel. In fact, the first one to respond was not even a man, but a woman, and she was not a Macedonian, but an Asian from Thyatira!

But I am going to resist the temptation to talk about this.

I could also talk about the special way the Lord kept Paul and his co-workers in Philippi -- by the insistence of Lydia that they stay in her home. The Lord had more work for them to do.

But I am going to resist that, too.

Instead I want to point out to you how Lydia was saved. Again we see evidence that God, in the exercise of His grace, discriminates.

She was not interested because she was different from the others, or more brilliant. The reason she listened and believed was because the Lord opened her heart!

And He did not do that for anyone else who was there at that particular time!

What did the Lord open her heart to? Verse 14b says, "that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." What was he giving to the women who were there. He was giving them the Gospel, the Word of God. Nobody will listen to the Gospel unless the Lord is touching their hearts.

And this ties right in with Rom. 10:17, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

So the Lord opened her heart to the Word of God, gave her the gift of faith, and she was saved. She would never have turned to the Lord of her own will, but God worked in her so that she willingly, and gladly, did His will by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, lest we be confused about this, we cannot overlook the providence of God in all of this. The Lord brought Paul to the very place where Lydia was, touched her heart, and made her receptive to the Gospel.

Let us bring this down to our situation in this service.

I do not believe that anybody is here by accident today. I do not believe that people will listen to this message on the radio, and here it just by chance. Our God does not depend upon chance!

But neither do I believe that everyone who hears this message will necessarily be saved.

But I do know this: That if you are hearing this message, it could very likely be because the Lord has brought you here because He intends to save you. You know if the Lord has been speaking to you, and, if He has, you will not need a lot of pleading from me to get you to trust Jesus Christ as your Saviour. My job is to tell you of Christ; it is the Lord's work to use that Word as He sees fit. My prayer is that the Lord will open the hearts of any who do not know Christ, but that is up to Him. I must tell you that Christ died for sinners, and that if you believe in Him, you will be saved.

Concl: What a wonderful passage this us -- telling us of how God led, and God blessed, so that churches were strengthened, and people were led to the Lord -- people who, as the Word of God teaches us, were chosen for salvation from the foundation of the world!

Perhaps the Lord has been working in your heart since you got here this morning. Maybe He has been working with you for a long time. You have not been seeking Him, but He obviously has been seeking you. What an encouragement are Isaiah's words in Isa. 65:1,

I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not . . .

THE QUESTION OF ALL QUESTIONS
Acts 16:16-40

Intro: At this point in Paul's ministry he was on his second missionary journey. He is in Europe, in Macedonia, and in Philippi, which was a Roman colony. Silas, Timothy, Luke, and possibly others, were with him. They had just been encouraged by the salvation of Lydia, an Asian, and her household. She had "constrained" them to stay with her -- possibly an indication that Paul and his co-workers were ready to leave Philippi. But their work in Philippi was not completed yet!

The remainder of the chapter gives us some very interesting and instructive history.

It all began with a situation that was most distressing to Paul -- the demon-possessed girl who followed him and the others for "many days" (v. 18a) "saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation." (See v. 17.)

This was followed by the first miracle of Paul in Philippi when she was delivered.

This infuriated her masters who could no longer make any money from her "soothsaying" (v. 16), and so they stirred up the whole city against Paul and Silas. The Lord's servants were beaten, and then cast into prison where for the first time they were put in contact with the jailor.

Paul and Silas, apparently unable to sleep, were praying and singing praises to God at midnight when the Lord opened the prison with a great earthquake. The jailor who had been asleep, was awakened, and seeing the doors of the prison open was ready to take his own life because he thought the prisoners were all gone. Paul stopped him, AND THAT IS WHEN A GREAT CHANGE BEGAN TO TAKE PLACE. Instead of taking his life, he asked THE QUESTION OF ALL QUESTIONS: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

We not only have the gist of Paul's answer in verse 31, but we see in verse 32 that this was followed by a more extensive answer.

The result was that the jailor was saved, and so was his family!

By morning the magistrates had changed their minds about Paul and Silas, and ordered that they be released.

But Paul objected to the way they were going about it, and was able to inform them for the first time that they were Roman citizens, and that they had been beaten and cast into prison without a trial before the people.

The magistrates "besought them . . . and desired them to depart out of the city" (v. 39), which they did after they had paid a last visit to the church in Lydia's house.

In this account we see much evidence of what God was doing:

- 1) The providence of God in the way all of this came about.
- 2) The protection of God over His servants, even though they had a difficult time.
- 3) The peace of God which Paul and Silas had.
- 4) The purpose of God, suddenly apparent when the jailor indicated by his question that he wanted to be saved.

Finally,

- 5) The power of God -- in the miracles that were performed as well as in the order of events which are related in our text.

BUT IT IS CLEAR THAT THE MAIN EVENT IN THE CHAPTER WAS THE SALVATION OF THE PHILIPPIAN JAILOR. AND WE MUST NOT FORGET THE VISION WHICH PAUL HAD HAD IN TROAS OF "A MAN OF MACEDONIA" WHO HAD SAID, "COME OVER INTO MACEDONIA, AND HELP US." Was this the man?

Now we can see how the Lord used Lydia to constrain Paul and Silas to remain; God had more work to do through them!

Even the trouble with the demon-possessed girl, while a work of Satan, was clearly a part of what God was doing to bring Paul and Silas into contact with the jailor. Satan was using a different tactic, "transformed into an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14), but Paul was not deceived even though all that the girl was saying was absolutely true. No compromise could be made with the Evil One, and this is what led to the beating, and then to the imprisonment.

Thus we see Satan's two primary weapons in this account:

- 1) Imitation.
- 2) Persecution.

But now let us look at the salvation of the jailor and his family. And the first thing that we want to note is

I. THE SUDDEN CHANGE (Acts 16:29, 30).

Why was he the one out of all of the masters, the magistrates, the prisoners, and the people, who did this? In view of the fact that in his heart he was no different from the rest of the people in the city, why did this man do what he did? Why the sudden change in him when just a few hours before he had shown that the situation regarding Paul and Silas did not bother him in the least because he had gone to bed and right to sleep?..

There can be only one answer: the Philippian jailor was one

of the elect of God, and God was drawing the jailor to himself.

Men never come of their own, so-called, free will! Men come to Christ because they are drawn to Christ by God, the Father -- and for no other reason! Cf. John 6:44 and 37, "No man can come . . ." and "All that the Father giveth . . ."

But it was especially significant that he asked the question that he asked -- and that he asked a question at all!

II. THE QUESTION (Acts 16:30).

For the significance of this, cf. 1 Peter 3:8-15.

What does it mean to "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts"? It means to do just what Paul and Silas did -- praying and singing praises to God, setting the Lord before them, trusting the Lord even when the outcome seemed very, very dark! Surely they must have felt that they should not have let Lydia talk them into staying in the city.

What an illustration Paul and Silas give us of Phil. 4:6, 7.

He did not ask how he could be happy, or even how he could have the peace that Paul and Silas had, nor the power. Nor did he ask for the solution of his problems. But he wanted to know how he could be saved -- what he could do to be saved!

III. THE ANSWER (Acts 16:31).

There is only one answer. Cf. Acts 4:12; John 14:6. Salvation is only through Christ -- even today!

And it is a personal matter: "and thy house." They were not saved because the jailor believed, but they must believe too.

Note this emphasis in vv. 31, 32, 33, 34 -- and even in the case of Lydia in v. 15.

Here is some encouragement regarding God's purpose in salvation, and with regard to the doctrine of election: When the Lord saves parents it is an indication of His will regarding that family! Thus election should encourage us, not discourage us.

However, this does not mean that it is all automatic. Our children must hear. We must live consistently before them. We must pray for them. They have to believe. But the encouragement is obviously here.

Note also that this explanation was supported by much other truth. See verse 32. In other words, it was not just the simple statement of verse 31, but the jailor and his family were told about Christ, Who He is, what He did, what it means to believe, etc.

What happened? He obviously believed, and so did his family, not only because it says so in verse 34, but because in other ways also we can see

IV. THE EVIDENCE OF SALVATION (Acts 16:33, 34).

Some of it was external; some of it was internal.

The external is mentioned first.

A. The external evidences.

1. He "washed their stripes."
2. He "was baptized, he and all his."
3. "He brought them into his house."
4. "He set meat before them."

B. Both external and internal -- he "rejoiced."

C. The internal evidence: "believing in God with all his house."

The jailor and his family could never be the same again because of what the Lord had done in their lives.

Concl: Have you ever asked THE QUESTION OF ALL QUESTIONS?

No question can possibly be of any greater importance, nor even remotely approach the importance of this question.

But it is not only important to ask the question, but it is absolutely essential that you get the right answer. The true answer is given to us in the Word of God. No other answer can possibly lead to salvation and to the forgiveness of sins. Make sure that you ask the question, that you know the answer, and that, in your heart, you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. You are not saved just because you know; you must believe!

THE MESSAGE GOD USES
Acts 17

Intro: Acts 17 gives us the record of the ministry of Paul and Silas in three places: Thessalonica and Berea in Macedonia, and Athens in Achaia. In reading the book of Acts you should consult a map frequently to see where the places mentioned are.

The ministry in Thessalonica is recorded in Acts 17:1-9.

The ministry in Berea is recorded in Acts 17:10-14.

The ministry in Athens is recorded in Acts 17:15 to the end -- v. 34.

In all of these places people turned to the Lord:

- 1) In Thessalonica, cf. v. 4.
- 2) In Berea, cf. v. 12.
- 3) In Athens, cf. v. 34. See also the encouragement given in v. 32b.

It is only in connection with Paul's ministry in Athens that we are given an extended report of what he said when he preached. Concerning his ministry in Thessalonica all we have is given in vv. 2, 3. Concerning Berea, vv. 11 and 13. But his message in Athens is given in vv. 22-31.

The brief accounts in the first two instances ought to make us realize that the more extended account regarding Paul's message in Athens was also abbreviated. In fact, after the first recorded message in this book, it seems that Luke indicated that this is what he was doing -- giving us a digest of the messages, not a word-for-word account of all that the Apostles, and others, said. I am thinking about Acts 2:40,

And with many others words did he testify and exhort,
saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

So we ought to read Paul's message on Mars' hill in Athens realizing that Paul said more on each point that is mentioned than we have recorded here, but we have the main points recorded for us.

I am always inclined to turn away from writings that are abridged. No two men would abridge another man's work in exactly the same way. I have mentioned to some of you that several years ago I bought a set of Spurgeon's sermons, only to find out later that everything, or almost everything, that had to do with Spurgeon's Calvinistic views had been edited out of the series! Men will do that. All of us are aware of the fact that the news media, and often our politicians, give us what they think we ought to hear, and not a full account of all that happened.

But when we come to the Word of God we do not need to be fearful

that something vital is being left out. In the Word of God we are reading what the Holy Spirit has given to us, not just what men have written. The Holy Spirit, being God, will not, cannot lie. It is His purpose to give us the truth, to give us the vital facts of apostolic preaching. He does not attempt to deceive us, but, as the Lord Jesus said in John 16:13, "He will guide you into all truth." So we can read Acts 17 fully assured that the Holy Spirit has not permitted the writer, Luke, to leave anything out that is important for us to know if we are going to learn why Paul and Silas and Timothy, and possibly others, were used in the salvation of people in all of these places that are mentioned in Acts 17. They said much more than is recorded here, but they did not touch on any subject that the Spirit of God has not had Luke mention here.

Now the one thing I am concerned about this morning is this: What was there about Paul's preaching in these places that God used as He did? Was there something about Paul's preaching that is lacking in ours today? There may be many reasons why there is so much preaching today, but so little lasting fruit. But for the moment, let us examine Paul's preaching. What did he do? What did he say?

Several things stand out in this chapter which will help us.

I. FIRST, AND MOST OBVIOUS, IS THE FACT THAT HE PREACHED THE SCRIPTURES.

Note verse 2 and the first three words of verse 3.

Note also verses 11 and 13.

And then note that even though Paul referred to the Athenian poets in the latter part of verse 28, yet as far as the rest of his message on Mars' hill was concerned, Paul was dealing with facts that he had learned from the Scriptures -- at this point, the Old Testament Scriptures!

"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17) -- so the first lesson that we need to learn about preaching and witnessing is that we have no right to expect that people will believe unless we give them that which the Lord uses to bring them to faith. Faith is impossible apart from the Word of God!

And we must be very careful to note that Paul did not try to defend the Word of God. He did not reason with the Thessalonians about the Word of God, but "out of" the Word of God. There is a vast difference.

We need to remember the truth of Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is quick . . ."

II. THE SECOND THING TO NOTICE, PROMINENT ESPECIALLY IN PAUL'S MESSAGE IN ATHENS, IS THAT HE PREACHED GOD. PAUL'S PREACHING WAS GOD-CENTERED.

Look at Paul's sermon in Athens. Every verse from verse 23 on to verse 31 has to do with God!

He told them that God was their Creator.

He spoke of the attributes of God -- of His greatness, His immensity, of His self-sufficiency, of His sovereignty, of His grace, and of His wrath.

