

The Bible Notebook

THE BOOK OF ACTS

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Volume 4

(Chapters 13-15)

A Verse by Verse Study

By

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DEDICATION

To

Lonnie Wascom

A Man of

Courage, Conviction, Commitment, Character

ACTS 13

ABOUT THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK: I became convinced years ago that the Lord wanted me to do the research and write Bible studies for my own personal edification. It became an obsession. I began by outlining Romans, and then went on to other books. Then I added notes. In time a friend gave me his computer, which I didn't want but didn't tell him, and I began expanding the studies. In time I believe the Lord led me to a format and a special purpose. I would aim at what I perceive as a gap between the critical commentary and a devotional commentary. I would provide a little critical help, complete with basic documentation in brackets, and then add practical applications and illustrations.

On the PastorLife.Com web site, the official web site of the Georgia Baptist Convention, edited by Dr. Mike Minnix, my verse by verse studies of various books of the Bible are listed as commentaries. Most of them need a final re-write and proper documentation before I would consider them commentaries. I began writing these studies a number of years ago as I taught Seminary Extension classes, with a desire to provide help for the bi-vocational pastor or Sunday School teacher who does not have a theological education, but desires serious Bible study. I also had in mind a quick reference for busy pastors who are far better qualified than I to write formal commentaries. The format I follow not only invites repetition, it practically demands it. If someone is working on a particular passage of Scripture it is sometimes an inconvenience and distraction to find a note: "See notes on chapter 9, verse 12." I try not to say exactly the same thing, but I may paraphrase what I have said in another place.

At one point, I decided that the term, **THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK**, was appropriate for all the informal commentaries I have written. Only one commentary, *UNDEFEATED: Finding Peace in a World Full of Trouble*, a verse by verse commentary of Philippians, has been published to date, but there are now between 32 and 35, either on Pastor Life.Com, or intended for that web site. Dr. Minnix is also uploading over 150 of my sermon manuscripts which I have included in **THE SERMON NOTEBOOK**.

ACTS, CHAPTERS 13-15

A Commission to Missions

13:1 - LOCAL CHURCH. *"In the local church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius the Cyrenian, Manaen, a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul."* "In the church" implies that there distributed throughout the church people who were prophets and teachers. This unusual usage may draw attention to the organized nature of the church at Antioch. If so, it may suggest a new development in the church, in which case, it is fitting that this expression is used here at the beginning of a new era when the Gospel will be taken to other

countries. Following Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost people were added to the fellowship. Soon, the numbers were multiplied. Now the Gospel movement is about to explode as the Gospel is proclaimed to the ends of the earth.

PROPHETS AND TEACHERS. The Old Testament prophet occasionally foretold future events, but continually proclaimed (told forth) the Word of God. The ministry of these prophets in Antioch would compliment that of the teachers who were teaching new Jewish converts as well as Gentile converts about Jesus and His church. One distinction seems to have been that during the time before the New Testament was completed, and copies sent out to the churches, the prophet may have been one to whom God revealed answers to questions that would later be provided as the Holy Spirit inspired Paul, Peter, John and others to write the various epistles and Revelation.

Teachers always have a special place in the church. While the word "prophet" implies the preaching of the word with exhortations, this word refers to the clear and systematic instruction of members in the truth. Even in this early church great emphasis is placed on the preaching of the Word and the systematic teaching of the truth. Sound doctrine is essential to the well being of the church and the individual Christian.

All prophets were teachers, but all teachers were not prophets. A prophet, like Agabus (11:28) may sometimes foretell future events. A. T. Robertson (designated by the initials ATR in this study) wrote that

"The double use of *te* here makes three prophets (Barnabas, Symeon, Lucius) and two teachers (Manaen and Saul). Barnabas heads the list (Acts 11:22) and Saul comes last. Symeon Niger may be the Simon of Cyrene who carried the Saviour's cross. Lucius of Cyrene was probably one of the original evangelists (Acts 11:20). The name is one of the forms of Luke, but it is certainly not Luke the Physician" [ATR].

MANAEN. The mention of Manaen reveals how the Gospel was penetrating even the higher classes in the region, including this close friend of Herod Antipas.

13:2 - AS THEY WERE MINISTERING. *"As they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work that I have called them to.'"* The word "ministering" was used of priests who served in the temple, of government officials who served the state, and now of those who lead in worship. In Romans 15:27, it is used of aiding those in poverty. Here the emphasis seems to be worship.

FASTING. The only references to fasting in the NT are found here and in 14:23. Christian Jews were still observing Jewish holy days, fast days, and festivals. Fasting was not obligatory to Christians but they were facing a great emergency in trying to determine what the Lord wanted them to do next. I am neither discouraging fasting nor prescribing formulas, days, hours, dress, and announcements. What I would sincerely encourage is a prayerful study of our Savior's teachings on the subject. I would also sincerely confess my failure, both in prayer and fasting.

THE HOLY SPIRIT SAID. Those saints were praying and fasting and the Holy Spirit gave them His answer. That answer did not have to be audible for them to know what He was saying. The biggest mistake one can make here is to get caught up in a debate as to how He spoke to them and miss His message to us today. There is, however, one thought we may consider. There were prophets in the church, and at least until the New Testament was completed, as some interpret 1 Cor. 13:10, the Lord did speak to those who had the gift of prophecy, whether audibly or in the spirit we are not told. The Holy Spirit inspired Luke to record this communication and it is the conviction of this writer that what He said was infallible and inerrant.

SET APART. The Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work that I have called them to.” Do I believe the Holy Spirit can, and does call people and set them apart for specific ministries? Absolutely! When I was thirteen years old my mother took a car load of young people to Marks, Mississippi, to hear missionary James Bellote, on furlough from his mission field in South America. I listened with interest, never thinking that the Lord who had called James Bellote was about to speak to my heart. An invitation was given and the Holy Spirit called me to serve the Lord with my life. I have never been more sure of anything in my life. When I walked down that aisle that night I had no idea where the Lord would lead me, to the foreign mission field, to a youth ministry, to a prison ministry, or the pastorate. I surrendered my life to Him and let Him make those decisions.

