

The Acts of the Apostles

by Arno Clemens Gaebelein

The Book of Acts is the continuation of the Lord's actions, no longer on earth, but from the Glory, and it contains the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to the Gentiles.

Scripture: Acts 9:1, Acts 10:1, Acts 22:3, Acts 26:10, Galatians 1:15, Ephesians 2:11

Topics: "Salvation History", "Gentile Ministry"

Description

Arno Clemens Gaebelein preaches about the significant transition in the Book of Acts from the rejection of the Gospel by the Jews to the acceptance of the Gentiles. He highlights the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a fierce persecutor of Christians, into the Apostle Paul, chosen to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. The sermon also focuses on the obedience of Peter to preach the Gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile centurion, breaking the barrier between Jews and Gentiles. The miraculous events and visions in these chapters demonstrate God's plan to extend salvation to all nations.

Transcript

Introduction

The book known by the name "The Acts of the Apostles" (The oldest manuscript, the Sinaiticus, dating from the 4th century, given the title simply as "The Acts," which is no doubt the better name for the book), follows the four Gospel records. This is its proper place. The books of the New Testament have been correctly divided into five sections, corresponding to the first five books, with which the Bible begins, that is the Pentateuch. The four Gospels are the Genesis of the New Testament. Here we have the great beginning, the foundation upon which the subsequently revealed Christian doctrines rest. The Book of Acts is the Exodus; God leads out from bondage a heavenly people and sets them free. It is the great historical book of the New Testament given by inspiration, the beginning of the church on earth. The Pauline Epistles are the Leviticus portion. Holiness unto the Lord, the believer's separation and standing in Christ; what the believer has and is in Christ, by whose blood redemption has been purchased, are the core truths of these Epistles. The Epistles of Peter, James, John and Jude, known by the name of the Catholic Epistles, are for the wilderness journey of God's people, telling us of trials and suffering; these correspond to the Book of Numbers. The Book of Revelation in which God's ways are rehearsed, and, so to speak, a review is given of the entire prophetic Word concerning the Jews, the Gentiles and the Church of God has therefore the same character as Deuteronomy.

By Whom was this Book Written

There is no doubt that the writer of the third Gospel record is the one whom the Holy Spirit selected to write this account of the establishment of the Church on earth and the events connected with it. This becomes clear if we read the beginning of that Gospel and compare it with the beginning of Acts. The writer in the third Gospel says: "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1:3-4). The Acts of the Apostles begin: "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach." The former treatise known to Theophilus is the third Gospel, called the Gospel of Luke. The writer of that Gospel must therefore be the penman of the Book of Acts. Though we do not find Luke's name mentioned in the Gospel, nor in the second Book, he was entrusted to write by inspiration, there is no doubt that he wrote them both. We find his name mentioned a number of times in the Epistles, and these references give us the only reliable information we have. In Colossians 4:14 we read of him as "the beloved physician." In the Epistle of Philemon he is called a fellow laborer of the Apostle Paul, and from the last Epistle the great Apostle wrote, the second Epistle to Timothy, we learn that Luke was in Rome with Paul and was faithful to him, while others had forsaken the prisoner of the Lord. From Colossians 4 we also may gather that he was not a Jew, but a Gentile, for with the eleventh verse Paul had mentioned those of the circumcision. Epaphras was one of the Colossians, a Gentile, and then follow the names of Luke and Demas, both of them undoubtedly Gentiles. The reason that the Holy Spirit selected a Gentile to write the Gospel which pictures our Lord as the Man and the Saviour and the Book of Acts, is as obvious as it is interesting. Israel had rejected God's gift, and the glad news of salvation was now to go to the Gentiles. The Gospel of Luke addressed by a Gentile to a Gentile (Theophilus) is the Gospel for the Gentiles, and Luke the Gentile was chosen to give the history of the Gospel going forth from Jerusalem to the Gentiles.

Internal Evidences

There are numerous internal evidences which show likewise that the writer of the third Gospel is the instrument through whom the Book of Acts was given. For instance, there are about fifty peculiar phrases and words in both books which are rarely found elsewhere: they prove the same author.

Then we learn from the Book of Acts that Luke was an eyewitness of some of the events recorded by him in that book. He joined the Apostle during his second missionary journey to Troas (chapter 16:10). This evidence is found in the little word "we." The writer was now in company of the Apostle, whose fellow laborer he was. He went with Paul to Macedonia and remained some time in Philippi. He was Paul's fellow traveler to Asia and Jerusalem (chapter 21:17). He likewise was with him in his imprisonment in Caesarea, and then on to Rome. There is no doubt that Luke had completely written and sent forth the Book of the Acts of the Apostles at the end of the two years mentioned in Acts 28:30, though the critics claim a much later period.

The Contents and Scope of the Book

The first verse gives us an important hint. The former treatise, the Gospel of Luke, contains that Jesus began to do and teach. The Book of Acts contains therefore the continuation of the Lord's actions, no longer on earth, but from the Glory. The actions of the risen and glorified Christ can easily be traced through the entire Book. We give a few illustrations. In the first Chapter He acts in the selection of the twelfth Apostle who was to take the place of Judas. In the second chapter He himself poured forth the Holy Spirit, for Peter made the declaration "therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which ye behold and hear."

And in the close of the second chapter we behold another action of the risen Lord, "the Lord added to the assembly daily those that were to be saved." In the third chapter He manifested His power in the healing of the lame man. Throughout this Book we behold Him acting from the Glory, guiding, directing, comforting and encouraging His servants. These beautiful and manifold evidences of Himself being with His own and manifesting His power in their behalf can easily be traced in the different chapters.

Then on the very threshold of the Book we have the historical account of the coming of that other Comforter, whom the Lord had promised, the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, came. His coming marks the birthday of the Church. After that event we see Him present with His people as well as in them. In connection with the Lord's servants in filling them, guiding them, fitting them, sustaining them in trials and persecutions, in the affairs of the church, we behold the actions of the Holy Spirit on earth. He is the great administrator in the church. Over fifty times we find Him mentioned, so that some have called this Book; "the Acts of the Holy Spirit." There are no doctrines about the Holy Spirit and His work in the Book of Acts. But we find the practical illustrations of the doctrines of the Holy Spirit found elsewhere in the New Testament.