He spoke of the will of God both regarding salvation and regarding the day of judgment which has already been set.

It was obvious to Paul who was angered by the idolatry of the Athenians (see v. 16) that they were doing what they were doing in all of their idolatrous practices because they really did not know God!

Paul did not even hesitate to speak of the inscrutable ways of God -- a difficult subject which preachers often avoid in any way they can. I refer to the words, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at" (v. 30a), that is, for a long time He did not do anything about it. PAUL DID NOT FEEL THAT HE HAD TO DEFEND THE SCRIPTURES; NEITHER DID HE FEEL THAT HE HAD TO MAKE EXCUSES FOR GOD! He did not feel that God owes us an explanation for what He has done, or for anything that He will do!

What a difference it would make in our preaching if we were faithful in declaring the glory of God, the majesty of God, the absolute sovereignty of God. When this has been done in the past, God has honored His servants, and people have believed.

But notice another feature of apostolic preaching.

III. IT WAS CHRIST-CENTERED.

There is no conflict between being God-centered in our preaching, and being Christ-centered. In fact, you cannot really be God-centered unless you are Christ-centered. You cannot honor the Father unless you honor the Son also. Men cannot come to God unless they come through Christ.

What did Paul say about Christ?

-- He proved that He was the Messiah, the One Who was anticipated throughout the Old Testament, the seed of Abraham and the seed of David, the heir to the throne of Israel, the Redeemer of men.

- He proclaimed His Deity, and yet at the same time declared His perfect humanity. You can see these in the references to "Christ" and to "Jesus."
- He taught the true suffering and death of Christ.
- BUT HE ALSO LEFT NO DOUBT BUT THAT JESUS CHRIST HAD BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD. This was a dominant theme in all apostolic preaching. See Acts 17:3, 18, 31. The reference also in verse 11 to "those things" must also be a reference to Paul's teaching about Christ.
- He declared the purpose of His coming into the world.
- BUT HE ALSO LEFT NO DOUBT BUT THAT ANOTHER DAY WAS COMING, AN ALREADY-SET DAY OF JUDGMENT, AND THAT JESUS CHRIST WOULD BE THE JUDGE.

All that Paul had to say had to do with Christ. To tell the Apostles "that they should not speak in the name of Jesus" (Acts 5:40) was telling them that they could not speak!

Their message was Christ-centered.

How different their preaching was from much that we hear today! Thank God there are those who speak of Christ, but they are too few in number.

One more thing:

IV. HIS PREACHING WAS SALVATION-CENTERED.

Why did Christ come? Why did He suffer, and die? Why was He raised from the dead? Why preach about Him? Why not let people alone if they are religious? Why tell men about our God if they have gods that they are already worshipping?

There are two main reasons:

- 1) Because all men are under divine judgment because of their sins -- and the day is coming when that judgment will be executed in full measure.
- 2) Because the Apostles believed, and the Scriptures make it perfectly clear that there can be no deliverance from that inevitable judgment except through the sacrifice of Christ -- and His resurrection!

Note Paul's emphasis in vv. 26, 27; in v. 30; in v. 31.

There was authority in Paul's preaching. The authority of God was set before men, whether they were Jews or Gentiles. Verse 27 gives us God's purpose for me. Verse 30 gives us His command. Verse 31 shows why men need to be saved, and the inescapable nature of divine judgment unless sinners turn to Christ.

In contrast with this clear evidence in the Word of God

there are some very alarming things being said by certain men in our day who claim to be evangelical -- and it is this: That God will make some special provision for the salvation of people who have not heard of Christ!

Listen to two quotations.

One writer who has written a major work on the history of missions in referring to the heathen who have not heard of Christ, says this:

The heathen on the other hand will have a much easier time. But he will not go scot free. He had the light of creation, providence, and conscience and will be judged by that light. If he is finally condemned it will . . . be . . . because he failed to live up to the light he had (quoted by Ron Blue in Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 138, No. 552, p. 343 from Herbert Kane's book, Understanding Christian Missions).

Here is another:

Of one thing we can be certain: God will not abandon in hell those who have not known and therefore have not declined His offer of grace. Though He has not told us the nature of His arrangements, we cannot doubt the existence and goodness of them (Op. cit., from Clark Pinnock's article, Why Is Jesus The Only Way?).

What is it that the Lord has said in the Word about adding to the Word of God?

Do you want to know what I think about such teaching? I consider it nothing less than blaspheming the Word of God. If any man can be saved without Christ, then all men could have been saved without Christ -- and the coming of Christ into the world was, after all, not really necessary.

Will there be people in heaven who are their by their own works, there without Christ as their Saviour? ABSOLUTELY NOT.

Talk about teaching that kills missionary zeal -- this is it! The Bible leaves no hope at all for anyone who is without Christ!

Concl: What is THE MESSAGE THAT GOD USES? It is Bible-centered. It is God-centered. It is Christ-centered. It is salvation-centered. And it is all of these in the very sense that it was true of the preaching of the Apostle.

What was the result? See Acts 17:6. May the Lord be pleased to do the same thing again in our day!

FROM ATHENS TO ANTIOCH
Acts 18:1-22

Intro: We come in this passage to the close of the second missionary journey of the Apostle Paul. When Paul left Athens on his way back to Antioch he was to visit two of the most important cities in all of his ministry: Corinth, which was just a few miles away, and Ephesus, which was across the Aegean Sea to the east.

Paul's stay in Ephesus on this occasion was very brief. Acts 19 tells of a more extended visit of two years. But Paul's ministry in Corinth was over a year and a half.

One reason for saying that Paul's ministry in these two places was so important is because of the strategic place that these cities had in the Roman Empire. But their importance is seen also from the divine standpoint in that Paul wrote more to Corinth under divine inspiration than he did to ~~any~~ ^{any} other church, and his Epistle on the Church, the Body of Christ, was destined originally to go to the church in Ephesus!

So, although Paul did not know it at the time, these places were to figure largely in his own ministry as well as in the future ministry of the Gospel.

In many respects, the record of Paul's ministry in these places was like that in the cities he had visited before -- he arrived, began meeting with the Jews, experienced some blessing, also strong opposition (although he seems to have had a fairly easy time on his first visit to Ephesus), and then he left. But there are some special things in connection with both of these cities which should be profitable for us to notice, and to learn.

Let us consider, first of all, the things that happened to

I. PAUL IN CORINTH (Acts 18:1-18a).

The first thing that should impress us is

A. The insignificant beginning (Acts 18:1-3).

He did not stay with those who ~~have~~ ^{had} been in Corinth for a long time, but with a man and his wife who were newcomers, displaced persons, who would not have had a great deal of influence with which to help Paul. We even learn later that they went on to Ephesus with Paul.

It seems from this that the Lord ordered Paul's ministry there so that the glory for the results could only be given to God Himself! Every servant of the Lord has to

learn that God uses humble people, insignificant people, and circumstances that seem to promise so little, because He wants the glory for Himself! Remember the words in Isaiah 42:8,

I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another . . .

Add to this what some of the Corinthians said even about the Apostle Paul:

. . . his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.

How this should encourage us when we look at ourselves, and at our circumstances. But God is in all of this, and let us be encouraged to believe that God will use us for His glory. He could have chosen others, but He chose us. We are not His by default, but by divine planning.

But let us notice another thing which led to great blessing, and to fierce opposition, too! It is what we might call

B. The Pauline method (Acts 18:4, 5).

I hesitate to speak of his ministry in this way because today it seems that the Church is looking for quick and easy ways of doing the Lord's work. Acts 17:2 refers to "his manner," but let us not think for a moment that Paul went from city to city with what we might call a canned message. He did not! He never gave a method of four or five or six points on how to win people to Christ. Instead he did what is described in verses 4 and 5 of our text. (Read.)

A. T. Robertson (III, 267) says that many things are indicated by the words that are used here. Paul would begin by speaking. He would ask questions, and answer questions. He carefully selected passages from the Old Testament which seemed to be appropriate in showing them Who the Lord Jesus Christ was! He sought to stir them up to think, and then he would exhort them to believe in Christ. But the instrument he used was the Word. His subject was Christ and salvation. He did not expect to see great results immediately, but week after week he continued to teach and to explain and to exhort.

Verse 19 informs us that when he got to Ephesus he did the same thing!

Are you and I ready to do this? Do we know the Bible well enough to take someone who doesn't know anything about it, and tell them about Christ, why He came, and what it means to be saved? Are we depending upon our

abilities, or upon the Spirit of God to use His Word?
Are we looking for instant results, or do we see that it takes time to reach people with the Word of God?

If we are going to see God's blessing here in Portland, it is important to know the conditions under which His blessing has been given in the past.

But notice a third thing:

C. The results (Acts 18:6-8).

There were two kinds -- fierce opposition, but also many who believed.

This was the case wherever Paul went -- and we must be prepared for the same. Not everyone is going to believe. Some are going to hate us for what we preach. But this must not stop us!

Now it is at this point that we need help -- and it should encourage us to see that Paul evidently needed help, too. We must not think of him as some kind of a superman who was unmoved by threats upon his life. He was subject to the same fears that we are, and the proof is

D. The vision he received from the Lord -- with its message (Acts 18:9, 10).

It was not common for Paul to receive such revelations.

We should also note that God does not give us needless or meaningless messages. The things that the Lord said to Paul here were things that Paul needed. The words indicate that Paul was afraid, and that he was inclined to be quiet, to say no more -- and so the Lord had to strengthen the faith and bolster the courage of His servant.

Let me read the words to you again, and note especially the two reasons why Paul was not to be afraid:

- 1) "For I am with thee."
- 2) "For I have much people in this city."

Do you know what each of these means?

The first does not just mean that the Lord was there, but it means that the Lord was there to bless Paul, that the Lord was on his side!

The second gave Paul a glimpse into the sovereign, divine plan, which was being carried out in Corinth.

There were people in Corinth appointed by God for salvation who were going to be saved. Paul was not to trust in his ability to persuade the Corinthians to receive Christ (although he sought to persuade them), nor was he to trust in the willingness of the Corinthians to trust the Lord. Paul's hopes were to be set on the Lord, and on the fact that the Lord had a work to do there that had its roots in eternity past.

Listen to some words which were spoken by our Lord while He was here on earth -- words recorded for us in John 10. They are found in verses 16, 26-28.

You see, those who believe are sheep before they are saved -- which means that they are the elect. They must be reached. They will most certainly be saved. We do not know who they are, or where they are, BUT GOD KNOWS, and that is why He did not want Paul to leave Corinth yet. The work was not done!

What about our work today?

We can be sure that the Lord would never have raised up Trinity Bible Church if He did not have a work for us to do, people who must be reached.

If we bear testimony to Christ, using the Word of God, seeking only the glory of God and of Christ, the Lord will bless us, too!

What followed this vision?

E. A time of peace (Acts 18:11).

After the way things had started, you would never think that this could happen -- quietness for "a year and six months" -- but that is exactly what happened. The Lord bottled up the opposition so that for 18 months they couldn't do anything!

What evidence that the Lord was "with" Paul!

But then notice this last thing with regard to Corinth:

F. The faithfulness of God toward Paul (Acts 18:12-17).

Remember the words of the Lord in verse 10: " . . . no man shall set on thee to hurt thee . . ." The Lord did not promise this in every place, but He did as far as Corinth was concerned -- and He kept His promise! Sosthenes was beaten, but that was all!

Note how tenderly Paul wrote of Sosthenes in 1 Corin-

thians 1:1,

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ
through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother.

But now let us move on for just one point in connection with

II. PAUL IN EPHEBUS (Acts 18:19-21).

Verse 18b tells us that Paul left Corinth by ship, that Aquila and Priscilla went with him, and about the vow. Verse 22 tells us about Paul's trip from Ephesus back to Antioch. But verses 19-21 are the verses we need to note in particular.

Verse 19 tells us that Paul did again in Ephesus what he had done in each place before -- meeting with the Jews, and reasoning with them out of the Word of God. We do not need to repeat what has been said before.

But, for a final word of instruction, note verses 20, 21 -- and especially the words, "if God will."

The Ephesians wanted Paul to stay. He did not feel that he could. But he promised to come back again -- "if God will."

How quickly and completely we make our own plans -- and we even presume to make the Lord's plans for Him! And yet we all know that we do not have the slightest control over the next minute! The future is entirely in the Lord's hands. Our steps are ordered by Him, not by us! Cf. Psa. 37:23. Calvin wrote:

. . . because there reigneth in men so great arrogancy everywhere, that they dare determine anything (passing over God) not only for the time to come, but also for many years, we must oftentimes think upon this reverence and sobriety, that we may learn to make our counsels subject to the will and providence of God . . . yet is it good to accustom ourselves to use certain forms in our speeches, that they may put us in mind that God doth direct all our doings (Vol. XIX, p. 198).

Listen to these verses:

1 Corinthians 4:19,

But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.

1 Corinthians 16:7,

For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit.

Hebrews 6:3,

And this will we do, if God permit.