13:3 - SENT THEM OFF. *“Then, after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.”* Again, the saints in Antioch fasted and prayed, this time in preparing to send out Barnabas and Saul to the mission to which the Holy Spirit was leading them.

Often, Paul would express his gratitude for the prayers of various churches. He also assured them of his prayers on their behalf. Many churches and denominations send out missionaries today. The International Missions Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention supports around six thousand missionaries and the North American Mission Board (NAMB) supports about the same number in North America. More than 40,000 churches support all these missionaries and mission stations through the Cooperative Program, which is supported by a percentage of tithes and undesignated offerings given through those local churches. Each church is autonomous, and therefore determines the amount it will send to the Cooperative Program. The missionaries are understandably appreciative of those contribution, as well as special offerings that are sent directly to the mission field, with no money held back for administrative or personnel costs. However, when I have talked with missionaries or hear from them throughout the years, the one thing they especially thank churches and individuals for is the prayers of those who support them. The Lord does not lead every person to go into every corner of the earth, but He does place an obligation on each Christians to pray for them. How are you doing?

LAI D HANDS ON THEM. This is not an ordination to the ministry because both Saul and Barnabas had been in the ministry for years. It was a solemn consecration to the missionary task to which the Holy Spirit had called them.

Paul would later reveal that, even though the saints in this church laid their hands on them and sent them on their way, they did not support them financially on this missionary journey. While he wrote that it was appropriate for a minister to receive support from the church (1 Cor. 9:14), he refused money, at least in Corinth, so that he would not be a burden on the churches.

First step on the First Missionary Journey

ITINERARY

- 1) From Antioch in Syria to Seleucia, by ship to Salamis in Cyprus (13:2-4).
- 2) From Seleucia to Paphos (13:5-6). Saul begins to use his Roman name Paul. Elymas stricken with blindness (6-12).
- 3) From Paphos in Cyprus to Perga in Pamphylia (13:13). John Mark left them.
- 4) From Perga to Antioch in Pisidia (13:14). Paul preached in the synagogue there (13:16-31).
- 5) From Antioch of Pisidia to Iconium (13:50-51).
- 6) From Iconium to Lystra (14:5-6). Here Paul was stoned after stopping the people from worshipping him and Barnabas (14:8-13).
- 7) From Lystra to Derbe (14:20).
- 8) They returned through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to Perga, establishing the churches (14:21ff).
- 9) From Perga to Attalia (14:25).
- 10) From Attalia to Antioch of Syria to report to the church that sent them on the mission (14:26-28).

13:4 - SENT OUT. *“Being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they came down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.”* We note here again the personality of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity. He is directing the spread of the Gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and now to the ends of the earth. Those who reject the Trinitarian view of God deny the existence of the Holy Spirit. One of my former professors was preaching a revival for me when I discovered that he had moved to the left theologically. He knew I had earned the Doctor of Ministry degree from Luther Rice Seminary and sought to denigrate Luther Rice by pointing out a paper a student had written on the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. My former professor very authoritatively declared, “There is no Holy Spirit in the Old Testament!” Another professor I had in seminary denied the existence of a

personal devil, and said he rejected the doctrine of the Trinity because the word is not mentioned in the Bible. When the identity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is clearly spelled out in Scripture, it will take more than a term for me to reject the Trinity.

Luke's readers would be able to follow the progress of Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark from Antioch to Seleucia, the seaport for Antioch, which was about sixteen miles from the mouth of the Orantes River. Barnabas was from Cyprus and since there were many Jews on the island this would be a good place to start. The going was going to get a lot rougher.

13:5 - PROCLAIMED GOD. *“Arriving in Salamis, they proclaimed God’s message in the Jewish synagogues. They also had John as their assistant.”* Salamis was the largest city on the island. It had been “the Greek capital of the island. It was located on the eastern side. There was a large Jewish population living there” [New Commentary of the Whole Bible, QuickVerse Electronic Bible Library. Parsons Technology - after this, NCWB]. “They proclaimed” is imperfect: They began to proclaim, and kept on proclaiming the Gospel.

JEWISH SYNAGOGUE. Paul and Barnabas did not start off on this missionary journey without a well thought out mission strategy. It may have been for practical reasons that they went to Cyprus first. Barnabas was the leader initially and he knew the Island of Cyprus. As they move onto the mainland, their strategy would be to follow the major Roman roads to the major population centers. They would go to the synagogue on the Sabbath Day and, when given an opportunity to speak, Paul would begin with the Law and the prophets and proclaim the good news that the long awaited Messiah had come to earth and that He had died on the cross for our sins, and that God had raised Him from the dead. Some of the Jews and some of the Gentiles who were called ones “who feared God”, would believe in Jesus and receive His salvation. When the Jews rejected the Gospel and turned them away, they would turn to the Gentiles. In most places they were able to plant a church.

JOHN MARK. This cousin of Barnabas went along as their assistant. He may have done some preaching, and it is suggested that he may have baptized converts. The word translated “assistant” actually meant “under-rower”.

13:6 - PAPHOS. *“When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came across a sorcerer, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus.”* This itinerant journey would have taken some time, because Paphos was “100 miles southwest of Salamis and the seat of the provincial government, was their next point of ministry. What took place here is of great significance in the progression of the gospel to Gentiles” [The Bible Knowledge Commentary, QuickVerse, Parsons Technology - after this, BKC].

Paphos, writes Robertson, is “The new Paphos at the other end of the island, reached by a fine Roman road, some eight miles north of the old Paphos famous for the worship of Venus” [A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources - after this, ATR].

A SORCERER. Like Simon (8:9), this man posed as a philosopher and magician. He practiced occult type magic. The word “magon” does not necessarily mean sorcerer, but only a “magus” (Matt. 2:1, 7, 10). The bad sense of the word occurs in Acts 8:9-11 (Simon Magus) and it is made plain here by the words “false prophet”. His name was Bar-Jesus, or Son of Jesus (or Son of Yeshua). Jewish magicians were apparently common in that day.