In the third place another supernatural Being is seen acting in this Book. It is the enemy, Satan, the hinderer and the accuser of the brethren. We behold him coming upon the scene and acting through his different instruments, either as the roaring lion, or as the cunning deceiver with his wiles. Wherever he can, he attempts to hinder the progress of the Gospel. This is a most important aspect of this Book, and indeed very instructive. Aside from the human instruments prominent in this Book of Acts, we behold three supernatural Beings acting. The risen and glorified Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Satan.

Another hint about the contents of this Book and its scope we find at the close of the Gospel of Luke. There the risen Christ said "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name to all the nations beginning at Jerusalem." In the first chapter of Acts the Spirit of God reports the commission of the Lord, about to ascend, in full. "Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The Book of Acts shows us how this mission, beginning in Jerusalem, was carried out. The witness begins in the City where our Lord was crucified. Once more an offer was made to the nation Israel. Then we behold the Gospel going forth from Jerusalem and all Judea to Samaria. and after that to the Gentiles. and through the Apostle Paul it is heralded in the different countries of the Roman empire. The parable of our Lord in Matthew 22:1-10 gives us prophetically the history of these events. First the guests were called to the wedding and they would not come. This was the invitation given by the Lord to His earthly people when He moved among them. They received Him not. Then came a renewed offer with the assurance that all things are ready. This is exactly what we find in the beginning in the Book of the Acts. Once more to Jerusalem and to the Jewish nation is offered the kingdom, and signs and miracles take place to show that Jesus is the Christ risen from the dead. In the above parable our Lord predicted what the people would do with the servants, who bring the second offer. They would ignore the message and treat the servants spitefully and kill them. This we find fulfilled in the persecution which broke out in Jerusalem, when Apostles were imprisoned and others were killed. The Lord also predicted in His parable the fate of the wicked City. It was to be burned. Thus it happened to Jerusalem. And after the second offer had been rejected the servants were to go to the highways to invite the guests. And this shows that the invitation was to go out to the Gentiles.

Jerusalem is in the foreground in this Book, for the beginning was to be in Jerusalem "to the Jew first." The end of the Book takes us to Rome, and we see the great Apostle a prisoner there, a most significant, prophetic circumstance.

The Division of the Book of Acts

"But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This verse in the beginning of the book is the key to the historical account it contains. The Holy Spirit came on the day of pentecost and the witness to Christ began. We make a threefold division.

I. The Witness to Jerusalem. The Advent of the Spirit and the Formation of the Church. The Offer to Israel and its Rejection. Chapter 1-7.

II. The Witness to Samaria. Saul's Conversion and Peter's Witness in Caesarea. Chapter 8-12.

III. The Witness to the Gentiles. The Apostle to the Gentiles, His Ministry and Captivity. Chapter 13-28.

While undoubtedly all witnessed, the book of Acts reports mostly the acts of Peter and Paul. The Apostle Peter is in the foreground in the first part of the book. After the twelfth chapter he is mentioned but once more. Then Paul comes upon the scene with His great testimony concerning "The Gospel of Christ, the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Jerusalem is prominent in the start. Antioch, the Gentile center of Christian activity, follows, and Rome is seen at the close of the book. The witness of which the risen Lord spoke was therefore given to Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria. Then to the uttermost part of the earth. Africa received a witness in the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch. Then followed the witness to Asia and Europe. The book of Acts ends, so to speak, in an unfinished way.

Analysis and Annotations

Part I

The Witness to Jerusalem. The Advent of the Spirit and the Formation of the Church. The Offer to Israel and its Rejection. Chapters 1-7

CHAPTER 1

1. The Introduction (verses 1-3).
2. The final words of the risen Lord (verses 4- 8).
3. The ascension (verses 9-11).
4. The waiting company (verses 12-14).
5. Matthias chosen in the place of Judas (verses 15-26).

The introductory words prove that Luke is the writer. In the former treatise, Luke had addressed to Theophilus (the Gospel of Luke) the beginning of the teaching, and acts of our Lord were reported. The Book of Acts reveals the same wonderful person witnessed to by the Holy Spirit. Eight things are mentioned concerning our Lord in the beginning of this book. 1. His earthly life of doing and teaching. 2. He gave them commandment. 3. He had suffered. 4. He had showed Himself after His passion by many infallible proofs. 5. He was seen by them for forty days. 6. He spoke of the things which concern the Kingdom of God. 7. He was taken up. 8. He will come again. Once more He gave to them the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit. In verse 5 we read "ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days

hence." John the Baptist had spoken also of a baptism with fire. The Lord omits the word fire, because the baptism with fire is a judgment act linked with His second coming (See Matthew 3:12). The question they asked of Him concerning the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel was perfectly in order. This is the Hope of Israel; the Hope of the church is not an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly glory; not to be subjects in the kingdom on earth, but to reign and rule with the King. The answer they received assured them that the kingdom was to be restored to Israel; the times and seasons for that, however, rested with the Father.

Then they saw Him ascending. What a sight it must have been! Their Lord was "received into Glory." Gradually in majestic silence He must have been lifted out of their midst. Lovingly His eyes must have rested upon them, while their eyes saw only Him. Then a cloud received Him out of their sight. "And then a cloud took Him in (literal rendering) out of their sight." The cloud was not a common cloud of vapor, but the glory-cloud. It was the cloud of glory which had filled Solomon's temple, which so often in Israel's past history had appeared as an outward sign of Jehovah's presence. Then angels announced His coming in like manner. And thus He will come, even back to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4).

However, we must beware of confounding this event given here with that blessed Hope, which is the Hope of the church. The Coming of the Lord here is His visible Coming as described in the prophetic books of the Old Testament; it is His coming to establish His rule upon the earth. it is the event spoken of in Daniel 7:14 and Revelation 1:7. When He comes in like manner as He went up, His Saints come with Him (Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 3:13). The Hope of the church is to meet Him in the air, and not to see Him coming in the clouds of heaven. The coming here "in like manner" is His Coming for Israel and the nations. The Coming of the Lord for His Church, before His visible and glorious manifestation, is revealed in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18. It is well to keep these important truths in mind. Confusion between these is disastrous. He left them to enter into the Holy of Holies, to exercise the priesthood which Aaron exercised on the day of atonement, though our Lord is a priest after the order of Melchisedec. And when this promise of the two men in white garments is fulfilled, He will come forth to be a priest upon His throne.