James 4:13-15,

Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye yought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

Proverbs 27:1,

Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

We need to think this way about our lives, trusting the Lord to guide us, to provide for us, to protect us, each moment of each day, but we need to think this way about the Lord's work, too. It is popular with churches these days to make long-range plans -- and to expect to stay with them. But the Lord leads us a step at a time. He asks us to walk with Him for the present moment, trusting Him to show us what the next step will be, opening to us doors of opportunity and blessing which we could never expect to see otherwise.

How good it is to be able to trust in the providence and in the sovereignty of our great God!

Concl: There is a lot for us to learn in these chapters, isn't there?

Let us pray that we will not be forgetful hearers, but that we will learn from Paul and his ministry so that we, too, will be able to see the Lord's blessing in this place as we fearlessly proclaim His Word, trusting Him to use it where and when He shall see fit!

THE WAY OF GOD
Acts 18:23-19:7

Intro: From the time Paul left Ephesus toward the end of his second missionary journey until he got back to Ephesus early in his third journey, a Jew by the name of Apollos arrived in that city. Apollos then left Ephesus before Paul got back, and he went on to Corinth where his name became associated with the Apostle Paul.

This was the Apollos about whom the Apostle Paul wrote,
I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase
(1 Cor. 3:6).
Thus, they became co-workers, but at this time it does not seem that they knew each other.

Apollos was from Alexandria in Egypt. (Egypt is mentioned in Acts 2:10; Alexandrians, in Acts 6:9.) Alexandria was a great commercial center as well as a great center of learning for both Jews and Gentiles. It had the greatest library in the world, and, it is said, that it provided the greatest educational opportunities of any city in Apostolic times! Apollos was probably a well-educated Jew, but it was not with great secular learning that he came to Ephesus. It was as "an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures."

Verse 25 says that "this man was instructed in the way of the Lord" -- "instructed" being the Greek verb from which we get our English word, catechized. He had received oral instruction in the scriptures, and he knew "the way of the Lord" -- but not perfectly! He had some problems regarding "the baptism of John," an expression which seems to be synonymous with the ministry of John -- the distinctive ministry which God gave him.

When we get down into the first 7 verses of Acts 19, after Paul arrived, he found that there were 12 other Jews who had the same problem. They were believers, but they were followers of John.

And so we see that Aquila and Priscilla sought to help Apollos the same way that Paul sought to help the 12 Jews after he got to Ephesus. It is described in Acts 18:26 as helping them to understand "the way of God more perfectly," which means more accurately, or more exactly. It is the comparative form of the word, "diligently," in verse 25 which should be translated, accurately, or exactly, or correctly (Alexander, p. 182).

Apollos knew the Word correctly as far as he had gone, but he had not gone far enough. It indicates that God was moving His people ahead to another phase in His dealings with them.

Let us begin, then, by taking a look at

I. THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

We need to look, first of all, at

A. John the Baptist in prophecy.

He was mentioned by two prophets: Isaiah and Malachi.

1. In Isaiah 40:3,

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness,
Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight
in the desert a highway for our God.

The importance of this verse is demonstrated by the fact that it is quoted in all four Gospels: Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4 (and Luke quotes Isa. 40:4 in Luke 3:5); John 1:23.

Note in particular the statement, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." John the Baptist did not have, in the plan of God, a permanent place of ministry, but one in which he was preparing the people of Israel for the coming of the Messiah. And baptism seems to have been the key issue.

2. In Malachi 3:1,

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall
prepare the way before me . . ."

This also is quoted in the NT -- three times: Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27.

Again we have the statement, " . . . and he shall
prepare the way before me . . ."

B. John the Baptist in history -- at that time, very recent history.

His message was this: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2).

Matthew also tells us,

Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins (Matt. 3: 5, 6).

When he realized that certain Pharisees and Sadducees came to be baptized, but had not repented, you may remember that he said to them,

O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father:

for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham (Matt. 3:7b-9).

He also told them,

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 (Matt. 3:11).

And the Apostle John gives us some interesting truths in connection with John the Baptist's ministry, especially after John the Baptist positively identified the Lord at the time of the Lord's baptism. He said,

- 1) Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29).
- 2) And I knew him not (i.e., previously): but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water (John 1:31).
- 3) And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God (John 1:34).

Note these great truths because this would mean that Apollos would have known about the Deity of Christ, about the atoning death of Christ, and about the superiority of Christ to John the Baptist. So these could not have been the areas of his deficiency.

Add to this what our Lord said about John after John had been cast into prison. The Lord did not go to release him, and John was greatly disturbed by his circumstances. He sent two of his disciples to the Lord asking, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3). But then just afterwards the Lord said to the multitudes concerning John the Baptist,

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least (or, less) in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he (Matt. 11:11).

Two ~~things~~ stand out from all of these passages:

- 1) John was ministering to Israel alone.
- 2) His ministry was definitely a transitional ministry.

Now let us look at

C. John the Baptist as the Apostles understood his ministry.

Take the Apostle Paul as an example. When he was preaching in Antioch of Pisidia in Acts 13, he said this:

When John (the Baptist) 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 (Acts 13:24, 25).

This statement tells us the same think that the words of the Lord tell us:

- 1) That John the Baptist ministered exclusively to Israel, and
- 2) That John the Baptist was not setting himself up for a permanent following, but came at a special time in history, a very special time, to prepare the way for the Lord.

These facts give us a clue to what Luke meant when he wrote in Acts 18:25 that Apollos knew "only the baptism of John."

But let us take just a moment with

II. THE MINISTRY OF APOLLOS.

Luke says that he was "mighty in the scriptures" (Acts 18:24), and that he was "instructed in the way of the Lord . . . and taught diligently the things of the Lord . . ." (Acts 18:25).

This does not sound like someone who needed to be saved! Instead, Luke tells us that Aquila and Priscilla "took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly," meaning more accurately, more exactly, more correctly. (See Acts 18:26). This is the comparative form of the word "diligently" which Luke used in verse 25.

By the way, the word "instructed" in verse 25 of our text is the Greek word from which we get our English word, catechized. Alexander says that it speaks of "oral elementary instruction" (p. 182).

THIS EVIDENTLY WAS APOLLOS' PROBLEM: HE UNDERSTOOD ABOUT CHRIST. HE DID NOT THINK THAT JOHN THE BAPTIST WAS THE MESSIAH. BUT HE HAD NOT SEEN THAT OUR LORD'S MINISTRY WAS TO GO BEYOND THE BORDERS OF ISRAEL, AND THAT AN ENTIRELY NEW PHASE OF THE LORD'S PLAN WAS BEING INTRODUCED -- A PART WHICH JOHN THE BAPTIST DID NOT LIVE TO SEE, JEW AND GENTILE BEING UNITED TOGETHER IN THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST.

Apollos went on to Corinth. The Apostle Paul came to Ephesus. It was he, not Apollos, who was to help the Jewish believers, twelve of them, out of the same problem that Apollos had had -- the problem which was very common among these early Jewish con-

verts. And so let us look now at

III. PAUL'S MINISTRY IN EPHESUS TO "THE TWELVE" (Acts 19:1-7).

We cannot say that these men were not true believers because the evidence is to the contrary. Paul himself recognized that they had "believed" (Acts 19:2).

The question, however, would be better translated, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you ~~believed~~?"

Obviously at this point in the early history of the Church things were still in transition. This question is never asked in the Epistles! Instead you have statements about the Holy Spirit such as are in 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 and Romans 8:9.

We find in this passage a repetition of what took place in Acts 2, Acts 8, and Acts 10. But it is never repeated in the NT after this!

Two significant things happened here:

- 1) These believers who had been baptized "unto John's baptism," a peculiarly Jewish baptism, were re-baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus."

There is no indication in the Gospels that John the Baptist ever used the words of Matthew 28:19, ". . . in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

So John's baptism, and baptism in the Church, are not the same. John's baptism was for believers in Israel in anticipation of the coming kingdom; baptism in the Church speaks of our union with Christ in His death and resurrection -- and therefore our union with each other in Christ, as members of His body.

- 2) The other thing that happened is that these twelve disciples received the Holy Spirit in His permanent indwelling, and that evidence of that was seen in the twofold result: "they spake with tongues (i.e., Gentile languages), and prophesied" (Acts 19:6b).

It is significant that the Apostle Paul was the one whom the Lord used in this situation, and that He did not use Apollos. Later Paul wrote to the Ephesians that the Church was "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:20).

These Jews had been born again by the Spirit, but they had not yet experienced the fulfillment of our Lord's prediction in John 14:16, 17, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter . . ."

Concl: What are we to learn from this extremely important passage of Scripture?

We are to learn:

- 1) That the ways of the Lord are different as we go through Scripture. The Jews were wrong in their desire to hold on to the old ways, to the observances of the Law, to reserve Christ just for themselves.
- 2) That even though we might be well instructed in many things, perhaps in most things, we can always know "the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:26).
- 3) That none of the Lord's servants is even to share the glory at all with our Lord Jesus Christ. We must not even be for Paul like those Ephesian Jews were about John the Baptist.
- 4) That this is the age of the Holy Spirit -- and that if we do not know how the Spirit's work is different today from what it has been in the past, we, too, need to know "the way of God more perfectly."

Those who have been saved since the Day of Pentecost have a relationship to the Holy Spirit that no generation of believers ever had prior to that time. Thus, we need to know what the Spirit's work is, and to know it well. It would seem that the Ephesian Jews were giving John the Baptist the place that only the Holy Spirit could take.

May God Himself give us real understanding in these truths that are so vital to His glory and to our blessing and usefulness!

SPIRITUAL WARFARE IN EPHEBUS
Acts 19:8-41

Intro: Whenever the Word of God is preached with power, and especially when it is preached in a stronghold of Satan, spiritual warfare results. The forces of Satan arise, and everything possible is done by men and demons to silence the Gospel message and overthrow the work of God!

This is what happened in Ephesus, and throughout the Roman province of Asia -- the area which we have known as Asia Minor, and which today is Turkey.

At the beginning of Paul's second missionary journey he and Silas had wanted to go into Asia, but they "were forbidden" by the Holy Spirit to do so. (See Acts 16:6.) However, Paul did visit Ephesus briefly at the end of that journey, just before he went back to Antioch -- and at that time he promised to return to them, "if God will" (Acts 18:21).

In Acts 19 we have the account of part of Paul's third journey and the whole chapter is devoted to his time in Ephesus, and Asia.

It is significant that his first ministry in Ephesus had to do with the believers who were there ** and that had to do with their baptism in water "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5), and to their reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:6). It seems that God's work in the hearts of His people always precedes any significant work among the lost. Therefore, if we are concerned about evangelism and missions, we need to expect that the Lord will be dealing with us first.

There were many participants in this Spiritual Warfare in Ephesus. Some could be seen; others could not. They were:

- 1) Paul and his co-workers.
 - 2) The unbelievers in Ephesus.
- They were the participants who could be seen.
The unseen participants were:
- 3) God.
 - 4) Evil spirits.

It is very significant that it was in his Ephesian letter that Paul wrote, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but . . ."

Let us note what Luke records with reference to all of these -- and we will start with

I. PAUL.

He was not alone. Throughout the chapter we find the names of Timothy and Erastus (v. 22), Gaius and Aristarchus (v. 29), and Alexander in v. 33. And there may have been more.

But the emphasis is on Paul.

A. First, on his preaching.

This is always the case. They went everywhere to preach the Word of God, and this is what Paul and his co-workers did!

B. The places he preached:

1. He started in the synangogue.

This was his habit, but he had also been invited, as Acts 18:20 indicates.

When his message was rejected there,

2. He moved to "the school of one Tyrannus" -- which seems to have been the Gentile counterpart of the synangogue. It was not actually a "school," but a meeting place for speeches, discussions, etc.

In the third place

3. Paul's ministry extended throughout Asia.

See v. 10b.

See also the latterppart of v. 22.

Paul probably made trips throughout Asia, but also people coming to Ephesus from other parts of the province would carry the message back with them. An amazing ministry was being carried on.

It is not possible to separate the workings of all who were involved in what was going on in Ephesus and Asia at this time, and we need to understand this as we go on to speak of

II. THE EPHESIANS WHO DID NOT BELIEVE.

Three things are said about them initially in v. 9:

- 1) They "were hardened."
- 2) They "believed not."
- 3) They "spake evil of that way before the multitude."

Men despise and oppose the preaching of the Gospel, the preaching of the Word of God. But that fact did not keep Paul from preaching because he knew that the only way the hearts of men could be reached was through the preaching of the truth. Cf. Heb. 4:12 and Rom. 10:17.

Now we do not know the details of what had taken place, or

that was taking place, but we can read those words, "were hardened," and we can link them, as we should, to 2 Cor. 4: 3, 4,

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

"Blinded" means hardened. While Paul was preaching, Satan was at work!

What a solemn thing it is to hear the Gospel! Every person who hears needs to know that there are unseen powers who are present to deepen his spiritual blindness -- and that the only way that blindness can be turned to sight is through the Word of God and through the grace of God.

But we will come back to the opposition in connection with God's work in just a moment.

But let us see further evidence of Satan's work; It has to do with

III. THE EXORCISTS AND THE EVIL SPIRITS.

"Exorcists" were itinerant Jews who "undertook to expel demons by the use of spells or charms" (Alexander, p. 195).