We need to distinguish between the magician who is simply an entertainer and one who involves occult practices and powers in his work. My wife and I stopped to visit with a lady who has run a home for Alzheimer’s patients for about sixteen years. She was out but a lady who works for her told us that the lady’s son, a Jesuit priest, had told her that the only way to get rid of a Ouija board was to sink it in the deepest part of the ocean. I assume he was speaking figuratively, but a number of years ago a lady in Texas told me that her daughter had come under the influence of a witch and for some time their life was a nightmare. Finally, the daughter agreed to go with home with a relative who was in a Pentecostal school somewhere in Minnesota. They prayed with her and worked with her, and after several months she called and asked her mother to go into her room and remove all the occult paraphernalia and burn it in their burn barrel. They burned everything until they got to the Ouija board and it would not burn. They made a serious effort, but it would not catch fire. Realizing that they were fighting an occult presence, she stopped and, with her two daughters who were still at home, got down on their knees and prayed that God would destroy the Ouija board. They got up and put it back in the fire and it immediately caught fire. I did not see it, but that was their testimony. There may be a lot of fakery involved in occult magic, but there may also be satanic power involved.

13:7 - THE PROCONSUL. *“He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and desired to hear God’s message.”* Luke has been criticized by certain critics for a number of reasons. Interestingly, when modern science finally caught up with him, some of those critics had to admit that he was a sound historian. Robertson notes that he had been criticized by some

“for applying this term to Sergius Paulus on the ground that Cyprus was a province under the appointment of the emperor with the title of propractor and not under the control of the senate with the title of proconsul. That was true B.C. 30, but five years later it was changed to proconsul by Augustus and put under the control of the Senate. Two inscriptions have been found with the date A.D. 51 and 52 with the names of proconsuls of Cyprus and one is in the Cesnola Collection, an inscription found at Soli with the name of Paulus as Proconsul, undoubtedly this very man, though no date occurs” [ATR].

The proconsul was an intelligent man who wanted to hear Barnabas and Paul, which made him a threat to the sorcerer. He, we learn in the next verse, wanted to hear God’s message from the missionaries. That an intelligent man would be deceived by a sorcerer may at first seem strange, but it is not at all uncommon for a well educated person to be deceived by Satan. All one has to do is

consider how many educated people there are who are being deceived by the theory of evolution. There are intelligent people who worship false gods, and there are intelligent people who are deceived by practitioners of the occult today.

13:8 - THE SORCERER. *“But Elymas, the sorcerer, which is how his name is translated, opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith.”* Thomas Walker explained that the word Elymas is possibly the Greek form of an Arabic word (*Alim*), meaning wise [Walker, Thomas, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1965, p. 284 - after this, WALKER]. If so, that would help explain the name. I checked on comments in numerous commentaries and found in them an effort to try to reconcile that name with the name Bar-Jesus. Consider the note from one commentary: “The name **Elymas** is something of a problem. Probably it is a Semitic word meaning “sorcerer,” which was given or taken by him as a nickname” [BKC]. Another says:

“Elymas is the interpretation of the word magov, or sorcerer; not of the word Bar-Jesus as some have imagined; and to support which they have been led into strange etymologies on the word bar-ihsouv, Bar-Jesus. But how is Elymas, elumav, the interpretation of the word magov, magician or sorcerer? Ans. Both names are Asiatic; but neither Hebrew nor Greek” [Adam Clarke's Commentary - after this, CLARKE].

OPPOSED THEM. Elymas had both position and money at stake and he is not about to give up without a fight. He had to realize that if the proconsul was persuaded by Paul, he would lose both, so made an effort “to turn the proconsul away from the faith” (in Christ). The verb is “the first aorist active infinitive of *diastrephô*, old verb to turn or twist in two, to distort, to pervert (cf. Mat 17:17; Luke 23:2) [ATR].

13:9 - CALLED PAUL. *“Then Saul—also called Paul—filled with the Holy Spirit, stared straight at the sorcerer...”* Saul has now moved into the Roman world and takes the Roman name Paul (Paulus). As a Roman citizen, he would have had both names all his life. He probably used the Hebrew name Saul when he was in Palestine and when he was working with Jews in other lands. He was proud of his Hebrew name and his identity with the Tribe of Benjamin, and as such, possibly even with King Saul (Phil 3:5). Now he is in a Gentile country, standing before a Gentile official and here he uses his Roman name Paul, the name which would become synonymous with theology and missiology until the end of the age. Paul, “filled with the Holy Spirit, stared at the sorcerer” and launched a courageous attack. This was war and Paul understood that.

Walker found this “one of the most interesting and critical scenes in Acts. The representatives of light and darkness, of truth and falsehood, of pseudo-theosophy and true religion are ranged against each other. The Gospel was confronted, at Paphos, by the opposing forces of superstition and magic which cast so potent a spell over the Roman world” [WALKER: 284]. That satanic control was not limited to the Roman world. Little could Walker have imagined that within the very decade in which he published his commentary on Acts, there would be an occult awakening in America, complete with Anton Levay’s Satanic Bible, the church of Satan, and the spread of witchcraft and other

expressions of the occult that would impact the nation which was founded on Christian principles.

Paul is here filled with “a fresh ascension of spiritual power for a new crisis” [WALKER: 285]. If one wonders why the Holy Spirit filled Paul rather than Barnabas for this debate, all he has to do is recall the sovereignty of God in the choice of individuals and spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:4-11). The Lord had been training Saul of Tarsus for this very hour. Peter and John could share their testimony, preach the Gospel, win the lost, and work signs and wonders, but it was Paul who could debate the most brilliant philosophers of the day.