Then we see them as a waiting company. They are not the church. Their waiting for the Coming of the Holy Spirit ended ten days after, when the Holy Spirit came. Since then He is here. To wait for another outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as so often done by well meaning people, is unscriptural. Among the waiting ones were "Mary the mother of Jesus and His brethren." The one chosen by God's grace to be the mother of our Lord; Mary, who had conceived by the Holy Spirit, is waiting with the other disciples. This proves that she has no place of superiority among God's people. When the Holy Spirit came she too was baptized by the Spirit into the one body of which, through the Grace of God, she is a member like any other believer in our Lord. After this she is not mentioned again in the Word of God. Mary, the mother of Jesus, has absolutely no relation with the redemption work of the Son of God. His brethren, according to John 7:5, were unbelieving. Since then they had also believed on Him.

The action of Peter in proposing to place another in Judas' place was not a mistake as some claim. Peter acted upon the Scriptures and was guided by the Lord. Some hold that Paul was meant to be the twelfth apostle. This is incorrect. Paul's apostleship was of an entirely different nature than that of the twelve. Not till Israel's complete failure had been demonstrated in the stoning of Stephen was he called, and then not of men, but by revelation of Jesus Christ. There is positive proof that the Holy Spirit sanctioned this action of the disciples. See 1 Corinthians 15:5-8. Furthermore, twelve apostles were needed as a body of witnesses to the entire nation. How strange it would have been if Peter and the ten, eleven men in all, instead of twelve, had stood up on the day of Pentecost to witness to Christ in the presence of the assembled multitude.

CHAPTER 2

1. The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit (verses 1-4).
2. The Immediate Effect of His Presence (verses 5-13).
3. Peter's Address (verses 14-36).
4. The Result of the Witness (verses 37-41).
5. The Gathered Company in Fellowship (verses 42-47).

This is an important chapter. The Promise of the Father was fulfilled, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity came down to earth, to be the other Comforter. He came on that blessed day.

Two things are at once apparent. He came upon the assembled believers individually, and also did a work in a corporate way. Each believer on that day was filled with the Holy Spirit. He came as the indweller to each. But He also was present as the mighty rushing wind which filled all the house. He did not only come upon each, but all were baptized with the Holy Spirit, and united into a body. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 the more complete revelation is given concerning this fact. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." The One Spirit is the Holy Spirit as He came on the day of Pentecost, the One Body is the church. All believers were on that day united by the Spirit into the one body, and since then, whenever and wherever a sinner believes in the finished work of Christ, he shares in that baptism and is joined by the same Spirit to that one body. A believer may be in dense ignorance about all this, as indeed a great many are; but this does not alter the gracious fact of what God has done. The believing company was then formed on the day of Pentecost into one body. It was the birthday of the church.

There is an interesting correspondence between the second chapter of Luke and the second chapter of Acts which we cannot pass by. In the first chapter of Luke we have the announcement of the birth of the Saviour. In the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke we read of the accomplishment of that Promise given to the Virgin. And so the second chapter of Acts contains the fulfillment of a similar promise. The Holy Spirit came and the church, the mystical body of Christ, began.

But the truth concerning the church was not revealed on the day of Pentecost. The twelve apostles were ignorant of what had taken place, and that the church formed would be composed of believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews; nor did they know anything of the different relationships of the church. Through the Apostle Paul the full truth concerning the church was made known.

The Coming of the Holy Spirit was accompanied with visible signs. A new dispensation was inaugurated with outward signs, just as the giving of the law for that dispensation was accompanied with similar signs. (Hebrews 12:18-19.) The rushing mighty wind filled the house, "and there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire and it sat upon each of them." The filling of the house indicated the fact that His abode would be the house; the church and the parted tongues upon each head testified to the fact that each had received Him. The Person, not a power or influence given by measure, had filled each believer. He came as the gift of God.

Then they spoke in different languages. The speaking in other languages was a miracle produced by the Holy Spirit, who had come upon them in mighty power. These Galileans spoke in different tongues,

sixteen at least, if not more. "By a sudden and powerful inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these disciples uttered, not of their own minds, but as mouthpieces of the Holy Spirit, the praises of God in various languages hitherto, and possibly at the time itself, unknown to them" (Dean Alford in Greek Testament).

The significance of this miracle speaking in other tongues is not hard to discover. It was the oral manifestation of the parted tongues of fire, which had come upon each. Besides this it proclaimed the great fact that the Holy Spirit had come to make known the blessed Gospel to all nations under heaven, and though no Gentiles were present when this took place, the languages of the Gentiles were heard, and that from Jewish lips, showing that the Gospel should go forth unto the uttermost part of the earth. But did they utter all an orderly discourse, preaching the truth concerning Christ, or was their speech of an ecstatic nature, in the form of praising God? We believe the latter was the case. We look in vain through this book for the evidences that these believers continued speaking these different languages.

Now, while it is true that there was such a gift as speaking in an unknown tongue in the apostolic age, and no Christian believer would doubt the power of God to impart to a person the gift to preach the Gospel in a foreign tongue, we do not believe that this gift of speaking in an unknown tongue was to abide in the church. Repeatedly claims were made in years gone by that it had been restored (for instance during the Irvingite delusion in England), but in every case it was found to be spurious or emanating from the enemy. The present day "apostolic or pentecostal movement" with its high pretensions and false doctrines, lacking true scriptural knowledge and wisdom, creating new schisms in the body, with its women leaders and teachers, has all the marks of the same great counterfeiter upon it. (For a closer examination of the speaking in tongues see our larger work on Acts.)

Then Peter stood up with the eleven and gave his great testimony. What boldness he manifested! What a change from the Peter before Pentecost! It was the result of the Holy Spirit he had received. His address dealt with the great historical facts of the Gospel, bearing witness to the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus. In its scope and pointedness it is a remarkable production. It has three parts. 1. He reprobates the charge of drunkenness and quotes from Joel, avoiding, however, the statement that Joel's prophecy was fulfilled (verses 14-22). (Joel's Prophecy will be fulfilled in connection with the second Coming of Christ. Then the Holy Spirit, after the predicted judgments are passed, will be poured out upon all flesh. To put the fulfillment in our day is erroneous. See our Exposition of Joel.)

2. Next he gives a brief testimony of the life and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He quotes from the sixteenth Psalm (verses 23-28). 3. The last part of his address shows that the Holy Spirit had come as the result of the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The briefest but deepest Messianic Psalm is quoted in this section (Psalm 110). The address as reported closes with the significant word: "Let the whole house of Israel, therefore, assuredly know that God has made Him, this Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (verses 29-36). Notice how the Holy Spirit uses through Peter the Word of God. The Holy Spirit testifies in and through the written Word. The aim of Peter's address was to prove to the house of Israel that the crucified One is raised from the dead and that God made Him Lord and Christ, witnessed to by the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Person of Christ and His work is still the great theme. Whenever He is preached the power of God will accompany the message.