And note a very important detail about Satan's working. When open opposition fails, he will use counterfeit measures. Note the words which they used according to v. 13 -- probably because they had heard Paul use them!

But the whole thing backfired on them (see vv. 14-16), and the result was just the opposite from what they had desired! See vv. 17-20.

Now, notice an interesting thing about this chapter: After verse 21, no Member of the Godhead is mentioned throughout the rest of the chapter, nor is any further mention made of Paul's ministry except in v. 22b. Reference is made in v. 26 to what he had done, and in v. 30 to the fact that he wanted to go into the Amphitheater, but no more ministry, no more words!

But it is evident that GOD is at work!

And so let us look at what is indicated in the chapter about

IV. GOD.

We have already noticed how the work of the exorcists backfired. That had to be of God. But let us notice what is said about

A. The miracles (Acts 19:11, 12).

They were done "by the hands of Paul," but "GOD wrought" them!

And they were "special miracles" because God had not worked this way before. It was to show beyond any doubt that this was a work of God because even Paul had not performed miracles in this fashion before!

Paul did not even have to be present, but it was well-known that the "handkerchiefs and aprons" had come from him.

The second thing that we have noticed about God's working had to do with

B. The exorcists.

There is no need to say any more about them. Just notice that God overruled their evil plan.

But we do need to see

C. The providence of God with Demetrius.

This occupies over half of the chapter -- from verse 23 on to the end of the chapter!

This is something like the book of Esther -- God is not mentioned in this section, but it is obvious that He is at work. Only God could have delivered His servants in the way in which they were delivered.

But note that the ministry of the Gospel in Ephesus presented a threefold threat to Demetrius and the Ephesians:

- 1) It threatened to do away with their wealth, their business. See vv. 25 and 27a. This was their first concern.
- 2) It threatened their goddess -- Diana (Roman), or Artemis (Greek).
- 3) It threatened the exalted reputation of their city. See v. 35. This was the kind of a distinction that was coveted throughout the Empire.

But the interesting thing about this divine intervention is the source of the help: the Ephesian "townclerk" -- who was probably like our mayor, and possibly one who had been appointed by Rome! His very presence as well as his speech could calm a whole mob!

How amazing are the ways of God! Do you remember how

the Lord used Gamaliel back in Acts 5:33 ff.?

Remember also the words of Mordecai to Esther when the Jews were threatened by Haman:

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place . . ."
(Esther 4:14a).

THE QUESTION IS NEVER IF GOD WILL HELP HIS PEOPLE; IT IS ONLY WHEN AND HOW!

Here "the townclerk" is added to that long list of unregenerate men whom the Lord has used as His servants. The Church had been established in Ephesus. The opposition was, for the moment, stopped. And the Lord's servants moved on (see Acts 20:1 ff.) to their next assignment.

But, apart from the fact that God is faithful to His people and to His servants, why did He intervene here in Ephesus in such a miraculous way?

Let me call your attention to that cry of the Ephesians which is mentioned in vv. 28 and 34 -- a cry that was heard without interruption for about "two hours"! It was as though saying it made it so! "GREAT IS DIANA (or, ARTEMIS) OF THE EPHESIANS."

Let me call your attention to the word, "GREAT."

Do you know that this is an attribute of God? It means high, exalted, majestic!

The Ephesians were doing something that God will not tolerate: They were giving to Diana the glory which belongs to God alone! He only is worthy of our worship. He alone is high, exalted majestic.

Over 700 years before this the Lord had spoken some words through Isaiah the prophet which apply here. Listen to the words of the Lord:

I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. This is Isa. 42:8.

Let me cite another word -- this one from David, 1,000 years before Christ:

Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. This is Psalms 29:1, 2.

Men and their gods may appear at times to be great, to have the upper hand, BUT THERE IS NONE GREATER THAN GOD! And there is no greater blasphemy than to give worship to others, or to things, or to the ways of men, which belongs to God alone!

Concl: Yes, there was SPIRITUAL WARFARE IN EPHESES -- and the victory was God's.

This was but the foreshadowing of an even greater victory which is predicted in Phil. 2:9-11,

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.

Some day every person hearing the sound of my voice will acknowledge Who Jesus Christ is. But then it will be too late for those who have not trusted Him as Saviour. Let not your heart be hardened even more by another rejection of the Saviour, but trust Him now and enter into the kingdom of God!

PAUL AND THE EPHESIAN ELDERS

Acts 20:1-38

Intro: It has been estimated by many that, from the time that Paul left Ephesus at the end of chapter 19, until he was back with the Ephesian elders at Miletus (as recorded in the twentieth chapter), that three, or possibly four, years elapsed.

During those years he visited the places that are mentioned in the first fifteen verses of Acts 20:

- 1) Vv. 1, 2a -- he went back across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia.
- 2) Vv. 2b, 3a -- he went south into Greece (Achaia), probably in Corinth. During the three months that he was there he may have written Galatians, and most certainly wrote Romans.
- 3) Vv. 3b-6a -- he went back to Macedonia, and then leaving Philippi, he sailed back across the Aegean Sea to Troas with 7 fellowworkers who are mentioned in Acts 20:4.
- 4) Vv. 6b-12 -- he was in Troas. Here he remained for 7 days, and it was here that Eutychus fell out of a window asleep while Paul was preaching.

After Paul left Troas he went down the coast of Asia visiting a number of places which are only mentioned until he came to Miletus.

- 5) Vv. 13, 14a -- Assos.
- 6) V. 14b -- ~~Mitylene~~.
- 7) V. 15a -- Chios.
- 8) V. 15m -- Samos.
- 9) V. 15m -- Trogyllium.
- 10) V. 15b -- Miletus. The rest of the chapter, to verse 38, tells about his ministry to the Ephesian elders at Miletus. This was about 30 miles from Ephesus, and so it would have taken the elders a full day to get there from Ephesus -- and a full day going back.

Why Luke did not give us more information about what took place in all of the cities which he mentioned, we do not know. It was probably because nothing of special significance happened. It is consistent with the way Luke has written Acts to concentrate on certain places, and only to mention others -- so there is nothing unusual about the chapter. But clearly the emphasis is upon his time with the Ephesian elders.

Verses 17 through 38 are important for two reasons:

- 1) They give us an excellent portrait in words of the Apostle Paul himself -- possibly the best in all of the NT.
- 2) They give us Paul's understanding of the nature of the NT ministry.

It is obvious that Paul is defending himself against many verbal accusations that his enemies were making against him, but it is

also clear that he was there to encourage the Ephesian elders in their ministry. It is very probable that the Ephesian elders had a major part in the training of elders in most other places throughout Asia -- and that this would be a part of the reason that Paul wanted to spend time with them.

It is fairly easy to see what Paul did from the words which Luke has recorded for us:

- 1) He spoke mainly of his own ministry, past, future, and present.

He begins with this -- down to verse 27, and then he concluded with this in verses 33 through 35.

- 2) From verse 28 to verse 32 we have his words to the elders about their ministry.

So, let us take his words in the same order that they are given in the chapter:

- 1) Paul's ministry (vv. 17-27).
- 2) The elders' ministry (vv. 28-32).
- 3) Final words about Paul's ministry (vv. 33-35).

I. PAUL'S MINISTRY (Acts 20:17-27).

ONE REASON THAT PAUL'S WORDS ABOUT HIS OWN MINISTRY ARE SO IMPORTANT IS BECAUSE THEY GIVE US THE PATTERN FOR EVERY NEW TESTAMENT MINISTRY DOWN TO THE PRESENT DAY!

Note first of all

A. His understanding of his ministry.

It is seen in such words as:

- 1) "Serving the Lord" (v. 19a) -- as a bondservant.
- 2) In v. 24 he spoke of "the ministry which I have received of," or, from, "the Lord Jesus."

Here is an extremely important point: While Paul was obviously working with people, and serving them, yet he was first and foremost a servant of Jesus Christ.

He stated in Gal. 1:10 the point that he made here:
" . . . or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."

There is a great release from bondage to men when we realize who we are! Paul's liberty is brought out when we see what he said to the elders about his message. We will come to that in a moment.

The second thing about Paul's ministry that we need to note is

B. His manner of ministry.

This had to do both with Paul as a person as well as with the way he did his work.

Look carefully at these statements:

- 1) "With all humility of mind" (v. 19).
- 2) "With many tears" (v. 19) -- mentioned again in v. 31b.
- 3) His diligence. He carried the battle to the enemy. We see this in several statements:
 - a) " . . . have taught you publicly, and from house to house" (v. 20).
 - b) "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks . . ." (v. 21).
 - c) V. 26 -- " . . . I am pure from the blood of all men."
 - d) V. 31 -- " . . . and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."

And all of this was in spite of the trials and persecutions that he had faced in Ephesus -- and that he knew he would face in the days to come. Note:

- 1) His reference to "temptations" in v. 19 -- trials, opposition, persecution, bodily injury, etc.
- 2) And read verses 22-24.

How many of us can say what Paul said in verse 24? Paul's ministry was especially precious to him because of the One from Whom he had received his call!

The Jews were his special enemies, but he took the Gospel to them anyway. See v. 19 again.

But let us hurry on to look at

C. His message.

This is brought out by several statements which Paul made:

- 1) V. 21 -- "Testifying . . . repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."
- 2) V. 24 -- " . . . to testify the gospel of the grace of God."
- 3) V. 25 -- " . . . preaching the kingdom of God . . ."
- 4) V. 27 -- "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

In connection with this last statement note Paul's words at the beginning of verse 20: "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you . . ."

Not only did he speak about repentance, and faith, and grace, and the kingdom of God, and the counsel of God, but he held nothing back!

How different this is from twentieth century preaching where we seem to feel that we can preach what we want to, and forget the rest!

Nothing could be more profitable for all of us than to spend much time dwelling on all of these words which Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders on that occasion. Luke has recorded them for us under the direction of the Spirit of God because they are for us just as much as they were for the Ephesian elders.

But let us move on to the next point:

II. THE EPHESIAN ELDERS' MINISTRY (Acts 20:28-32).

Paul spoke to them:

- A. About their care for themselves: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves . . . " (v. 28). The verb means that they were to hold their minds on themselves with constant, anxious care!

Cf. Prov. 4:23.

Secondly,

- B. About the people of God: "Take heed . . . to all the flock of God, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers (bishops), to feed (shepherd) the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

Note every detail in this tremendously important statement --

- * we see Who the flock belongs to.
- * ~~We~~ we see Who has appointed the elders and placed them where they are.
- * we see what the flock needs.
- * we have a statement of our Lord's Deity.
- * we have a declaration of the truth of particular redemption. Cf. also Eph. 5:25, " . . . as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it."

One reason for all of this was to be seen in what Paul said then about

- C. About their enemies (vv. 29, 30).

They will come from without, and from within.

Note what the Lord said in Matt. 7:15 and John 10:12.

Opposition to the true grace of God is inevitable, but

we must be prepared spiritually, and we must prepare and guard the flock of God!

What hope do we have that such a work can be done? What hope did Paul have?

D. About God, and His Word -- Acts 20:32.

This is a prayer. Paul was leaving, but God was staying, and His Word was there!

And then we come back at the end of Paul's message to a word which seems very strange as a conclusion. Note:

III. FINAL WORDS ABOUT PAUL'S MINISTRY (Acts 20:33-35).

It has to do with money:

- 1) What Paul himself had done -- his attitude.
- 2) What the elders must do.

And, as an encouragement to them, the Spirit of God causes Paul and Luke to give us a beatitude from the Lord that is not recorded any other place in Scripture: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Happiness does not come for anyone from seeking money, but from giving money. The Lord Jesus said so.

Concl: Vv. 36-38 -- a most tender and moving scene as Paul said "good-by" to the Ephesian elders.

This is a passage that needs to be written into the heart and life of every elder, every deacon, every member of the flock of God. This passage is just as current today as it was almost 2,000 years ago when Paul spoke these words. We need the same humility, the same tenderness, the same fearless diligence, the same devotion to our Lord, the same concern for those whom the Lord died to save, the same trust in God and in His Word. If we follow the example set by Paul in his life and in his ministry, God's blessing will be upon us for God's own glory as it was upon the Apostle Paul -- and on the work of the Lord in Ephesus.

Note, however, what eventually happened: Rev. 2:1-7, esp. v. 4.

PAUL AT JERUSALEM
Acts 21:1-40

Intro: Acts 20 is an especially significant chapter because the words of verse 33 in the chapter, as one commentator has expressed it,

"eventually proved to be the end of his ministry at large, and the commencement of his long apostleship in bonds" (Alexander, J. A., p. 280).

It seems clear that Paul was imprisoned twice, and in Rome twice as a prisoner. This was the beginning of the first. But things were actually never the same again.

In order to have the proper perspective on Paul's desire to go to Jerusalem, we need to have a little background: Note:

- 1) Acts 18:21 -- although the statement, "I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem," has been disputed by some authorities.
- 2) Acts 19:21. Note the words, "purposed in the spirit," a very probable reference to the Holy Spirit.
- 3) Acts 20:16.
- 4) His words to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:22-24. Note the words: in v. 22, "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem" -- another probable reference to the Holy Spirit, which probability is increased by the reference to the Holy Spirit in verse 23.