13:10 - YOU SON OF THE DEVIL. *“(A)nd said, “You son of the Devil, full of all deceit and all fraud, enemy of all righteousness! Won’t you ever stop perverting the straight paths of the Lord?”* When I was a student in seminary I took an intensive in Revelation under a professor who, when pressed, admitted that he did not believe in a personal devil. He, the professor said, was simply he personification of evil. He reasoned that you cannot have two infinite beings, God and Satan. A few years after I graduated I had an opportunity to talk with Dr. H. Leo Eddleman, who had been president of the seminary at the time, and discovered that he was well aware of this professor’s position. He told my pastor and our mutual friend that he was going “to get rid of some of the stuff if he had to take that place apart brick by brick.” While I was working on my first study in Acts, Dr. Eddleman was writing *An Exegetical and Practical Commentary of Acts*, so it was my privilege to pick his brain from time to time. Even though we discussed this professor, he was not responding to him in his commentary when he answers one objection he had to the existence of a personal devil:

Paul pinpoints (the) ultimate source of all evil, guile, and villainy. This is not a ridiculous dualism, as though Satan and God were almost equal in power thereby leaving uncertain ultimate outcome between good and evil (in doubt). Victory belongs to God, now and always. Victory is in the process of realization as Paul exercised faith in God to overcome opposition from this evil man. (The) devil appears in Scripture as a personal being with great power over men, but it is always limited (Job 1:12) [HLE: 178f].

“Son of”, a common idiom in the Hebrew meaning “in the likeness of”, may have been used by Paul to stand him in contrast to the name Bar-Jesus (Son of Jesus), which he bore. If so, he is saying, “You are not the son of Jesus, you are the son of the devil!”

FULL OF. That this “son of the Devil” was “full of all deceit and all fraud” is not surprising since Jesus calls Satan a liar and murder from the beginning (John 8:44).

ENEMY OF ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS! Satan is the bitter enemy of God and everything that is godly. He is an evil enemy of righteousness and he seeks to destroy righteousness in any believer. What does the enemy of righteousness do? The sorcerer perverts righteousness and Paul keys in on that: “Won’t you ever stop perverting the straight paths of the Lord?” The ways of the Lord are straight, in contrast to the twisted ways of this son of the devil (see Is. 40:3-4).

13:11 - THE LORD'S HAND. “Now, look! The Lord’s hand is against you: you are going to be blind, and will not see the sun for a time.’ Suddenly a mist and darkness fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.” The hand of the Lord may be kind (Acts 11:21), or hostile (Heb 10:31), and when God’s hand touches one’s life (Job 19:21) it may be to bless or, it may be to judge as here with Elymas. He had not humbled himself under the mighty hand of God (1 Pet. 5:6) [ATR]. In Isaiah, God’s hand is seen as raised to strike Israel because of her rebellion (Is. 9:12, 17). Possibly no sermon ever preached in America has generated more debate than Jonathan Edwards’s sermon, *Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God*. Some like to portray Edwards as a raving fanatic, but the fact is, he never raised his voice or made one gesture in delivering that sermon. Yet, some people present sensed that they were sliding into hell and repented.

BLIND. Consider the irony. This “son of the devil” who had attempted to enlighten the proconsul was about to become so blind he could not even see the sun. The blindness came upon Elymas immediately and he began seeking someone to lead him.

13:12 - BELIEVED. “Then the proconsul, seeing what happened, believed and was astonished at the teaching about the Lord.” The proconsul had seen a demonstration of the power of the God Paul proclaimed. Just as Jews in Jerusalem were amazed at the demonstration of the power of God there, Sergius Palus believed and was astonished. It was not only the miracle that amazed him. The teachings of Christ also astonished him. No reference is made to his baptism but it may be assumed, for the simple reason that it is not reasonable to assume that he would have refused it because of his position.

One Bible student finds this incident significant for three reasons:

“(1) It marks the beginning of Paul’s leadership in this journey; verse 13 refers to “Paul and his companions.” (2) From this point on the ministry took on an even more decidedly Gentile slant. (3) It is filled with figurative nuances. A Gentile with the name Paul accepted the message while a Jew opposed it. The Jews’ blindness pictured the judicial blinding of Israel (cf. 28:26-27). Luke by this means emphasized the transitional nature of the Book of Acts. On one hand Gentiles became the primary object of the gospel, and on the other God temporarily turned from the Jews and thus judged them” [BKC].

Paul Preaches in Antioch of Pisidia

13:13 - PAUL AND HIS COMPANIONS. “Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. John, however, left them and went back to Jerusalem.” Clearly, from this point on Paul is the leader of this group. Barnabas, as far as we can tell, shows not resentment for this change. It may well be that the Holy Spirit had been using Barnabas to groom Paul for this very position. As his mentor he may well have rejoiced in the progress and maturity of the man he had been first to befriend in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit is leading Paul and Barnabas on

to the next mission station, deep in the heart of Gentile country. When they crossed over from Cyprus to Pamphylia John Mark left them and went back to Jerusalem. There is no evidence that he was sent back! He defected. He deserted his companions as they moved deeper into this mission trip to take the Gospel to Gentiles.

He abandoned his companions, something Paul would not overlook when the time came to plan a second missionary trip. I have often said that there comes a time in every believer's life when he needs a Barnabas to encourage him rather than a Paul to condemn him. Paul would in time come to see that John Mark was a faithful servant, but the young man would have to prove himself to him. There are those who have proposed that John Mark may have turned back because of prejudice toward Gentiles, but we are not given that impression here. He may have turned back when Paul became the leader instead of his cousin Barnabas, even though there is no indication that Barnabas had a problem with that.

It seems more likely that when the going got rough the young man quit. That is still happening today. There is an old saying that when the going gets rough the rough get going. Paul and Barnabas kept going. John Mark quit on them. Is it possible that one factor may have been Paul's health? He wrote the Galatians that his condition was such that when they first saw him he wouldn't have blamed them if they had turned their backs on him (Gal. 4:13f).

TRUE CONFESSION: I stayed out of seminary one year to work and save money for the next year. I was praying for a church to "discover" me and ask me to be their pastor. I was at home, looking at a big repair bill on my car when I received a note from Dr. W. W. Stephens, who had taught me Bible classes at Mississippi College. He asked me if I could preach at Red Lick the following Sunday. I wanted to preach and I wanted a church to call me as pastor. I declined the invitation on the basis of my automotive problems, even though I knew I could have borrowed my mother's car.