Wonderful results followed. The Word had been preached and the power of the Holy Spirit brought the great truths to the hearts and consciences of the hearers. Their guilt in having crucified Jesus had been fully demonstrated, and now they asked, "Now, brethren, what shall we do?" Peter gives the needed answer. Repentance and baptism are the conditions. If these are fulfilled remission of sins and the gift of

the Holy Spirit are promised to follow. Peter's words wrongly interpreted have led to much confusion. Upon these words doctrines, especially concerning water baptism, have been built, which are not alone nowhere else taught in the Bible, but which are opposed to the Gospel. The words of Peter to his Jewish brethren have been used to make water baptism a saving ordinance, that only by submission to water baptism, with repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus, can remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit be obtained. We do not enlarge upon these unscriptural conceptions nor answer the utterly false doctrine of "baptismal regeneration", but rather point out briefly what these words of Peter mean. We must bear in mind that Peter addressed those who had openly rejected Jesus. They had, therefore, also openly to acknowledge their wrong and thus openly own Him as Messiah, whom they had disowned by delivering Him into the hands of lawless men. Repentance meant for them to own their guilt in having opposed and rejected Jesus. Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ (in which it differs from the baptism of John) was the outward expression of that repentance. It was for these Jews, therefore, a preliminary necessity. And here we must not forget that Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost had it still to do with the kingdom, as we shall more fully learn from his second address in the third chapter. Another offer of the kingdom was made to the nation. The great fact that the Holy Spirit had begun to form the body of Christ, the church, as stated before, was not revealed then. In this national testimony the word "repent" stands in the foreground, and their baptism in the name of Him whom they had crucified was a witness that they owned Him now and believed on Him.

About three thousand souls were added, who repented and were baptized. Then we behold them in blessed fellowship. Doctrine stands first. It is the prominent thing. They continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine. In the doctrine of the Apostles they were in fellowship together, and that fellowship was expressed in "the breaking of bread." It was not a common meal, but the carrying out of the request the Lord had made in the night He was betrayed, when He instituted what we call "the Lord's supper." Prayer is also mentioned. They had all things in common. They were like a great family, which in reality they were through the Grace of God.

And how happy they were! They had Christ, and that was enough. No system of theology, creeds, set of forms or any such thing, with which historical Christianity abounds--"Nothing but Christ." They received their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. Joy and singleness of heart are two great characteristics of the true believer.

CHAPTER 3

1. The Healing of the lame Man (verses 1-11).
2. Peter's address and appeal (verses 12-26).

The lame man, forty years old, at the gate called Beautiful is the type of the moral condition of the nation, like the impotent man whom the Lord healed (John 5). Israel with all its beautiful religious ceremonies was helpless, laying outside with no strength to enter in. Peter commands the lame man in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth to rise up and to walk. He is instantly healed. He then walked and leaped and entered through the gate as a worshipper into the temple, praising God. This great miracle was wrought as another evidence to the unbelieving nation that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had rejected and crucified, is their Messiah and King. It was a proof that the rejected One, who had died on a cross and had been buried, is living in Glory, and that God's omnipotent power had been revealed in answer to that name. The miracle also denoted that the promised kingdom was once more offered to the nation. Concerning that kingdom,

when it comes, it is written that "the lame man shall leap as an hart." (Isaiah 35:6.) But the lame man, so wonderfully healed, leaping and praising God, is likewise a picture of what the nation will be in a future day, when they will look upon Him whom they have pierced (See Zechariah 12:10; Ezekiel 36:27; Isaiah 12:1-6; 35:10). Peter delivers his second address. Interesting and of much importance are verses 19-21. They can only be understood in the right way if we do not lose sight of the fact to whom they were addressed, that is to Jews, and not to Gentiles. They are the heart of this discourse, and as such a God-given appeal and promise to the nation. If this is lost sight of, the words must lose their right meaning. The repentance which is demanded of them is an acknowledgment of the wrong they had done in denying the Holy and righteous One, a confession of their blood-guiltiness in having slain the author of life. This, of course, would result in their conversion and the blotting out of their sins as a nation. This God had promised before to the nation (Isaiah 44:22-23).

The "times of refreshing" and "restitution of all things" are expressions in which the Holy Spirit gathers together the hundreds of promises He gave through the different prophets of God concerning a time of great blessing for His people, and through them for the nations of the world. It would be impossible to mention all these promises and in what the times of refreshing and restoration of all things consist. These days of a coming age, the kingdom age, or as we call it because its duration will be a thousand years, the Millennium, are fully described on the pages of Old Testament prophecy. Not alone will the nation be blessed, but Jerusalem will be a great city; the land will be restored and become the great center for blessing; the nations of the earth will receive blessings, and groaning creation will be delivered from its groans and the curse which rests upon it. If we interpret the Word of Prophecy literally and cease spiritualizing it, we shall have no difficulty to behold the full meaning of the times of refreshing and the restitution of all things. The latter word does not include a restoration of the wicked dead, a second chance for those who passed out of this life in an unsaved condition. And these glorious times cannot come till the Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

CHAPTER 4

1. Their Arrest (verses 1-3).
2. The Result of the Testimony (verse 4).
3. Peter and John before the Rulers and Elders (verses 5-7).
4. Peter's bold witness (verses 8-12).
5. The astonished Sanhedrin and their Release (verses 13-22).
6. With their own company (verses 23-31).
7. The saved multitude (verses 32-37).

The enemy begins now his acts, and the first indication is given that the offer God's mercy was making to the nation would not be accepted. The Holy Spirit was acting mightily through the spoken Word, but these ecclesiastical leaders were hardening their hearts against the Word and the Spirit of God. The hate against that blessed Name broke out anew under the satanic power to which they had yielded. And the Sadducees came too. Though not much had been said on the resurrection, yet these rationalists, or as we would call them today, "higher critics," were much distressed because they preached Jesus and the resurrection. The next step is the arrest and imprisonment of the two apostles. Rough hands seize them.

Of the Apostles we read nothing else. They submitted. The power of the Holy Spirit now manifested itself in a new way with them. They could suffer, and perhaps with great joy; in perfect peace they allowed themselves to be taken away.