It is important to keep these statements in mind so that we will not feel that Paul was actually violating the will of God by what he did.

But, from his standpoint, why did he want to go to Jerusalem? Our text would indicate at least three reasons:

I. PAUL'S REASONS FOR GOING TO JERUSALEM.

There were three reasons in particular -- the first that I will mention is not in Acts 21, but it is mentioned later; the other two are in this chapter, and the last is confirmed by a statement that Paul made to the Ephesian elders:

- A. To bring alms and offerings to the saints in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17; Rom. 15:25-29).
- B. To report to the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-20).
- C. To preach the Gospel in Jerusalem (Acts 21:37-40).

Note how this is confirmed by the words we read a moment ago in Acts 20:22-24, esp. v. 24. Paul had some inkling that his ministry was coming to an end, and it was the will of God for him to preach in Jerusalem before it did.

But now let us look for just a moment at

II. THE WARNINGS ALONG THE WAY.

These must be put with what Paul said in Acts 20:23.

There are definitely two in Acts 21, and probably a third:

A. Acts 21:4.

Paul had gone from Miletus to Coos (an island) to Rhodes (another island) to Patara (all in Acts 21:1), then he sailed to Tyre where this first warning was given (vv. 2, 3), then he went down the coast to Ptolemais (v. 7), on to Caesarea (v. 8) -- where he received the other warnings, finally arriving in Jerusalem (v. 17).

So we see why Luke has given more time to Tyre and to Caesarea than to any other places in Paul's journey from Miletus to Jerusalem: It was in these places that the warnings came.

B. Acts 21:9.

This is only probable, but there seemsto be no other reason for mentioning Philip's daughters, and that they prophesied, except that they warned Paul, too.

C. Acts 21:10, 11 -- apparently the same Agabus mentioned in Acts 11:27-30.

The only real problem is with theffirst one, but this seems to have been, in the light of the preceding passages we have read, a warning that he should not go up to Jerusalem "if he valued his own ease and safety" (Alexander, p. 260).

Why would these warnings be given?

- 1) To prepare Paul for what was ahead.
- 2) To move the hearts of the believers to support him in prayer.

His response and attitude are given in Acts 21:13. (Read.) This confirms his desire to preach in Jerusalem (1) the Lordship of Christ, and (2) thesaving work of Christ.

Not let us move on to all that happened in the beginning of his time in Jerusalem. First,

III. THE REPORT TO THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS (Acts 21:17-20a).

Note in v. 19 how Paul stated his report, and then in v. 20a

how the Apostles and elders responded. "Particularly" indicates that it was a detailed report -- perhaps much like the chapters which we have just been through in Acts.

But the Apostles and elders knew that Paul was in trouble. See Acts 21:20b-22. And they knew that it was serious trouble.

Note carefully

IV. THE CHARGES THAT WERE TO BE PLACED AGAINST PAUL.

Although others were to be added, we have the two primary ones in verse 28, expressed shortly afterwards by "the Jews which were of Asia" (v. 27). They were:

A. That Paul was trying to do away with the Law.

B. That Paul had desecrated the holy place, the Temple.

These were the very charges that were brought against Stephen, resulting in his death -- and Paul had been there! See Acts 6:9-15.

The issue was clearly salvation. The Jews had distorted what Paul was preaching. Behind the two expressed objections was a third objection that was also to come to the surface: that Paul had been preaching to the Gentiles! Note Acts 22:21, 22. And a fourth objection was to be included: Paul's preaching of the resurrection! See Acts 23:6.

All of these continued to be tremendous issues of conflict in the early Church, but it is encouraging to note that, while Paul sought to conciliate where he could, he never backed down on the truths of the Gospel -- and neither can we!

In rapid succession, the chapter concludes with

V. FOUR SIGNIFICANT EVENTS.

The first one was:

A. Paul's attempt to conciliate the Jews (Acts 21:20b-26).

We cannot tell exactly why the four men had taken a vow upon them, but it may have been a Nazarite vow, or some preparation for a special feast day.

We must be clear in recognizing that no compromise on Paul's part was involved. The temple was still standing. Many things were in a state of transition. Paul's

actions in entering into this vow with the four would have clearly demonstrated one purpose of the Law which was in solid support of the Gospel message: that men are not fit to stand before God without purification from sin and from all defilement of the flesh!

But this was all to no avail because we see that before the seven days of purification were completed we read about

B. The Jews' attempt to kill Paul (Acts 21:27-30).

Notice how the Apostles and elders had described the myriads of Jews in v. 20 -- "how many thousands of Jews there are which believe . . ." And now they were ready to kill Paul. See v. 31a. How can we explain this? If they were believers, how could they be potential murderers, especially since the Apostle John teaches us in 1 John 3:15,

Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

We must come to the same conclusion that we see today in many, many instances: There are those who profess to believe, who give in outward agreement with many of the doctrines of the Christian faith, BUT WHO HAVE NEVER BEEN SAVED! And if this happened without pressure (which was the method of the Apostles), how much more is it true today with all of the pressure we put on people to receive the Lord!

"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7: 20) -- not just by what they say!

What happened?

Thank God, Luke was able to record that there was

C. A providential intervention by God Himself (Acts 21: 31-34).

No other explanation can possibly be the right explanation. The Jews could not kill Paul yet because his work was not finished.

We might say that the Roman captain just happened to hear, and he just happened to bring his men to quell the riot, and that it just happened that he was able to rescue Paul -- BUT WE REALLY KNOW THAT GOD WAS BEHIND IT ALL!

Listen to Paul's own account given in his last epistle:

But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all THE LORD delivered me.

Paul was always careful to look behind the actions of men to see the work of God!

And so it was God Who was at work here in Acts 21.

One more thing:

D. Paul's request to speak (Acts 21:37-40).

Next week, the Lord willing, we will examine what Paul said, but for now I want you to notice his request.

Why did he want to speak? Was it to vindicate himself so that his life would be spared?

No! Paul did not know what was ahead -- except that troubles were ahead, and maybe even his immediate death. No, it was not for himself that he wanted to speak, but for the sake of the Jews who wanted to kill him. Perhaps he remembered the impression made on his own heart when he saw Stephen die, and he felt that there might be others just like he was out there in that angry mob -- men appointed by God to eternal salvation.

J. A. Alexander, in his commentary written over 100 years ago, has expressed the situation in the following words:

Having thus asserted his respectability, he makes it the ground of a request, not for his own advantage, but for that of his kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom. 9, 3), his love for whom could not have been more clearly proved than by his asking to address them at such a juncture, when his life had just been rescued from their fury by the interposition of a Roman soldier. To the people ($\lambda\alpha\omicron\upsilon$), not the multitude ($\pi\lambda\hat{\eta}\theta\omicron\varsigma$), or the rabble ($\delta'\chi\lambda\omicron\upsilon$), but the chosen people as there represented.

And then he adds:

There is something grand in the position here assigned to the Apostle of the Gentiles, in the custody of the Gentiles, yet by their permission speaking to the Jews, not only in the Holy City, but in sight of the temple, and on the very verge of its sacred enclosure, which he had just been accused of wantonly profaning. So far, he could not have begun . . . his apostleship in bonds,

in a more imposing or auspicious manner.
(The two quotations are found on pp. 290, 291.)

Could we have any better illustration that the attitude of our Lord toward His enemies from the Cross, and the attitude of Stephen as he was dying, was also the attitude of the Apostle Paul at this moment -- not filled with resentment and hatred, but filled with love, proclaiming the sovereign grace of God to angry sinners who did not know what they were doing!

Concl: Do we love the Lord like this? Do we love the Gospel like this? Are we this thankful that the Lord has saved us? Do we have this kind of an understanding about the call that we have to proclaim the Gospel? Do we want to finish our course "with joy"?

May God enable us to see that our task is not to convert men, but to witness to them -- to preach the Gospel to them. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to determine ~~how~~ the Word of God shall touch the lives of men.

We have not been promised an easy time, but we have been ~~commanded~~ to be faithful, and we have been assured that our labors are not in vain. May God enable us to be faithful in telling men about Christ, as Paul and many others have been faithful to the Lord and to His Word before us.

PAUL'S DEFENSE
Acts 22:1-30

Intro: Paul himself describes his words here in Acts 22 as his "defence" (the English spelling). It is the Greek word from which we get our English word, apology. But we must not think of Paul as apologizing; he is not doing that. He is explaining. He has been charged by the Jews with a crime; here he is giving his answer as a defendant against those charges.

The word apology primarily means a verbal explanation or defense, but it also can be written. In it the defendant explains his motives, his convictions, and his acts (see Random House Dictionary).

To Paul, this was the very nature of much of his preaching. See Phil. 1:7, 17:

. . . inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.

. . . I am set for the defence of the gospel.

It is this word that Peter uses in 1 Peter 3:15, translated "to give an answer."

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts . . ."

The word suggests that the preaching of the Gospel is going to be misunderstood and opposed. It suggests that the world is going to look upon Christians as criminals, as people in some instances who ought to die!

This is exactly where Paul was. See Acts 21:31a.

If he had not been providentially rescued by the Roman captain, the crowd would have killed him.

What was the charge against him?

It is stated in Acts 21. See verses 17-22 and 27-30.

Now, none of this means that a Christian's defense will be accepted. Some will accept; others will not! In this instance, in Acts 22, there seems to have been total rejection. The Lord had told Paul (according to verse 18),

Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem:
for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

Therefore, by Paul's ~~exam~~ple we must not compromise our message; we cannot accommodate our message to make it conform to what the

people want to hear. We must stick with the truth and trust the Lord to give the results!

But Paul does do this: He does bring in those things from his background and from his present condition to show that he is not an enemy of the Jews. In fact, read again what he wrote on his third missionary journey to the church at Rome about the Jews. Cf. Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1. The trouble was that Paul loved his people so much that he was firmly convinced that he was the one who should be ministering among them. He may have thought that they could see the changes in him, and so would be inclined to receive his message. But this was not the will of God for Paul, and Paul had to learn this in a very hard way.

PAUL'S DEFENSE is conveniently divided for us into three parts by his own use of the expression, "And it came to pass . . ." You will see it in verses 6 and 17. A reading of the DEFENSE will bear this out. So we have these divisions:

- 1) In vv. 1-5 Paul tells about his life before he became a Christian.
- 2) In vv. 6-16 he tells what happened to him on that memorable trip to Damascus.
- 3) In vv. 17-21 he relates what the Lord said to him and what he said to the Lord when he returned to Jerusalem.

Before we look at these I want to point out one very important thing about PAUL'S DEFENSE. It is this: He spoke to them in the Hebrew language (possibly meaning, Aramaic).

By birth Paul could have been considered a Hellenist, but by choice and by conviction he was "an Hebrew of the Hebrews," as he wrote later in his Philippian Epistle (Phil. 3:5). And you can see from Acts 22 how this impressed the crowd because, when they heard the language he was using, "they kept the more silence" (Acts 22:2). They had gotten quiet, but they became more so when they heard him using their language!

Now let us look at the first part of his DEFENSE: vv. 3-5:

I. PAUL'S LIFE BEFORE HE WAS SAVED (Acts 22:3-5).

Here he spoke of:

- A. His race: he was "a Jew."
- B. His birthplace: "Tarsus, a city in Cilicia."
- C. His education:
 1. In Jerusalem.
 2. "At the feet of Gamaliel."
 3. "Taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" -- not according to some of the

ways in which certain teachers were perverting the Law. Paul's upbringing was orthodox!

D. The result:

1. He "was zealous toward God."
2. He "persecuted this way unto the death."

And, to confirm this he take the high priest and all the estate of the elders (one word in the Greek, meaning the Sanhedrin -- lit., the presbytery).as his witnesses.

The high priest and the Sanhedrin were the very ones who had authorized his trip to Damascus!

In the eyes of the people who were listening to Paul -- his DEFENSE so far was good!

But now let us go on to see what he said about Damascus.

II. PAUL'S TRIP TO DAMASCUS (Acts 6-16).

Here Paul spoke of two things:

- 1) What the Lord did and said to him.
- 2) His contact with Ananias.

We have had all of this in Acts 9 -- the actual event. Here Paul speaks of it as HIS DEFENSE. And, as strange as it may seem to us as believers, the Jews did not seem to object to any of this.

Paul speaks of:

- A. The "great light."
- B. The voice of the Lord.
- C. His blindness.

He also indicates that those who were with him saw the light but they did not understand what was going on. They knew also that he could not see, and so they led him into Damascus.

Of special importance are the words of the Lord in verse 10. Notice the word "appointed." It is obviously Paul's intention to show that what he was accused of by the Jews was God's appointment for him. It was ultimately God's decision regarding Paul, God's assignment for him. Paul wanted it to be otherwise, but this is what God had set for him.

Now let us notice what Paul said about Ananias. Some of the details in Acts 9 are passed over here because they do not

serve Paul's purpose in his DEFENSE.

First of all, Ananias healed Paul of his blindness.

Secondly, he spoke to Paul about God, and about God's design for his life. The latter part of verse 14 (in fact, all of it) has to do with Paul's salvation. Verse 15 has to do with his ministry.