There was something about that name, Red Lick, that turned me off. Throughout the years I have recalled that invitation and tried to determine whether or not I turned down the invitation because of the trouble I was having with my car or was it that Satan whispered into my ear, "You don't want to go back to seminary and tell all of your friends you are pastor of a church named Red Lick!" I made up my mind that whenever I had an invitation to preach after that, I would accept the invitation if at all possible. I had turned down an invitation while I was still a student at Mississippi College because I did not have an automobile and knew I needed a student pastorate rather than a summer as a youth minister in order to afford one. I could borrow my father's truck to work for the ASCS (a USDA department) that summer and make a lot more money than the church would have paid. However I rationalized either invitation, I have never forgotten that my decision was based on what was expedient at the time, not primarily what the Lord wanted me to do. I do not condemn Mark!

Whatever John Mark's reasons were for turning back, Paul and Barnabas still had a great desire to see the people of this region come to know the Lord. They wanted to see churches planted deep within this Gentile region where the members could reach out to others with the Gospel. The Holy Spirit set Paul and Barnabas for this mission trip, and He places within the heart of each true believer the desire to see others come to know Jesus as Savior. That compassion for the lost was not a First

Century phenomena. When one is filled with the Spirit of God today he will have a burden for lost people.

ILLUSTRATION (The following story was sent to me by Charles Roberts, pastor of Denman Avenue Baptist Church in Lufkin, Texas):

“My 9-year-old's last-second request surprised his doctor and taught me a valuable lesson about sharing the gospel” (Tina Blessitt).

Last fall my 9-year-old son, Austin, had his tonsils removed. Before the surgery, Austin's anesthesiologist came to start an IV. He was wearing a cool surgical cap covered in colorful frogs. Austin loved that "frog hat." The doctor explained that he had two choices. He could either try to start the IV, or he could wait until Austin was up in the operating room. In the OR the doctor would give Austin some "goofy" gas, and start the IV when he was more relaxed.

"So, Austin," he asked, "which do you want?" Austin replied, "I'll take the gas." But when the doctor started to leave, Austin called, "Hey, wait." The doctor turned. Yeah, buddy, what do you need?" "Do you go to church?" "No," the doctor admitted. "I know I probably should, but I don't." Austin then asked, "Well, are you saved?"

Chuckling nervously, the doctor said, "Nope. But after talking to you, maybe it's something I should consider." Pleased with his response, Austin answered, "Well, you should, 'cause Jesus is great!" "I'm sure He is, little guy," the doctor said, and quickly made his exit.

After that a nurse took me to the waiting room. Someone would come and get me when Austin's surgery was done. After about 45 minutes, the anesthesiologist came into the waiting room. He told me the surgery went well and then said, "Mrs. Blessitt, I don't usually come down and talk to the parents after a surgery, but I just had to tell you what your son did."

Oh boy, I thought. What did that little rascal do now? The doctor explained that he'd just put the mask on Austin when my son signaled that he needed to say something. When the doctor removed the mask, Austin blurted, "Wait a minute, we have to pray!" The doctor told him to go ahead, and Austin prayed, "Dear Lord, please let all the doctors and nurses have a good day. And Jesus, please let the doctor with the frog hat get saved and start going to church. Amen."

The doctor admitted this touched him. "I was so sure
he would pray that his

surgery went well," he explained. "He didn't even mention his surgery. He prayed for me! Mrs Blessitt, I had to come down and let you know what a great little guy you have." A few minutes later a nurse came to take me to post-op. She had a big smile on her face as we walked to the elevator. "Mrs. Blessitt, I couldn't wait to tell you something exciting that your son did." With a smile, I told her that the doctor already mentioned Austin's prayer.

"But there's something you don't know," she said. "Some of the other nurses and I have been witnessing to and praying for that doctor for a long time. After your son's surgery, he tracked a few of us down to tell us about Austin's prayer. He said, 'Well girls, you got me. If that little boy could pray for me when he was about to have surgery, then I think maybe I need his Jesus too.'" She then recounted how they joined the doctor as he prayed to receive Christ right there in the hospital. Wow! Austin had played a small part in something wonderful. But then, so did the nurses who prayed and witnessed. I thought about John's words in his Gospel, "One sows and the other reaps" (John 4:37).

Austin's experience taught me that, although we never know which role we may be called to play, in the end it doesn't matter. What's important is that we remain faithful in sharing the gospel. Tina Blessitt, a freelance writer, lives with her husband and four children in Kentucky.

13:14 - ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA. *"They continued their journey from Perga and reached Antioch in Pisidia. On the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down."* Scholars have wondered why Paul and Barnabas left Perga so soon and proceeded to Antioch of Pisidia.

"Ramsay suggests malaria that spurred them on to the hills after the desertion of John Mark. They preached at Perga on the return (Acts 14:25) and apparently hurried away now. Farrar thinks that the hot weather had driven the population to the hills. At any

rate it is not difficult to imagine the perils of this climb over the rough mountain way from Perga to Pisidian Antioch to which Paul apparently refers in 2Co 11:26" [ATR].

Paul's physical condition when he arrived in Galatia led many earlier scholars to the conclusion that Paul may have contracted malaria or swamp fever. If that is the case, his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7) may not have been poor eyesight, for that would not have tempted people to turn away from him. However, there is always the possibility that he suffered from two health problems.

ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA. They had begun this missionary journey from Antioch in Syria, and now they are in Antioch in Pisidia. Antioch in Pisidia was located directly north of Perga. "The distance was short, but the road passed through mountains, along rivers, and through an area heavily inhabited by robbers. Paul may be referring to this trip in 2 Corinthians 11:26" [NCWB]. Pisidian Antioch was located in southern Asia Minor, with Pamphylia on the south and Phrygia on the north. It was actually in Phrygia and at one time people referred to it as Antioch on the way to Pisidia.

ON THE SABBATH. They have now moved more deeply into Gentile territory, and Paul is now the obvious leader. Here we see the missionary strategy that Paul would follow whenever possible through his missionary travels. Whether malaria had driven him from Perga or not, circumstances are not driving this missionary trip into the Gentile world. God had raised up Assyria to destroy the Northern Kingdom, Israel, in 722 B. C.; Babylon to take Judah into captivity for seventy years (606 B. C. - 536 B. C.); Persia to return the Remnant; Greece to Hellenize the world and give the world the language of the NT (Greek); and Rome to give the world the safest travel by land or sea, the best highway system, and the best postal system the world had ever known.