We have here also the first fulfillment of the many predictions given by our Lord that His own were to suffer persecution (Matthew 10:16-17; Mark 13:9; John 20:20). In Peter's witness we see the effect of the filling with the Spirit. What holy boldness he exhibited! He quotes the same Scripture passage to the assembled Sanhedrin, which the Lord had mentioned in their presence (See Matthew 22:23-41).

They knew that the Lord meant them when He quoted that verse, that they were the builders, who were to reject Him. They had done so in fulfillment of that prophecy. Peter's words are directed straight at them, "He is the stone which has been set at naught by you, the builders."

The rejected stone had become the corner stone. The One whom they had delivered up and cast out had been given the prominent place of the corner stone upon whom, as the foundation stone, everything rests, and who unites the building.

Peter closes with the statement that salvation is only in Him whom they had set at naught. There is no other Name given to men by which man can be saved, and that is the Name of Him who had made this lame man whole. Salvation they all needed. They, too, rulers, elders, chief priests must be saved. But only in Him God had procured salvation free and complete for all who will have it by believing on Him. This salvation was offered to these rulers, the builders who had rejected the Lord.

They were then threatened by the astonished rulers and elders and set at liberty. We find them in their own company and after praise and prayer new manifestations of the Holy Spirit follow. In the closing verses we have another glimpse of the assembly in Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 5

1. Ananias and Sapphira (verses 1-10).
2. Signs and wonders by the Apostles (verses 11-16).
3. The second arrest of the Apostles and their Deliverance (verses 17-25).
4. Before the Council (verses 26-33).
5. Gamaliel's Advice (verses 34-39).
6. The Apostles beaten and dismissed (verses 40-42).

With this chapter the scene changes. Beautiful is the ending of the previous chapter, Barnabas having sold his land, laid the money at the feet of the Apostles. He gave by it a striking testimony how he realized as a believing Jew his heavenly portion, by giving up that which is promised to the Jew, earthly possessions.

Our chapter begins with the significant word "But." It is the word of failure and decline. All was evidently perfect; nothing marred the precious scenes of fellowship--"but," and with this little word the story of evil begins. The enemy seeing himself so completely defeated by his attacks from the outside now enters among the flock and begins his work within.

Ananias and Sapphira were lying to the Holy Spirit. Swift judgment followed as to their earthly existence. They were cut off by death. The sin they had done was "a sin unto death" and the sentence, physical death, was immediately carried out. Peter is still in the foreground. We must remember here the words of the Lord which He spake to Peter, after this disciple had confessed Him as Son of God. "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). The same words concerning binding and loosing the Lord addressed to all the disciples (Matthew 18:18). The binding and loosing refers to discipline on earth. It has nothing whatever to do with forgiveness of sins or eternal salvation. Peter here exercises this authority, it was the first discipline. We must likewise remember that these events happened on Jewish, on kingdom ground. The witness was still to the nation. The sudden judgment which came upon Ananias and Sapphira was a strong witness to the nation that the Holy One of Israel, Jehovah, dwelt in the midst of this remnant, who believed in the One whom the nation had rejected. When the kingdom is established on earth and the Lord Jesus Christ rules in righteousness, then, no doubt, every sin will be swiftly judged by death.

Great things followed. Their habitual place seems to have been in Solomon's porch. No one dared to join them. They held the position of authority. Though they had been forbidden the public ministry they are back in a prominent place. The people magnified them too. Then another result was that more believers were added. Added to what? The First Hebrew Christian Church of Jerusalem? The First Jewish Christian Society? No. They were added to the Lord. The sinner believing is saved, receives the Holy Spirit, is joined to the Lord, becomes one spirit with the Lord, a member of the body of which He is the Head. Signs and wonders were done by the Apostles. The sick were healed, unclean spirits were driven out. Multitudes of people from the surrounding country flocked to Jerusalem, bringing their sick, and they were all healed. They waited even in the streets for the time when Peter walked along so that his shadow might fall on some of them. These were great manifestations of the power of God. The words spoken by the Lord were then fulfilled. They did the works He did. These signs and wonders, however, are nowhere mentioned as to their permanency throughout this age. They were only for the beginning of this age; after the Gospel of Grace and the mystery hidden in former ages had been fully made known they disappeared.

All the Apostles were then arrested and Put into the common prison. During the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison door and led them out. Such a manifestation was perfectly in order at that time, and fully corresponds with the other kingdom characteristics in the beginning of this book. But these supernatural manifestations have ceased. Peter once more with the other Apostles bears witness to the resurrection and exaltation of the rejected Christ. On the advice of Gamaliel they were released after they had been beaten. With rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name, they departed and continued in their great ministry.

CHAPTER 6

1. The Murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews (verses 1-7).
2. Stephen; His Ministry and Arrest (verses 8-15).

Another failure is brought before us. The enemy acts again. From without and from within Satan pressed upon that which was of God. While the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit acted in Grace and power, the enemy came in to disturb. It is still so. Whenever there is a door opened there are also many adversaries (1 Corinthians 16:9).

The flesh manifested itself in murmuring. The assembly took care of the poor; widows being specially helpless, were the objects of daily ministrations. The Jews themselves in connection with the synagogue had special funds for them. They must have also formed a recognized group in the early church (1 Timothy 5:9-10). The ministration is the distribution mentioned in Chapter 4:35, and as the multitude was very great, including, perhaps, hundreds of widows, this work was quite a task. Murmurings arose and these were born of jealousy, the result of unbelief. It is the first indication of weakness and failure. This reminds us of the murmurings of Israel as recorded in the book of Exodus. The same old thing, the changeless flesh, shows itself among the saved and united company of believers, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The murmurings were on the side of the Grecians. Their complaint was against the Hebrews that the Grecian widows were being overlooked. The Grecians were not, as some teach, Gentiles, but they were Greek-speaking Jews, born in countries outside of Palestine, and therefore called Hellenists, or Grecians.

The murmuring is at once arrested. Seven men are chosen under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles declared "we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word." The Holy Spirit thus separated the gifts called to minister in spiritual things from those in temporal matters. Note how prayer is put before the ministry of the Word. There can be no effectual ministry, no successful preaching and teaching of the Word, unless it is preceded by prayer.

The seven chosen ones are then named. While we know little of these men and the service they rendered, with the exception of Stephen and Philip, it is an interesting fact that their names are all Greek. In this the grace of God is beautifully exhibited. The Grecians were the murmurers, and no doubt they were fewer in number than the Hebrews. A modern day church meeting would have proposed to elect a committee composed of equal numbers of the two parties. But not so here.