Note how Ananias sought to impress upon Paul's heart that GOD was dealing with him -- that God had long before chosen Paul for salvation and for this special ministry "unto all men" -- which meant, all kinds of men, with special reference to the Gentiles (not every person without exception).

Thirdly, Ananias encouraged Paul to be baptized -- not to be saved, but to picture the fact that his sins had been washed away through calling upon the name of the Lord. Cf. Rom. 10:13.

Obviously much more was said by Ananias, but this is the gist of his remarks which would be appropriate for PAUL'S DEFENSE.

Finally, Paul speaks of what the Lord said to him after he went to Jerusalem.

III. GOD'S REVELATION TO PAUL IN JERUSALEM (Acts 22:17-21).

It is very apparent that Paul wanted to stay in Jerusalem, to minister to the Jews.

In verse 19, 20 we see how he argued with the Lord -- as did Moses, and Jeremiah, and Peter, to name just a few. The Lord wants us to do something, and we can see why we ought to do something else!

Paul may have felt that the change in his life would be very convincing to the Jews who did not know the Lord. But the Lord would not bless Paul with fruit here; it was in going to the Gentiles that he would be blessed.

Paul could not appease the Jews by changing this, but it was his hope that they would see that he was doing what he had been doing with the Gentiles because the God of their fathers had willed it!

Concl: But this was too much for these Jews. They reverted to their original purpose -- to kill Paul. God's word to Paul in verse 18 proved to be true. It was not God's purpose to change them.

But their opposition did one important thing, under the hand of

God. It led to the next step in PAUL'S DEFENSE: his testimony before the Sanhedrin. This, in turn, led to others, as the Lord, through Paul's imprisonment, began to open doors of testimony to him, even before kings (as Ananias had said -- see Acts 9:15), opportunities which Paul had never had before, and which could not have been brought about (we must assume) in any other way!

What can we learn from PAUL'S DEFENSE? Several things:

- 1) That we should not exclude anyone from the possibility of being saved.
- 2) The absolute sovereignty of God.
- 3) That our ways and God's ways may not be the same. Paul wanted to go to the Jew; the Lord's will was for him to go to the Gentiles!
- 4) The providential way in which God works even through the opposition that we face.

PAUL AND THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD
Acts 23:1-35

Intro: It is not possible to limit the providence of God to one chapter of the book of Acts, nor to just one period in the life of the Apostle Paul. The providence of God is evident throughout Acts, as it was throughout the life of Paul, even before he became a Christian. However, there are times when God has been pleased to make His providential dealings with His people more evident than at other times, and that is the situation in Acts 23.

But what is the providence of God? What do we mean by this expression?

Charles Hodge, who would have to be considered as one of the greatest theologians that we have ever had in the United States, taught for many years at Princeton Seminary during the last century. He wrote a theology which is still in print today -- three volumes. In the first volume he has a chapter devoted to divine providence, and he defines it this way:

God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions. Providence, therefore, includes preservation and government. By preservation is meant that all things out of God owe the continuance of their existence, with all their properties and powers, to the will of God (I, 575).

And then he adds these words a few pages later:

Providence includes not only preservation, but government. The latter includes the ideas of design and control. It supposes an end to be attained, and the disposition and direction of means for its accomplishment. If God governs the universe He has some great end, including an indefinite number of subordinate ends, towards which it is directed, and He must control the sequence of all events, so as to render certain the accomplishment of all His purposes (I, 581, 582).

The word providence itself suggests that God, Who knows the end from the beginning, does this with foresight so that what He is doing today was planned and prepared for long ago! In fact, the roots of divine providence for all of us and for all of the world are in eternity past.

You can see that the doctrine of the providence of God is a part of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. It is a doctrine that applies to all men of all times, and not just to the Lord's people, or even to the most outstanding of the Lord's people. It indicates that God has a plan which He is carrying out, but

it also means that, if His great plan for all things is to be completed, He must control the details of every individual life. And He does this without making robots out of us! As you read through Acts 23 you can see that the people involved were doing what they wanted to do (except for the Apostle Paul). You can see the same kind of freedom among people today -- or in any day. But the Biblical doctrine of divine providence means that behind and through and over all of the actions of man is the will and purpose and power of an all-mighty God! We could have no peace if this were not true, nor could we have any assurance that the purposes of God were being fulfilled.

Let me cite one outstanding illustration of the providence of God from the life of Joseph. It has to do with the sin of his brothers who sold him as a slave, and then he was taken into Egypt. His brothers did what they wanted to do. They were fully responsible for their sin. The men who bought Joseph did what they wanted to do. Potiphar, Potiphar's wife, the butler, Pharaoh -- all of them did what they wanted to do. And yet, years later, when Joseph was speaking to his brothers about what they had done, he said this:

And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt (Gen. 45:7, 8).

God not only overruled in what Joseph's brothers did, in their sin, but He used it all for them! Let us say about God's providence as Paul said about the whole work of salvation, " . . . how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33b).

Thus, in the providence of God we have God working "all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11), anticipating, guiding, protecting, providing, governing -- and all for the good of His people, for the fulfillment of His purposes, and for the glory of His Name! What a marvelous truth this is!

And this is a truth which applies to the most insignificant of the Lord's people even today just as it applied to the Apostle Paul in his day! And it applies to the actions of the nations today just as it did to "the chief captain" and to the Roman government in Paul's day.

But let us look at it now, the evidence of divine providence, in the life of Paul at this crucial time in his history and in his ministry.

Be sure to notice that it was a heathen, unregenerate, Roman military man, "the chief captain," whom the Lord used to play a

most significant part in Paul's life at this time.

I. THE CHIEF CAPTAIN AND THE SANHEDRIN.

Why was Paul in Jerusalem?

He had come there to bring an offering to the poor saints; we need to recognize that. But you will remember that he told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:24b that he was going there "to testify the gospel of the grace of God." This was a crucial point in the history of Israel. Their rejection of Christ was all but complete. This, as far as we know, was Paul's last time with them. But look! Whom did God use to make the Sanhedrin listen to Paul and to the preaching of the Gospel? It was "the chief captain." Cf. Acts 22:30.

Paul had this amazing evidence of the providence of God even after he got to Rome. Cf. Phil. 1:12-18.

Here in Acts 22, 23 an unregenerate Roman soldier of high rank made the official leaders of the whole nation of Israel sit and listen to Paul! How could the hand of God be more evident?

II. PAUL AND THE HIGH PRIEST (Acts 23:2-5).

There have been a number of explanations for Paul's words and actions at this particular time. The one that seems most reasonable to me is that he could not clearly see so as to recognize the high priest. But when he was told who had ordered him to be smitten, even though it was contrary to the Law -- meaning that the high priest was in the wrong, Paul back down, and apologized. WHY? Because many years before he had memorized a verse of Scripture! And it was probably in one of Gamaliel's classes.

This had to have a good effect on those present. You see, what we say is important when we are telling others of Christ, but how we say it is also important! The Lord was not letting His servant spoil this time of witnessing even through ignorance of what he was doing!

III. PAUL AND THE PHARISEES (Acts 23:6-9).

Let me ask you a question: Do you think it was by chance that Paul had been a Pharisee? Or was this also included in the providence of God? Cf. Phil. 3:5, " . . . as touching the law, a Pharisee."

It had to be of God! Not only did it mean that a belief in the supernatural and in life after death was instilled in

Paul's heart long before he became a Christian, but God knew that the time would come in Paul's ministry when it would be very important for him to be able to stand before the Sanhedrin and say, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee . . ." (v. 6). There was not another Apostle who could have said that!

We do not know if anyone was saved because of that, but we do know that it gave Paul some friends in the Sanhedrin and that that alone had a part in saving his life! Here again you see the providence of God.

But this led to a big uproar, and it looked like Paul might be killed after all, and so, again, God brings the chief captain to Paul's aid.

IV. PAUL AND THE CHIEF CAPTAIN (Acts 23:10).

How many times all of the people of God can bear witness to the fact that the Lord has had the right person in the right place at the right time to meet their need and to accomplish His purpose.

This is the third time that the Lord had used "the chief captain" to save the life of Paul.

The next one gets my vote for the most important evidence of God's providential care for Paul. Let me call it

V. PAUL AND THE LORD (Acts 23:11).

Note the specific time when the Lord came and spoke to Paul -- the night after the uproar, and the night before Paul was to learn about another serious threat upon his life!

Paul used almost the same words in 2 Timothy 4:17 that Luke has used here. In writing to Timothy Paul was referring to another time, but he said,

Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me . . .

One of the Puritans once said, "If the Lord is our friend, it mattereth not who our enemies are."

Who among God's people has not experienced the "comfort of the scriptures"? See Romans 15:4.

The Lord does not appear to us as He did to Paul, but He ministers to us in just as real a way when He speaks to us through His Word.

Have you not been comforted by this word? "The Lord is my

shepherd; I shall not want" (Psa. 23:1). Or by this one:
 Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed;
 for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I
 will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the
 right hand of my righteousness (Isa. 41:10)?

Or what about Isaiah 54:17?

No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper;
 and every tongue that shall rise against thee in
 judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage
 of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness
 is of me, saith the Lord.

Who has not rested on Romans 8:28, and on Hebrews 13:5 and
 6 and 8?

The Word is full of encouragement. It was through His Word
 that the Lord was strengthening the faith of Paul, and it
 is through the Word that He does the same for us! Oh, do
 not neglect the Word -- especially when the way is rough
 and the outcome seems to have a big question mark over it!

Sixth . . .

VI. PAUL AND HIS NEPHEW (Acts 23:12-22).

This was one of the most dangerous times in Paul's life.
 Forty men were seeking his life -- and they expected to
 accomplish their purpose in short order. How presumptuous
 men are when they act as though the lives of others were
 in their hands!

The Lord often brings help from the most unlikely sources.
 Did you know that Paul had a sister? And did you know that
 Paul's sister had a son? And did you know that that son was
 in Jerusalem at this particular time? And did you know that
 Paul's nephew had some kind of access to news like he heard?
 You didn't know any of that -- and neither did I! And this
 should teach us that God knows a lot of things that we don't
 know, and that He has ways of working that will take us
 completely by surprise!

And who do you think made "the chief captain" willing to
 take Paul's nephew aside and to listen sympathetically to
 what he had to say, and then to take action to protect Paul.
 There can be only one answer: God did!

And this leads us to the last evidence of God's providence which
 I will mention:

VII. THE CHIEF CAPTAIN AND FELIX THE GOVERNOR (Acts 23:23-35).

Paul was moved from Jerusalem to Caesarea by 200 soldiers,

70 horsemen, 200 spearmen -- in the dead of the night!

And Claudius Lysias, "the chief captain," wrote a letter to Felix, the highest Roman official in that area, and the letter was written for Paul without any request from Paul.

Who did this? God did! And God did it because He was not ready to take Paul to heaven; He still had work for him to do in Rome!

One thing that the Lord taught David whose experiences were very similar to Paul's is a truth which David expressed in Psalm 31:15, "My times are in thy hands."

Isaiah gives us this good word:

The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand" (Isa. 14:24).

Or think of that good word in Psalm 119:89,

For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.

Concl: What a wonderful chapter! The Lord is mentioned only 5 times in the 35 verses, but He is the most prominent Person in the chapter!

But the added glory of this chapter is that it teaches us what the Lord is for us today -- for all of us. If you do not know the Lord, let me warn you. You are not nearly as great as God is, and so don't even try to oppose Him. If you know the Lord, things may be tough, and it might look like the Lord is not doing anything -- but He is! He will not leave you for a moment! He knows your need, and He will supply your need. He is greater than anyone who seems to be against you. In fact, He will use what they do so that it turns out in your favor. How wonderful to be able to rest in God!

There is a hymn in our hymnal which beautifully expresses what I have been trying to say this morning. Let me read it as I conclude. It is Hymn #4 if you would like to follow me as I read:

All praise to God, who reigns above,
The God of all creation,
The God of wonders, pow'r, and love,
The God of our salvation!
With healing balm my soul he fills,
The God who ev'ry sorrow stills,
TO GOD ALL PRAISE AND GLORY!

What God's almighty pow'r hath made
His gracious mercy keepeth;
By morning dawn or evening shade
His watchful eye ne'er sleepeth;

Within the kingdom of his might,
 Lo, all is just and all is right,
 TO GOD ALL PRAISE AND GLORY!

I cried to him in time of need:
 Lord God, O, hear my calling!
 For death he gave me life indeed
 And kept my feet from falling.
 For this my thanks shall endless be;
 O, thank him, thank our God for me,
 TO GOD ALL PRAISE AND GLORY!

The Lord forsaketh not his flock,
 His chosen generation;
 He is their Refuge and their Rock,
 Their Peace and their Salvation.
 As with a mother's tender hand
 He leads His own, His chosen band,
 TO GOD ALL PRAISE AND GLORY!

Ye who confess Christ's holy Name,
 To God give praise and glory!
 Ye who the Father's pow'r proclaim,
 To God give praise and glory!
 All idols under foot be trod,
 The Lord is God! The Lord is God!
 TO GOD ALL PRAISE AND GLORY!