God had set the stage for the evangelization of the Gentile nations. If you like to connect the dots, try this: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, Paul! Now, led by the Holy Spirit, Paul implements his mission strategy. He follows the major Roman roads to the key population centers, waits for the Jewish Sabbath, goes to the synagogue where he speaks to the Jews if invited, and when rejected at the Synagogue, he turns to the Gentiles. In reality, he begins a church made up of believing Jews and Gentiles.

Paul had been called by the Lord to take the Good News to Jews and Gentiles and he never turned his back on the Jews. Paul and Barnabas went to the Synagogue and "sat down." They did not ask to speak.

13:15 - AFTER THE READING. *"After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent [word] to them, saying, 'Brothers, if you have any message of encouragement for the people, you can speak.'*" Robertson points out that "The law was first read in the synagogues till B.C. 163 when Antiochus Epiphones prohibited it. Then the reading of the prophets was substituted for it. The Maccabees restored both"[ATR]. Even though Antiochus Epiphones sought to destroy worship of the true God, there is a synagogue in the cities which had named for him both

here and in Syria. In the synagogue, there was a reading from the law and one from the prophets in Hebrew “which was interpreted into the Aramaic or the Greek Koin, for the people. The reading was followed by the sermon as when Jesus was invited to read and to preach in Nazareth (Luke 4:16)” [ATR].

LEADERS. The rulers of the Synagogue selected both the readers of the Law and the prophets, and the speaker. Usually, a rabbi or a distinguished visitor would be called on to speak. The HCSB has “Brothers, if you have any message of encouragement for the people, you can speak.” “Brothers” was their customary address for fellow Jews. The NASB has “word of exhortation”, and Robertson agrees: “Literally, if there is among you any word of exhortation for the people. It is a condition of the first class and assumed to be true, a polite invitation” [ATR]. Paul accepts the invitation. He had come for this purpose and he has a “word of exhortation” for them.

13:16 - STANDING UP. *“Then standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and spoke: “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen!”* Paul took advantage of the opportunity he must have known he would have to proclaim the Good News that the Messiah had come. The Bible Knowledge Commentary offers an overview of his message:

Paul seized the opportunity to present the fulfillments of Old Testament expectations of the Messiah in Jesus. Luke recorded a number of “sample sermons” of Paul in Acts (cf. 14:15-17; 17:22-31; 20:18-35). This, the first recorded discourse of Paul and the most completely preserved, illustrated how Paul preached to an audience grounded in the Old Testament.

The message may be divided into three parts by the three occurrences of direct address (13:16, 26, 38) and outlined as follows: (1) the anticipation of and preparation for **the coming of** the Messiah (vv. 16-25), (2) the rejection, crucifixion, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus (vv. 26-37), and (3) the application and appeal (vv. 38-41) [BKC].

Paul did exactly what he was prepared to do when he was invited to speak. Upon the invitation, Paul stood, which would have given him the attention of most of those present. He raised his hand to get their full attention, and when he had it he said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen.” The first part of the address was the traditional greeting from one Jewish man to other Jews. However, we must not overlook “you who fear God”, an address for God fearing Gentiles. “Probably the Gentiles were not full-fledged converts to Judaism. And yet, though they revered the Yahweh of Israel (cf. vv. 26, 43), they did not have New Testament salvation” [BKC]. There would have been an assigned place for Jewish men, one for Jewish women, and one for Gentiles who wanted to worship the one true God. As we continue with the study of the missionary journeys of Paul we will see that in many places there were Gentile women who were attracted to Judaism because Judaism showed greater respect for women than pagan religions. It would only get better.

13:17 - THE GOD OF THIS PEOPLE. *“The God of this people Israel chose our forefathers,*

exalted the people during their stay in the land of Egypt, and led them out of it with a mighty arm.” The thing we must bear in mind at all times is that the same Holy Spirit who called Paul and Barnabas is leading them as they move deeper into the Gentile world, and He is both anointing Paul to proclaim the Good News with power, and He is guiding him in the message he preaches. He has addressed two groups, (1) men of Israel, and (2) Gentiles who fear God (vs. 16). So, here he addresses those Gentiles who are attending the synagogue service and calling their attention to the God of Israel as a means of introducing his message. He does not know how much they know about the one true God or the history of God’s dealings with these people. His message, however will be consistent with what they may have heard any Sabbath in any synagogue, until he relates the Covenant to Jesus.

13:18 - ABOUT 40 YEARS. *“And for about 40 years He put up with them in the desert...”* Paul will preach to the men of Israel assembled before him, conscious all the time of the presence of Jewish women in their place, and God fearing Gentiles, in their place, who are listening to his world He begins by alluding to the 40 years their ancestors wandered in the wilderness. They could fill in the blanks.

13:19 - SEVEN NATIONS. *“(T)hen after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, He gave their land to them as an inheritance.”* These Jews knew their history, and all those who feared the God of Israel would have known something of their history. The seven nations God destroyed are the nations He used Joshua to defeat during the Conquest of Canaan:

“When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess, and He drives out many nations before you—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and powerful than you— and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you and you defeat them, you must completely destroy them. Make no treaty with them and show them no mercy” (Deut 7:1-2).

HE GAVE. God gave the land of Canaan to the Israelites. Modern day Arabs claim the land of Israel and seek the destruction of Israel and the death of all Jews, but this land was given, not to any descendants of Abraham, but to the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob (Israel). He gave them the land, by lot, as their inheritance. If one is concerned as to God’s fairness to the seven nations, let us remember that they had been allowed to live in this Holy Land for 500 years after the Promised Land had been given to Abraham. Rahab declared that the pagan people of Jericho knew that the God of Israel had given this land to Israel.

13:20 - THIS ALL. *“This all took about 450 years. After this, He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.”* He alludes to the Period of the Judges (Judges 2:16), which covered about 450 years. On the surface, this appears to contradict 1 Kings 6:1 (480 years). Barnes was well aware of the problem: “This is a most difficult passage, and has exercised all the ingenuity of chronologists. The ancient versions agree with the present Greek text” [Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament - after this, BARNES]. Various explanations have been offered:

“Several explanations have been proposed: (1) After approximately 450 years had passed from the time of the covenant with Abraham, God gave judges to the Israelites. (2) The period of the judges itself lasted approximately 450 years. (This seems to be historically correct if one includes the time of subjection to foreign powers and interprets it to describe the entire period from the settlement of the tribes in Canaan to the establishment of royalty.) (3) The 450 years denotes the interval between the beginning of Abraham’s journey and the occupation of the land but does not cover the period of the judges” [NCWB].