Grace and wisdom from above are manifested in this action. The entire seven were chosen from those who had complained. This was the blessed rebuke of Grace.

The seven were then set before the Apostles, and when they had prayed they laid their hands on them. As this "laying on of hands" is so much misunderstood, and has been made an act by which authority, power and blessing is claimed to be conferred, we must say a brief word on it. It is always proper in reading and interpreting the Word of God, to see if not elsewhere in the Bible the terms or things to be interpreted are used, so that through them the right meaning can be ascertained. The laying on of hands is first mentioned in the Book of Leviticus. In the opening chapters of that book we read how the offerer was to lay his hand upon the head of the offering. Thus we read of the Peace offering: "He shall lay his hand upon the head of his offering" (Leviticus 3:2). This meant the identification of the Israelite with the offering itself. And this is the meaning of the laying on of hands from the side of the Apostles. They identified themselves and the assembly with them in their work for which they had been chosen. It was a very simple and appropriate act to show their fellowship with them. All else which has been made of the laying on of hands is an invention. There is no Scripture for the present day usage in Christendom, that a man in order to preach the Gospel or teach the Word of God must be "ordained."

miracles among the people. Certain of the synagogue of the Libertines and others disputed with Stephen. (It is wrong to call these "Libertines" free thinkers. Jews had been taken to Rome as slaves. Their descendants who had been liberated were called Libertines, that is freedmen. They were known as such in Jerusalem and hence the name "synagogue of the Libertines.") And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Stephen is accused of blasphemy. The charge is "blasphemy

against Moses and against God." They succeeded in their satanic work by stirring up the people, the elders and the scribes. Three things are mentioned by them. He ceaseth not to speak words against this holy place, against the law, and that he should have said: "This Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us." And then they looked upon him, and behold his face was like the face of an angel. All eyes were attracted to this wonderful sight. Steadfastly they looked upon a face of Glory; a face

reflecting heaven's light, heaven's Glory; a face reflecting the Glory of Him into whose presence he soon would be called. And may not that young man named Saul also have been there and seen that face? And that dark countenance of that young Pharisee of Tarsus was soon to behold that same Glory-light, and then tell the world of the Gospel of the Glory and that "we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory unto glory."

CHAPTER 7

1. The Address of Stephen (verses 1-53).

2. The Martyrdom of Stephen (verses 54-60).

This is the largest chapter in this book and concludes the first section. Stephen is the chosen instrument to deliver the final testimony to the nation. He was not permitted to finish it.

We notice at once a marked difference between the previous preaching by the Apostle Peter and the address of Stephen. The testimony of Peter was marked on the day of Pentecost and at the other occasions by great brevity. Stephen's address is the longest discourse reported in the New Testament. The name of Jesus is prominent in all the addresses of Peter. The fact that He was rejected by the people, crucified and that He rose from the dead, and the call to repentance, were the leading features of Peter's preaching. Stephen does not mention the Name of Jesus at all, though he has the person of Christ and His rejection as the theme of his testimony. (The name "Jesus" appears in the A.V. in verse 45; but it should be "Joshua" instead.) At the close of his address he speaks of the Just One of whom they had become betrayers and murderers.

Stephen had been accused of speaking against Moses and against God, also against the temple and the law. These accusations he is asked to answer. What he declared before the council shows plainly that the accusations are utterly false. His speech is, therefore, partly apologetic; but it is also teaching, in that it shows certain truths from the historic events he cites. And before he finishes his testimony the accused becomes the accuser of the nation; the one to be judged becomes the judge. Indeed his whole testimony as he rapidly speaks of past history in his great and divinely arranged retrospect, is a most powerful testimony to the nation as well as against the nation.

The great address falls into the following sections: 1. Abraham's History (verses 2-8). 2. Joseph and his brethren (verses 9-16). 3. The Rejection of Moses. The rejected one became their Deliverer and Ruler (verses 17-38). 4. The Story of the nation's apostasy and shame (verses 39-50). Then Stephen ceased his historical retrospect, he addressed them directly. The accused witness becomes the mouthpiece of the Judge, who pronounces the sentence upon the nation. This is found in verses 51-53. His martyrdom followed.

Three things are mentioned of this first martyr. He was full of the Holy Spirit; he looked steadfastly into heaven, seeing the glory of God; he saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

This is the first manifestation of the glorified Christ, which we have on record. There are three of them only. He appeared here to Stephen. Then He appeared unto Saul, who consented unto Stephen's death. Saul beheld Him in that Glory, brighter than the noon-day sun, and heard His voice. The last time the glorified Christ manifested Himself was to John in the island of Patmos. These three appearances of the glorified Christ present to our view the three aspects of His Second Coming. First He comes to welcome His own into His presence. He will arise and come into the air to meet His beloved co-heirs there. This is represented by the first appearing to Stephen, standing to receive him. Then Israel will behold Him, they who pierced Him will see Him, as Saul of Tarsus beheld the Lord. Then He will appear as John saw Him, the One who judges the earth in righteousness.

And now after this great and glorious vision, Stephen bears testimony to it. "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." He speaks of the Lord as "Son of Man." This is the only time outside of the Gospel records that we find this title of the Lord (aside from the old Testament reference in Hebrews 2).

They stoned him and Stephen, the mighty witness and mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit, fell asleep.

God's gracious offer and Christ had now been fully rejected by the nation. Stephen, who bore this last witness, is a striking evidence of the transforming power of Christ. How much like the Lord he was!

He was filled with the Spirit, full of faith and power, and like the Lord he did great wonders and miracles among the people. Like Christ, he was falsely accused of speaking against Moses, the law and the temple, and of being a blasphemer. They brought him before the same council and did what they did with the Lord, bringing false witnesses against him. He gave witness to the truth of the confession the Lord had given before the council, that He was to sit at the right hand of God. He beheld Him there. The Lord Jesus committed His spirit in the Father's hands, and Stephen prayed that the Lord Jesus receive his spirit; and like the Lord he prayed for the forgiveness of his enemies. May the same power transform us all into the same image.

Part II

The Witness to Samaria. Saul's Conversion and Peter's Witness in Caesarea. Chapters 8-12

CHAPTER 8

1. The first great persecution (verses 1-3).
2. The preaching of the scattered believers. Philip in Samaria (verses 4-8).
3. Events in Samaria (verses 9-24).
4. The Gospel in many villages of Samaria (verse 25).
5. Philip and the Eunuch (verses 26-40).