Then come before his presence now
 And banish fear and sadness;
 To your Redeemer pay your vow
 And sing with joy and gladness:
 Though great distress my soul befell,
 The Lord, my God, did all things well,
 TO GOD ALL PRAISE AND GLORY!

Although this hymn was written in 1675, it could have been
 written and sung by Paul about 60 A. D., and it can be our song,
 too!

THE TIME THAT NEVER CAME
Acts 24:1-27

Intro: Acts 24 gives us another episode in the attempt of official Israel to secure the condemnation and death of the Apostle Paul. All of "the top brass" were in Caesarea for this occasion, and they had even brought one skilled in the art of speech to do all that he could to secure a judgment against Paul. This is especially interesting in the light of what some of the Corinthians had said about Paul's speaking ability as well as his physical appearance -- that "his bodily presence" was "weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:10).

But Paul told the Corinthians in his first epistle that "God hath" deliberately and knowingly "chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty . . . that no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Cor. 1:27b, 29).

All of the power and influence of the Jews was as nothing before the presence and power of the almighty God! The opposition was so formidable and the plan so calculated that we cannot think that Paul escaped by his own ability. This is another incident in which we see God at work. In fact, God so marvelously preserved His servant that we come away from the reading of the chapter convinced that it was Paul's enemies who were actually on trial -- not Paul!

Let me point out the divisions of the chapter:

- 1) The Charges Brought Against Paul By Tertullus (vv. 1-9).
- 2) Paul's Answer to Those Charges (vv. 10-21).
- 3) Felix's Decision To Wait for Lysias (vv. 22, 23). Paul was kept in custody, but with some measure of freedom so that his friends were able to be with him.
- 4) Paul's Ministry to Felix (vv. 24-27).

We will not take up all of the details of the chapter, but concentrate on the most significant points. So let us look, first of all, at

I. THE CHARGES AGAINST PAUL (Acts 24:1-9).

You will find these in verses 5 and 6.

Some say that there were three charges; others say that there were four. Those who mention three would say that the three led to the fourth which may have been the chief charge.

We could also say that three charges had to do with what he was; the fourth, with what he was intent on doing. The Temple stood as the very focal point of Jewish religious life, and so any attempt to desecrate it was considered to

be a most serious crime.

But, however they may be considered, note what the charges were:

A. That he was "a pestilent fellow" (v. 5a).

This was like saying that he was a one-man pestilence!

Now a pestilence is the spread of an infectious or contagious disease!

In other words they were saying that a deadly epidemic had broken out in Israel, and that Paul was "the bug" who was causing it. Kill him, and the trouble would be over!

This was the first charge.

The second charge was this:

B. That Paul was "a mover of sedition (v. 5m).

This meant that they were accusing Paul of being responsible for all of the unrest in Israel. They were saying that he was deliberately inciting the people to riot, to rebel against the "lawful" authority of the Sanhedrin -- to encourage insurrection.

Again it meant: Get rid of this man, and things will be quiet.

The third charge was:

C. That Paul was "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes" (v. 5b).

The Nazarene had become a term of contempt for our Lord. Cf. Matt. 2:23. Although He had been born in Judea, yet His enemies pointed out that He had been brought up in Nazareth because their purpose was to show that He was an outsider!

And so Christians were called, "Nazarenes" -- a term of contempt. They were no longer real Jews in the opinion of the Sanhedrin.

Now Tertullus says that Paul was "a ringleader"! Paul was the leader. Paul kept the teachings of the Nazarene alive; kill him, and the sect would be leaderless.

You see, there was an element of truth in what Tertullus was

saying. Paul was the key man in the Church at this time. His influence had been felt throughout the world, i.e., throughout the Empire. The death of Paul would have been a serious blow to the work of the Church. BUT THE MISTAKE THAT THE SANHEDRIN WAS MAKING HERE WAS THAT THEY WERE FORGETTING THE WISE COUNSEL OF GAMALIEL WHICH WE READ ABOUT BACK AT THE END OF CHAPTER 5. Hear it again:

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 (Acts 5:38, 39).

And that is exactly what they were doing -- fighting against God!

This is what a lot of people need to keep in mind in their opposition to the doctrines of sovereign grace. The issue is not, who is doing it, but is it true -- is it according to the Word of God. If it is of God (and it is), then it is going to prosper in spite of all that men may do to oppose it!

But let us look at the last part of the charge. It is in v. 6a:

D. That Paul had "gone about to profane the temple" (v. 6a).

This meant that Paul had encouraged the Jews to treat the Temple as though it were like any other building!

The real trouble on this point was that the Jews had failed to realize that the presence of God had been withdrawn from the Temple, and that, instead of treating it as a place where God could be worshipped, they worshipped the Temple itself!

When people lose sight of the Lord, then places, and days, and ceremonies take the place that the Lord should have.

How did Paul answer the charges?

II. PAUL'S ANSWER TO THE CHARGES (Acts 24:10-21).

He denied them all! (Read vv. 11b-13, 17-20.)

ONE THING PAUL DID ADMIT: That he did worship God "after the way," which was an expression that all Jews recognized as meaning, according to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul also claimed that this was entirely in harmony

with what the fathers of Israel had done, and it was in accordance with what "the law" and "the prophets" taught -- BUT THE SANHEDRIN WAS NOT INTERESTED IN HISTORY, NOR IN THE SCRIPTURES (except as it might serve their own purposes)!

Aren't many in the church like this today? They do not care about the history of the Church. They will not read history. Now will they take the Scriptures and carefully examine them to see what the Word of God teaches. There are certain ideas that are presently popular, and woe to the person who dares to call them into question!!!

What was the outcome?

III. FELIX'S DECISION (Acts 24:22, 23).

If God had not been with Paul, he would not have stood a chance of getting by such charges. But read in verses 22, 23 what happened!

God intervened, and Paul was miraculously spared!

Paul's last words to Timothy apply here: "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me . . ." (2 Tim. 4:17a). What a wealth of truth of expressed in those words!

But what followed? "Two years" of what we can describe as

IV. PAUL'S MINISTRY TO FELIX (Acts 24:24-27).

Felix was a Gentile; Drusilla, his wife, was a Jewess. He had enticed her away from a king she had been married to, and so they were living in adultery.

But evidently Drusilla had some tender feelings about the Jews' religion, and she wanted to hear what Paul had to say about "the faith in Christ" (v. 24b). As Paul preached, it was Felix who was influenced, not Drusilla! Felix was terrified. Here is a passage of Scripture which shows that God does in certain instances deal in mighty power with the reprobate. Not only did Paul preach to him once, but it would seem from the text that he preached to Felix over and over again.

This is our responsibility; and it is man's responsibility to believe. But it is up to God to use the Word as He sees fit in accordance with His eternal purpose.

So we have three significant truths here.

But let me point out three other things from the text:

A. What was Paul's message?

We have our answer in verse 25. " . . . as he reasoned" "concerning the faith in Christ" (v. 24), he spoke "of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come."

We are not given the details of the message, but we can be sure of some of the things that he said when we consider these three words, and as we remember Paul's previous messages as well as what we have in the Epistles which are found in the NT.

1. "Righteousness."

He began as all Gospel messages should begin -- WITH GOD!

Do you suppose he gave the substance of Romans 1: 16, 17?

2. "Temperance." This means self-control.

Do you suppose that here he spoke of the seventh commandment -- "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14)?

Perhaps he said what he had written in Romans 3: 19, 20,

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

3. "Judgment to come."

The word that Paul uses here does not have reference to the trial (κρίσις), but to the execution of the verdict (κρίμα).

Undoubtedly Paul spoke of hell. Perhaps he said what John, the Apostle, wrote in Rev. 20:15,

And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

He not only spoke of the divine benefits which were available for sinners in Christ, but he spoke of the consequences of not trusting in Christ.

B. What was Felix's response?

You have it in the latter part of verse 25. (Read.)

Let me point out a very solemn fact: FELIX OBVIOUSLY HEARD THE GOSPEL MANY TIMES AFTER THAT, BUT NEVER AGAIN IS IT RECORDED THAT HE "TREMBLED" AT THE WORD OF GOD, AND THERE IS NO EVIDENCE AT ALL THAT HE EVER BELIEVED. After Acts 25:14 he is never mentioned in Scripture again!

C. What were his problems? Let me mention four -- although there may have been more.

1. He thought that he could choose the time when he would do business with God. He said, " . . . when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." He did not realize that he was not just talking to to Paul, but he was talking to God!

If you are without Christ, remember that you do not set the time when God will deal with you. FELIX WAS TALKING ABOUT THE TIME THAT NEVER CAME.

2. He did not understand the depravity of his own heart.

If he had, he would have cried out to God for mercy, and for faith!

Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him . . ."
(John 6:44a).

3. He loved money. Cf. v. 26. This was the only reason he called Paul in, and listened to him.

Cf. 1 Tim. 6:9, 10,

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

4. He was a man-pleaser. Cf. v. 27.

Concl: What an example Paul is to us, and what a warning Felix is to all who are without Christ. Paul would rather die than to deny Christ; Felix would rather have his own way than to receive Christ.

Which way are we going?

BEARING THE NAME BEFORE A KING
Acts 25, 26

Intro: Acts 26 gives us the third account in the Book of Acts of the way in which the Apostle Paul was brought to the Lord.

- 1) First, the event itself, in Acts 9.
- 2) Second, Acts 22 -- when Paul stood on the steps of the castle in Jerusalem, and spoke to the Jewish mob.
- 3) This is the third time -- before Agrippa, who is called, "king."

The fact that all of this was under the sovereign hand of God can be seen if we go back to the words which the Lord spoke to Ananias about Paul. They are found in Acts 9:15, 16:

But the Lord said unto him (i.e., to Ananias), 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.

Now here we have the gist of Paul's ministry -- HE WAS TO BEAR THE NAME OF JESUS (with all that that meant) "before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."

In Acts 26 Paul was standing before a king!

Be sure to notice from Acts 25 that this meeting with Agrippa was not something which Paul had arranged, but it was held at the request of Agrippa himself after Festus told him about Paul.

And the fact that there was no reason for Paul to be held in bonds is brought out in Acts 25:26 when Festus confessed that he did not know what to write to Caesar because he knew that he was sending an innocent man to Rome.

So we continue to see that these difficult and humiliating experiences which the Apostle was going through were for the purpose of BEARING THE NAME of Jesus before all kinds of people, which included men in high places -- "and kings"!

In speaking about Felix and Drusilla from Acts 24 I pointed out that their relationship was a very corrupt one -- that Felix had broken up Drusilla's previous marriage in order to marry her. If anything, the relationship between Agrippa and Bernice was even worse. They were brother and sister, the children of the infamous Herod whose death is recorded back in Acts 12! I will not go into historical details that are available except to say that the word incest is suggested by the historians, and it is also a fact that Bernice later became the mistress of two prominent men.

It is important to keep these facts in mind as we notice the

first thing that stands out in these two chapters. It had to do with

I. PAUL'S INNOCENCY.

I am not going to spend much time in Acts 25. It tells about Festus who came to take Felix's place, and how he told Agrippa about Paul. But other than that the chapter is primarily important because of the history it contains.

But the one thing that does stand out from what Paul said has to do with his innocency. Note Acts 25:8-11.

The same thing was emphasized in Acts 24 -- vv. 12, 13, 16, 18.

This is an important point in the testimony that we bear to the Name of our Lord. Paul was like the Lord Jesus in this respect. Paul did not incite the Jews against their leaders. He did not desecrate the Temple. He did not lead any movement of insurrection against Rome. And neither did the Lord! It was not his ministry to do these things. He was to bear the Name of Jesus before the world! AND THE FIRST REQUIREMENT IN DOING THIS IS THAT WE MUST BE LIKE THE LORD JESUS IN ALL OF THESE RESPECTS. We may suffer as Christians, but we must not, as Peter has taught us in his first epistle, suffer as evil doers.

Thus, Paul was innocent even though his accusers and his judges were not! Their wrongdoing gave him no reason to do wrong. He was to BEAR THE NAME -- and that task could not be defiled by his own sinning!

May the Lord teach us this -- and may we be careful to exercise ourselves as Paul did. (Cf. Acts 24:16.) It takes constant vigilance on our part.

Cf. Matt. 5:43-48.

The second thing to note as Paul bore the Name of Jesus is this:

II. HIS PAST LIFE.

In order that Agrippa might more fully appreciate what Paul was then, he needed to know what Paul had been. Read Acts 26:4, 5, 9-12. Note especially vv. 9, 10. In v. 9 he mentioned "the name of Jesus of Nazareth."

As Saul of Tarsus he had believed in resurrection (because he was a Pharisee), but he had been outstanding in his opposition to "the name of Jesus of Nazareth."

In Paul's letter to the Galatians churches he wrote:

For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers (Gal. 1:13, 14).

This would have meant that, instead of being hated by the Jews (as he was then), he could have been their hero, their champion! Why did he give that all up? Why did he change? It had to be that he came upon something that was stronger than all of his Jewish background, all of his convictions, all of his ambitions!

This brings me to my third point:

III. THE REASON FOR HIS CHANGE.

Read Acts 26:12-15.