Clarke quotes Sir Norton Knatchbull, who held that the 450 years should not be seen as how long God gave them judges, but “to the time WHEN the God of the children of Israel chose their fathers” [CLARK]. Eddleman reminds us that “About means an approximation. This is not ‘tic-toc’ history in whereby every detail is correlated and made to appear in exact chronological order.” [HLE: 182]. He agrees that the 450 years “is approximately from Isaac’s birth to the conquest of Canaan (and) does not include the period of the judges [HLE: 182] .

SAMUEL THE PROPHET. It has been observed that when there was a need, God had a man to meet the need (or woman, as in the case of Deborah). When the Israelites demanded a king like the pagan nations around them, God raised up Samuel, who was the last of the judges and the first of the great prophets. He was a pivotal character in the history of Israel, with a role to play that was as much a part of God’s dealings with His people as that of Joseph, Moses, or Joshua. As a matter of fact, if you want to see the New Testament morality lived out in the Old Testament, you can look to Joseph and Samuel (and Enoch and Elijah). It was Samuel whom God sent to anoint the first king over Israel.

13:21 - THEY ASKED FOR A KING. “*Then they asked for a king, so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for 40 years.*” For those who do not see why Samuel would have resisted the request for a king so strongly, Dr. William R. Cooper, in his remarkable book, *AFER THE FLOOD*, offers an answer. Dr. Cooper discovered that no fewer than six royal families in Europe independently traced their genealogy back to Japheth and Noah. These records were maintained by pagan tribes and nations before the birth of Christ. Dr. Cooper, somewhere in his book, suggests that the problem with the request by the Israelites for a king was that pagan kings often claimed to be gods. Israel had one God, Yahweh, and they rejected him as their King in favor of a king like the Philistines.

SAUL. The duration of Saul’s reign is not mentioned in the Old Testament. The only reference to 40 years is found in 2 Samuel 2:10: “Saul’s son Ish-bosheth was 40 years old when he began his reign over Israel.” That this added information is given should not be surprising, for the NT writer, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit does, in places, give us information not given in the OT.

Bible students have asked why Saul was chosen as king. Did God not know that this man would not

make a good king? Could God not have known that the man was not totally committed to Him? Did He not know the man was not mentally or emotionally stable? The answer is that God knew exactly what He was doing. Some have said that God gave Israel Saul as their king to teach them a lesson, and that argument may have some merit.

What we know for sure is that God knew what he was doing. He also knew that the House of Saul would not be established indefinitely because Saul was of the Tribe of Benjamin and His covenant was with the Tribe of Judah. Judah marched under a flag with a lion as its emblem. Jesus is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. God had not only chosen the tribe, He had also chosen a family within that tribe through whom He would accomplish His purpose.

13:22 - RAISED UP DAVID. *“After removing him, He raised up David as their king, of whom He testified: ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will carry out all My will.’”* Saul failed as king and when trouble came he turned, not to Yahweh, but to witchcraft for help. He rejected God, and God rejected him and his house. In his place, “He raised up David.” Students of the Old Testament have asked a lot of questions about David, usually because of his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. I even heard a preacher claim that David never accomplished anything or made any contribution to the Lord after that sin. That was an unfortunate statement. Had he never read Psalms 51 (a psalm of repentance) or Psalm 32 (praising God for forgiving him)? Every king after David would be judged by David. Today, the national flag of Israel honors David. When we see a six pointed star we know it is the Star of David.

A MAN AFTER MY HEART. Did the Lord not remember all those times when David sinned? Did He not remember Bathsheba? Did he not remember how he lost control of his sons? Of course He did. He remembered it intellectually, but not judicially, or in a redemptive sense. For the first time in the history of the world, with the exception of Melchizadek, there was a king who never bowed before a false God. When he sinned he went to God. When he was in trouble he went to Yahweh. Very few kings, none in Israel, and very few in Judah (Hezekiah and Josiah are examples) who would manifest the character devotion of David. Robertson cites various opinions:

“Knowling thinks that this free and rather loose quotation of the substance argues for the genuineness of the report of Paul’s sermon. Hackett observes that the commendation of David is not absolute, but, as compared with the disobedient Saul, he was a man who did God’s will in spite of the gross sin of which he repented (Ps 51:1) [ATR].

CARRY OUT ALL MY WILL. Robertson writes, “Note ‘wills’ (thelêmata), plural, of God. Why did Paul use the plural?” [ATR]. Is it possible that he was implying that God’s will is complex, involving many factors and details? The logical question is just what was God’s plan for David? God had promised Abraham a land one thousand years before the time of David’s reign. He used David to conquer all the land from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River.

Here is something to ponder: If Israel had remained faithful to God, would they not control most of

the oil in the Middle East today? The world would be dependent upon Israel for its oil and gas rather than the bitter enemies of Israel. Would this not be included in the Will of God.

13:23 - FROM THIS MAN. *“From this man’s descendants, according to the promise, God brought the Savior, Jesus, to Israel.”* This is emphatic. As all Jews knew, the Messiah was to be the Son of David (Ps. 132:11; Is. 11:10). *“Two points in this statement are important: (1) Jesus came from David’s family in fulfillment of a prophecy, and (2) Jesus came as a savior (note Matt. 1:21)”* [NCWB]. Paul may well have mentioned others since David, but no more would have been necessary for these Jews who knew their history as well as he.

THE SAVIOR. Through David’s descendants, God has sent “the Savior, Jesus, to Israel” but through Him He would reach out to the world. Robertson explains that

“Jesus is in apposition with Saviour (accusative case) and comes at the end of the sentence in contrast with "this man" (David) at the beginning. Paul goes no further than David because he suggests to him Jesus, descendant in the flesh from David. By "Israel" here Paul means the Jewish people, though he will later enlarge this promise to include the spiritual Israel both Gentile and Jew (Rom 9:6)” [ATR].