The final testimony to the rulers of the people had been given. It was rejected, and the Spirit filled messenger killed. The last offer had therefore been completely rejected. The Gospel is now to be sent to

the Gentiles. The eighth chapter gives the record how Samaria heard the Gospel.

Saul, the young Pharisee, was consenting unto Stephen's death. Later he refers to the scene, which must have been impossible for him to erase from his memory. "When the blood of Stephen was shed, I was standing by and keeping the garments of them that slew him" (Acts 22:20). Concerning Saul the Lord said to Ananias, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (9:16). What was done unto Stephen was done unto Saul. The Jews and Saul with them, as we believe, disputed and resisted Stephen in the synagogue. The Jews disputed with Paul, resisted him, and rejected his testimony. Stephen was accused of blasphemy; so was Paul (Acts 19:37). Stephen was accused of speaking against Moses, the holy place and the customs; so was Paul (Acts 21:28; 24:6; 25:8; 28:17). They rushed upon Stephen with one accord and seized him. The same happened to Paul (Acts 19:29). Stephen was dragged out of the city. So was Paul (Acts 14:19). Stephen was tried before the Sanhedrin; so did Paul appear before the Sanhedrin. Stephen was stoned and Paul was stoned at Lystra. Stephen suffered martyrdom; so did Paul in Rome. And yet, with all the sufferings that Paul had to undergo, he rejoiced. His eyes rested constantly upon that glorious One, whom Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, beheld in Glory. Later we hear him crying out from the prison in Rome, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death" (Philippians 3:10).

The first great persecution then broke out against the church in Jerusalem. Saul was evidently the leader (Acts 26:10-11; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13). But "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." God permitted this persecution that His Word might now be scattered abroad by the suffering saints. Philip, the Grecian Jew, one of the chosen seven, not an Apostle, is mightily used in preaching the Gospel in Samaria. The first missionary move to extend the Gospel was, therefore, not brought about under apostolic leadership, nor by the decree of an apostolic council, but by the Lord Himself. He led Philip to Samaria, where He Himself had been, yea to the very city of Samaria, Sychar (John 4). Great results followed the preaching of the Gospel. Miracles took place. Unclean spirits were driven out, many taken with palsies, and those who were lame were healed, so that there was great joy in that city. Simon Magus was a sinister instrument of Satan. He bewitched the people of Samaria, claiming to be some great one.

The hour of deliverance came for the Samaritans when Philip preached the Word, concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. Signs and great miracles followed, and the Samaritans believed and were baptized. The miracles were done to show the power of God, to attest the preaching of the Gospel by Philip, and to expose the counterfeit powers of Simon. And he, like the sorcerers of Egypt, had to own that this was the power of God. He was amazed when he beheld the great miracles. But more than that, he also believed, was baptized, and then continued with Philip. But his faith was not through the Word of God. God's Word alone can produce faith in man, for faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Simon was captivated by the miracles he had seen. Philip was deceived by him, but not Peter, who uncovered his Wickedness.

That the Holy Spirit had not been given to the Samaritans and that He was received by them after Peter and John had come from Jerusalem and laid hands on them, has puzzled many earnest students of the Word. It has also led to erroneous teachings, as if the Holy Spirit must be received in a special manner after conversion.

The Samaritan believers had to be identified with those in Jerusalem, so much the more because there was a schism between Samaria and Jerusalem. Samaria had denied both the city of Jerusalem and the temple. This had to be ended and could no longer be tolerated. It was therefore divinely ordered that the gift of the Spirit in their case should be withheld till the two apostles came from Jerusalem. This meant an acknowledgment of Jerusalem; if the Holy Spirit had been imparted unto them at once it might have resulted in a continuance of the existing rivalry. And Peter is in the foreground and uses the keys of the kingdom of heaven here with the Samaritans as he did on the day of Pentecost with the Jews, and later with the Gentiles. Nowhere in the church epistles, in which the great salvation truths and blessings in Christ Jesus are revealed, is there a word said about receiving the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, or that one who has trusted in Christ and is born again should seek the gift of the Holy Spirit afterward.

The conversion of the Eunuch is full of blessed lessons. Philip was obedient to the call of the Lord and the Eunuch, the prominent Ethiopian, Queen Candace's treasurer, who had returned from Jerusalem, an unsatisfied seeker, believed on the Lord Jesus and went on his way rejoicing. Verse 37 is an interpolation and should be omitted. Philip was caught away and was found some twenty miles north of Gaza, at Azotus. From there he started out anew preaching the Gospel. In many cities his voice was heard. These coast cities were inhabited by many Gentiles and included larger places like Jamnia, Lydda, Joppa and Antipatris. The day of Christ will make known the labors and also the reward of this great Evangelist. Then he came to Caesarea. But did he stop with that? We do not know. Twenty years later we find him there and Paul was then his guest.

CHAPTER 9

1. The vision of Glory on the road to Damascus (verses 1-9).
2. Instructions given to Ananias (verses 10-16).
3. Saul filled with the Spirit, is baptized and preaches that Jesus is the Son of God (verses 17-22).
4. Saul persecuted and back in Jerusalem (verses 23-31).
5. Further Acts of Peter (verses 32-43).

The previous chapter must be looked upon in its main part as a parenthesis. The record now leads us back to the close of the seventh, and the person who was connected with the great tragedy enacted there is prominently brought now before us. The witnesses of the wicked deed had laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. This is the first time this remarkable man is mentioned. We also learned that he was consenting unto Stephen's death; he made havoc of the church and committed men and women to prison. While the scattered believers had carried the Gospel throughout Judea, Philip had gone down to Samaria and with great results preached the Gospel, and during the same time Peter and John preached in the Samaritan villages, Saul carried on his work of persecution. This we learn from the opening verse of the present chapter. "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest." The conversion of this great persecutor and his call by the risen and glorified lord to be the Apostle to the Gentiles is the event which is next described. It is the greatest event recorded in Acts next to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Saul was from Tarsus in Cilicia, where he had become acquainted with Greek life, literature, art and philosophy. The chief industry of Tarsus was tent making. This trade the young Saul learned. He had a

married sister living in Jerusalem (Acts 23:16). He also was a Roman citizen.

Saul received his religious education in Jerusalem. We find this from his own words, "I am verily a man, a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city (Jerusalem) at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye are all this day" (Acts 22:3).

That Saul was highly respected in Jerusalem and close to the leaders of the people, is seen by the letters entrusted to him and the commission to Damascus. He may have been even a member of the council, for "he voted." "When they (Christians) were put to death, I gave my voice (literally, my vote) against them" (Acts 26:10).