What was the reason for the change? Was he looking for something better? Was it something that he wanted? NO! NO! NO!

He was not looking for "Jesus"; "Jesus" was seeking him -- and He found Saul of Tarsus, and He subdued this angry, ambitious Jew, and completely transformed his life so that he was never the same again.

As I have said before, I know of no greater illustration of the irresistible grace of God in Scripture than this. Saul was confronted by the living, resurrected, Jesus of Nazareth on the road to Damascus -- and his life was forever changed!

But this was not all. Note:

IV. PAUL'S CALLING.

This is the way Paul explained what he had been doing during his lifetime from that day on the road to Damascus until the day that he stood before Agrippa. And even in the presence of Agrippa he was doing the same.

Read the words of the Lord Jesus in Acts 26:16-18.

He was not trying to cause trouble; he was acting under divine orders. And, even though it meant suffering (which Paul wisely did not mention here), yet he had no choice but to stand by his calling.

This brings us to the fifth point that I want you to see:

V. PAUL'S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS CALL.

Read what he said in Acts 26:19-23.

Why was Paul faithful? There are two reasons given here:

- 1) Because he was a man with the call of God upon him.
- 2) Because, as he said in v. 22a, he "obtained help of God."

So it was not to Paul's credit, but to the glory of God, that he had been faithful in his ministry.

Every servant of the Lord has felt the pressure to be quiet, or at least to tone down, and even to change the message. Is our trouble here -- that there are many in the ministry who are not called of God, or, if they are, they are not trusting "God" to give them the "help" that it takes for anyone to be faithful?

Do you remember what Paul wrote along this line to the Corinthians?

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16).

Oh, how we need men like this today -- men who by the grace of God will remain faithful in spite of any and all opposition!

There are two more things that I want to mention. The first of these is:

VI. PAUL'S GREAT AND GENUINE CONCERN.

The expression of it grew out of Agrippa's famous comment to him, "Almost (or, in a short time) thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28). The NIV makes a question out of it.

Expositors have debated the sincerity or insincerity of what Agrippa said -- and it would seem impossible to prove it one way or another. But no one doubts the sincerity of Paul's response when he 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. (Acts 26:29).

Paul was not there primarily to secure his own freedom, but to bear witness to the Name of Jesus!

And so let us look finally at

VII. HIS MESSAGE.

Isn't it interesting that the message of the Gospel is given over and over and over again in the Bible -- and even in the Book of Acts itself? How precious it is to God! And how important it is that we be just as clear as Scripture in our presentation of the Gospel!

What essential parts do we observe in this message?

A. It was pre-eminently a message of "Jesus."

See Acts 26:22, 23.

B. It was a message which could be read in the written Word of God.

See Acts 26:6, 7a, 22.

All preaching, all witnessing, must be confirmed by the written Word of God!

C. It was a message consistent with what you would expect from God.

See Acts 26:8.

D. It was a message of salvation.

We are not reformers of dead religion. We are not political activists. We are not founders of new sects. We are witnesses of Christ, and of the Gospel.

See Acts 26:18.

E. It was a message which demanded repentance and a change of life.

See Acts 26:20b. Also v. 18 speaks of change.

How interesting it is that Paul called upon the people to repent when he preached while he knew that even man's repentance was from God. Cf. Acts 5:29-32; 2 Tim. 2:24-26.

Concl: What was the outcome? Was Paul successful in seeing Agrippa turn to the Lord? No. But this was not his responsibility, either here or at any other time. Paul's job was to preach the truth, to bear before all men the Name of "Jesus." It was up to God to use His Word in accordance with His eternal plan. Ecc. 11:6 teaches us,

In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.

Let us be faithful ourselves, and faithful in our message.

A PROSPEROUS JOURNEY
Acts 27, 28

Intro: When Paul wrote to the church at Rome a few years before his imprisonment, he had said this:

. . . without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. Cf. Rom. 1:9b, 10.

Verse 1 of Acts 27 tells us that "it was determined that we should sail into Italy. Luke used the word "we" as he wrote because evidently he went with Paul on this journey.

Then verse 16 of Acts 28 begins in this way: "And when we came to Rome . . ."

I want to take those words from Paul's prayer in Romans 1 as my subject for this message: "A PROSPEROUS JOURNEY."

In dealing with this I want to deal with three points.

First -- I want to take up THE MEANING OF PROSPEROUS IN SCRIPTURE. What are we to look for to know that God answered his prayer for "a prosperous journey"?

Second -- I want us to notice from Acts 27 and 28 THE WAYS GOD PROSPERED HIM.

Third and finally -- I want to consider GOD'S REASONS FOR HIS WAYS. We need to answer the question, Why did God take Paul to Rome the way He did when He could have done it in a much easier way for Paul?

First, then, let us learn

I. THE MEANING OF PROSPEROUS IN SCRIPTURE.

The Bible has a lot to say about the prosperity of the Lord's people. Psalm 1:3 concludes with these words: ". . . and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" -- speaking of the man God blesses.

Perhaps the most familiar use of the word "prosperous" is to be found in those well-known words which the Lord gave as a promise to Joshua: ". . . for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."

So we have a right to expect prosperity.

BUT -- we have to place these promises by the situations in the Word and in every-day life which illustrate that, as men

usually interpret this word, the world prospers while the people of God have a rough time!

So, in interpreting this word in the light of Scripture we need to be aware of

A. Some wrong ideas about prosperity.

Does it mean

- 1) That we will encounter no difficulties, that we will have an easy time?
- 2) That we will have everything that we want to have and that we will suffer no lack?
- 3) That we will understand our circumstances perfectly so that we will never be confused and never have any reason to fear?
- 4) That we will see multitudes turn to Christ?

This is the way it is often interpreted for us.

It has become the thing to do to set goals in the Lord's work -- that we will have an evangelistic campaign to win so many thousands to Christ, or that we will endeavor to win so many people to Christ within a certain period of time.

Did it ever occur to you that you have no precedent for such evangelism in Scripture?

And have you ever stopped to think that if prosperity in its Scriptural usage means the things that I have mentioned about, then there were very, very few times in Paul's life when you could say that he was "prosperous." And we certainly could not say that God heard and answered his prayer about his trip to Rome and gave him "a prosperous journey"!

Paul went to Rome under the most difficult circumstances. He was a prisoner. His ship was wrecked. He was kept in custody for two years. This does not sound like he was very "prosperous."

But let us look at the Scriptures. That is the only way to answer our questions about the ways of the Lord. Let me point out

B. Some Scriptural explanations.

And first let us see

1. What is meant to Abraham's servant -- in Genesis 24.

Some form of the word is used in verses 21, 40, 42, and 56.

What did the servant mean when he used this word? Obviously we can tell that he meant the successful fulfillment of his mission. But what was his mission? What was he looking for?

Look back at Genesis 24:14 to that part of the verse where you find these words: "let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac." You see, his mission was not just to get a wife for Isaac, but to get the one that the Lord had for her. To prosper meant to see the Lord's will done, His purpose carried out!

Let us look at another illustration.

2. What it meant to Joshua. See Joshua 1:7, 8.

Again, to answer our question, we must note what the Lord had been talking to Joshua about. You can see it in verse 6 (although the idea runs all through the first 9 verses of this chapter).

It was God's purpose to give Israel the land of Canaan. That had been announced as far back as the life of Abraham. So that prosperity for Joshua meant that he would see the purposes of God fulfilled!

But there is still a better illustration.

3. What it would mean to our Lord, according to the prophecy of Isaiah. See Isaiah 53:10.

And here the meaning is very clear:

. . . he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands.

Even with the Lord to prosper did not mean that He would save everyone! If that were the case, then He did not prosper; He is not prospering! But He is prospering because He is accomplishing exactly what He came to accomplish according to "the pleasure of the Lord"!

And if Biblical prosperity means to have an easy time, and to have everyone acclaim you as the greatest, then the Lord was a failure!

One more illustration:

4. What it means for the Word to prosper. See Isaiah 55:11. Here again it is very clear. (Read.)

For the Word to prosper means that it will accomplish what the Lord wants it to accomplish, and no more!

So we are brought to this definition of success and of prosperity in Scripture: It means that we see the will of God done, that the purposes of God are being accomplished!

Now we are ready to see in Acts 27 and 28

II. THE WAYS GOD PROSPERED PAUL.

His prayer had been, "if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you." We could also translate what he wrote in this way: If by any means now at length I shall be given a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.

Notice the words, "by the will of God." Paul only wanted to go IF God wanted him to go, which meant that he wanted to go to see the will of God done, the purposes of God fulfilled.

Let me just hurriedly mention at least some of the ways in which Paul saw the will of God done.

A. First, in the fact that he got there.

There is no way that Paul would have gotten there if God had not been working in his behalf. Think of the storm, and remember that the soldiers wanted to kill him and all of the other prisoners, but the centurion intervened to save him.

Remember also the viper that bit him.

B. Second, because of all of the opportunities that were opened to him along the way.

1. Paul's prophecies concerning the storm and the outcome for all who were aboard.

See Acts 27:10, 21-26, 30, 31 (the last 2 verses give his warning about abandoning ship).

2. Paul's prayer before they had their last meal on the ship. See Acts 27:33-36.

3. The many miracles on the island of Melita, or Malta. Paul was spared from death, Publius' father was healed, and many other were healed by Paul, too. See Acts 28:3-10.

And then we must not fail to notice

- C. The freedom that Paul had to minister after he got to Rome even though he was kept a prisoner, and guarded constantly by a Roman soldier.

He could not go to the people, but they providentially came to him! See Acts 28:17 to the end of the chapter.

Notice especially verse 24 of Acts 28.

So, all along we can see evidence that God was prospering Paul, and that God's purposes were being fulfilled -- even to the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy which is mentioned toward the close of chapter 28 (beginning with verse 25).

And now we come to the last thing that I want to deal with from these two chapters:

III. GOD'S REASONS FOR HIS WAYS.

Why did the Lord take Paul to Rome the way he did -- as a prisoner, experiencing a terrible storm and a shipwreck, bitten by an adder, and the whole thing? We would all agree that the Lord could have made it a glorious, comfortable, short trip. Why did He do it the way it was?

There are 5 reasons I want to mention -- and I will only mention them.

A. For His own glory.

We come away from these chapters impressed with the greatness of Paul's God, do we not? It was God who made Paul's way prosperous, not Paul!

- B. To minister to Paul. Note Acts 24, 25. Paul was learning a little more about conquering his fears -- and of the sufficiency of faith alone, resting in the promises of God.

- C. To provide Paul with special opportunities for ministry.

Think of the sailors, the soldiers, the people on the island of Malta, etc. These were all opportunities that Paul would not have had if things had gone well.

- D. Related to the first above -- to show His own wisdom and power.

God knew the outcome, and He revealed it to Paul. He spared everyone although it would have been considered a miracle for anyone to escape the fury of the storm.

- E. To confirm the truth of the written Word -- as we can

see from Paul's quotation of Isaiah's prophecy in Acts 28:25 ff.

Was Paul wrong in turning to the Gentiles? Did the rejection of the Gospel by the Jews mean that God was helpless, and that His plans had to change? NO! It was all as predicted in the Word. Even the rejection was proof the Paul's prosperity!

Concl: And so ends the book of Acts -- an unfinished story even as far as the Word of God is concerned. Paul had not yet written his pastoral Epistles. He was to be released, and then imprisoned again, and, finally, according to tradition, martyred!

He did not prosper at the end according the world's standards, but he prospered gloriously according to the ways of God. And the story of the prosperity of the Lord's people continues.

We are a part of that story. God has worked with us far differently from what we had expected or hoped. How He works is not for us to choose, but we are to recognize that He is accomplishing His purposes. We, in another sense, know what it is to be shipwrecked. But we also know what it is to see the sufficiency of God, and the way in which we have been cast upon the Lord just to trust Him by faith. We have seen, and are seeing Him work -- and we will continue to see it. We are seeing the truth of His Word confirmed and emphasized! And all because

- 1) God is at work glorifying Himself.
- 2) He is working with us, in us, and, hopefully, through us.
- 3) He is opening new doors of ministry.
- 4) He is displaying His wisdom and power.
- 5) He is reviving, confirming, and blessing His Word.

May we continue to see to glorify Him, and to worship Him for the many evidences of His goodness to us!

In closing I want to read again John Newton's great hymn which I read just a year ago -- this time to relect Paul's prosperous journey to Rome, and as a reminder to all of us that God has the same reasons for prospering us today in His way instead of our way.

I asked the Lord, that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek more earnestly His face.

I hoped that in some favoured hour
At once He'd answer my request,
And by His love's constraining power
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

Yea more, with His own hand He seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe;
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

'Lord, why is this?' I trembling cried,
'Wilt thou pursue Thy worm to death?'
'Tis in this way,' the Lord replied,
'I answer prayer for grace and faith.

'These inward trials I employ
From self and pride to set thee free;
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou may'st seek thy all in me.'

Are you being tried personally? Then drink in the truth of
these two chapters, and note carefully the Lord's dealings with
Paul, that you may find the comfort and the understanding that
will keep your own heart in peace.