And now God's marvelous Grace and Power in salvation is to be manifested. Israel as a nation had rejected the offer and Stephen's death marked the end of that gracious offer. But God can manifest even greater riches of His Grace and display His great Love. Saul not alone belonged to the nation, which had rejected Christ, but shared in that rejection, but he was, so to speak, the heading up of all the hatred and malignity against the Christ of God. He personified the blindness, unbelief and hatred of the whole nation. He was indeed an enemy, the greatest enemy, the chief of sinners. Surely only Grace could save such a one, and Grace it is, which is now to be manifested in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the Grace which he was to know first by the vision of the glorified Christ, and which he, ever after, was to proclaim and make known to others.

The vision itself which burst upon Saul on the road to Damascus is one of the greatest in the whole Bible. It has baffled unbelief. Infidels of all descriptions, French rationalists like Renan, reformed rationalistic Jews, and the worst of all, the advocates of the destructive Bible Criticism, have tried to explain the occurrence in some natural way.

Renan said that it was an uneasy conscience with unstrung nerves, fatigue of the journey, eyes inflamed by the hot sun, a sudden stroke of fever, which produced the hallucination. And this nonsense is repeated to this day. Others of the critics have stated that it was a thunderstorm which overtook him, and that a flash of lightning blinded him. In that lightning flash he imagined that he saw Christ. Again, others have tried to explain his vision by some physical disease. Jews and others have declared that he suffered from Epilepsy, which the Greeks called "the holy disease." This disease, they say, put him into a state of ecstasy, which may have greatly impressed his Gentile hearers. In such an attack he imagined to have seen a vision and heard a voice. All these and other opinions are puerile inventions. The fact is, the conversion of Saul is one of the great miracles and evidences of Christianity.

The ninth chapter does not contain the full record of what happened on the road to Damascus. The Apostle Paul himself relates twice his own experience in chapter 22:5-16 and in chapter 26:12-18. He also mentions his conversion briefly in 1 Corinthians 15:8; Galatians 1:15-16 and 1 Timothy 1:12-13. The three accounts of Saul's conversion are not without meaning. The one before us in the ninth chapter is the briefest, and is simply the historical account of the event as it had to be embodied in the Book of the Acts, as history. The account in the twenty-second chapter was given by Paul in the Hebrew tongue; it is the longest statement and was addressed to the Jews. The account in the twenty-sixth chapter was given in presence of the Roman governor Festus and the Jewish king Agrippa, therefore addressed to both Jews and Gentiles. But are there not discrepancies and disagreements in these three accounts? Such has been the claim from the side of men who reject the inspiration of the Bible. There are differences, but no

disagreements. These differences in themselves are the evidences of inspiration. The differences, however, are simply in the manner in which the facts of the event are presented.

He saw then the glorified One and heard His voice. This great vision became the great turning point of his life. He received perfect knowledge and assurance, that the rejected Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. The great event is prophetic. It will be repeated on a larger scale when the Lord Jesus comes again and the remnant of Israel sees Him coming in the clouds of heaven.

The words which the Lord addressed to Saul:--"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" contain the blessed Gospel he was soon to proclaim. He did not persecute Christ, but those who had believed on Him.

Every believing sinner is a member of the body of Christ. Christ in Glory, the Lord, who spoke to Saul in the way, is the Head of that body, the church. Christ is in each member of His body, His life is there; and every believer is in Christ. "Ye in Me and I in you." And this great hidden mystery flashes forth in this wonderful event for the first time "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me." "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." The poor, hated, despised Nazarenes, whom the mad, Jewish zealot Saul of Tarsus had driven out of Jerusalem, put into prison and delivered unto death, were one with the Lord in Glory. They were identified with Him and He with them. Their persecution meant His persecution, in their affliction He was afflicted. They were members of His body and that body was in existence.

Soon after we see the erstwhile persecutor preaching Jesus, that He is the Son of God. Persecution soon followed. He also spent a time in Arabia and then paid a visit to Jerusalem for fifteen days (Galatians 1:17-24). Further Acts of Peter by divine power conclude this chapter.

CHAPTER 10

1. Cornelius of Caesarea and his Preparation (verses 1-8).
2. The Trance-vision of Peter (verses 9-16).
3. Peter with Cornelius at Caesarea (verses 17-33).
4. Peter Preaching to the Gentiles (verses 34-43).
5. The Interrupted Message (verses 44-48).

The ending of the preceding chapter tells us that Peter tarried in Joppa in the house of Simon the tanner. Was he breaking with his Jewish law and customs? Tanning as a trade was considered unclean by the Jews.

In Ephesians 2:11-18 we read of the Grace of God to the Gentiles. Up to this time in the Book of Acts we have seen nothing of this gracious purpose, the blessed result of the finished work of Christ on the cross. Jerusalem heard the Gospel first. Once more the good news of the Kingdom was preached with a full offer of forgiveness to the Jews. God was willing to blot out their transgressions and to make good all He had promised to the nation. Many signs and miracles had been done in Jerusalem in demonstration of the resurrection from the dead of the Prince of Life, whom they had crucified. We have seen how the seventh chapter in this book marks the close of that special offer to Jerusalem. Immediately after the death of Stephen, the Gospel was carried into Judea and Samaria. In Samaria a people heard and accepted the glad tidings. They were a mixed race and practiced circumcision and obeyed parts of the law. In the ninth

chapter the conversion of Paul is recorded and the Lord makes known that the persecutor of the church is to be the chosen vessel to bear His name before the Gentiles. Paul, however, was not chosen to open first the door to the Gentiles as such, but Peter, the Apostle of the circumcision. A new work is given him to do, which was indeed a strange work for a Jew. He was to go to the Gentiles, whom the Jews considered unclean. It was unlawful for a Jew to join himself to any Gentile; an insurmountable barrier divided them. For this reason the Jews considered the Gentiles as unclean, common, spoke of them as dogs, and had no intercourse with them. It is of interest to notice that Peter tarried in Joppa; from this old city he is to be sent forth to preach the Gospel to Cornelius and his household. Centuries ago another Jew had come to Joppa with a solemn message from his God, which he was commissioned to bear far hence to the Gentiles. Jonah, the prophet, took a ship from Joppa and refused obedience to the divine call.

But here is one who is obedient to the heavenly vision and who is to bring a higher message to the Gentiles, the good news of a free and full salvation. That Peter,

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