13:24 - TO PUBLIC ATTENTION. *“Before He came to public attention, John had previously proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.”* Knowing that these Jews were well aware of their history, he capsulizes the Davidic Covenant and its fulfillment in Jesus, as well as the message of the forerunner, John the Baptist, who proclaimed “a baptism of repentance” to the people of Israel before Jesus began his public ministry.

PREVIOUSLY PROCLAIMED. The picture is of a herald who goes before a king with a message to prepare for the coming of a king. John had proclaimed before the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, “a baptism of repentance.” John did not preach to make people happy, he proclaimed the One who would make men holy. He did not preach the baptism of religion, but the baptism of repentance. Some modern day preachers avoid sin and judgment because they “just want people to feel good.” John preached repentance from sin, which demands an about-face. Repentance is a change of mind that is reflected in a changed life.

13:25 - AS JOHN WAS. *“Then as John was completing his life work, he said, ‘Who do you think I am? I am not the One. But look! Someone is coming after me, and I am not worthy to untie the sandals on His feet.’”* Paul uses the “imperfect active of *plêroô*, describing his vivid ministry without defining the precise period when John asked the question. Paul uses this word *dromos* (course) of his own race (Acts 20:24; 2Ti 4:7)” [ATR]. John had been sent to herald the coming of the Savior. An earthly herald traveled before his king to announce the coming of the king and when the king arrived the herald would yield to the king.

SOMEONE IS COMING. John’s message was clear: he was not the One promised, but one who

had come to prepare the way for the coming of the King. John the Baptist understood that, as did Paul, but many were confused at the beginning of his ministry. John knew that His would not be a ministry of long duration because his purpose was to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. He understood his mission and readily yielded to Him: "I am not worthy to untie the sandals on His feet" (see John 1:19-27).

13:26 - BROTHERS. *"Brothers, sons of Abraham's race, and those among you who fear God, the message of this salvation has been sent to us."* Paul had addressed both the Jews and God fearing Gentiles at the beginning of his message, and now ye appeals to both groups. With the title, "Brothers", he identifies with the Jews present as the "sons of Abraham's race", that is, those who descended from him through Isaac and Jacob (Israel). Again, the words "you who fear God", are not repetitious, but a designation for Gentiles who believed in the God of Israel or were interested in the God of Israel.

SALVATION HAS BEEN SENT. The long ago promise of salvation has now been fulfilled in Jesus makes that salvation available to those who believe in Him. That message has now been delivered to this congregation.

13:27 - RESIDENCE OF JERUSALEM. *"For the residents of Jerusalem and their rulers, since they did not recognize Him or the voices of the prophets that are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled their words by condemning Him."* This is very interesting, and at the same time very sad. Peter (Acts 3:17), says that the Jew and their leaders killed Jesus because of ignorance. "Paul does the same about his conduct before his conversion (1Ti 1:13). This ignorance mitigated the degree of their guilt, but it did not remove it, for it was willing ignorance and prejudice" [ATR]. Clarke explains that this is:

"A gentle excuse for the persecuting high priests, etc. They did not know that Jesus was the Christ, because they did not know the prophets: and **why did they not know the prophets, which were read every Sabbath day?** Because they did not desire to know his will; and therefore they knew not the doctrine of God: nor did they know that, in condemning Christ, **they fulfilled those very Scriptures which were read every Sabbath day in their synagogues**" [CLARKE, bold added].

One wonders how the Chosen People could have read the Scriptures every Sabbath Day for centuries and then not recognized Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises when He came. They rejected Him in spite of the testimony of the Father, the signs and miracles, and His own testimony. They claimed to know the Law and the prophets, yet they broke their own law killed the Son of God in their zeal to protect themselves from Roman scrutiny and censorship. How could they do such a thing? How can people grow up in Sunday School and worship service, attend revival services and Vacation Bible School for years, still reject Jesus Christ today? There is no excuse!

Marvin Rosenthal (*"The Secret of the Missing Chapter"*, ZION'S FIRE MAGAZINE, August, 2007, pages 6-7) tells the story of a religious Jew who was reading his Hebrew Bible when he came to the

end of Isaiah, Chapter 52, and found an asterisk and a note that Chapter 53 had been left out of that Bible. He asked his rabbi why, only to hear that it was “a difficult text and not to be read by the unlearned.” The missing chapter, and the explanation, continued to play on the man’s mind, so one day he purchased a Hebrew Bible that contained Isaiah, Chapter 53, and began reading it. He went back to the rabbi and asked, “Of whom does he speak?” The rabbi’s answer was defensive and weak. Without telling even his wife, he went to a book store and bought “a Christian New Testament and began reading.

Rosenthall writes, “A conviction began to grow which he could no longer deny. Jesus was the one concerning whom the Jewish prophet Isaiah had written. He was the long-awaited Messiah of Israel and the Savior of the world. With that discovery he could no longer contain the joy it brought to his soul.”

Rosenthal, in the same article, tells the story of the young Jewish boy who went home from school one day and told his parents that the teacher had read to them about Jesus. Early the next morning, the highly disturbed parents were in the principal’s office to report the teacher. The principal told them that the school had a policy that all Bible reading would be from the Old Testament. When they insisted that he had read to them about Jesus, she called the teacher to his office, but he denied having read from the New Testament. When the principal asked him to read what he had read in class, he read from Isaiah 53:

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like one people turned away from; He was despised, and we didn’t value Him. Yet He Himself bore our sicknesses, and He carried our pains; but we in turn regarded Him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on Him, and we are healed by His wounds” (Isaiah 53:3-5).

“See,” cried the parents, confident that their complaint was justified, ‘he is condemned by his own mouth - he is reading about Jesus from the New Testament!’” The principal asked the teacher for an explanation. He admitted that the passage was about Jesus, but added that he was reading from the Jewish prophet Isaiah in their own Old Testament Scriptures. The parents left confused, but Rosenthal never heard if their curiosity led them to search for answers.

13:28 - NO GROUNDS. *“Though they found no grounds for the death penalty, they asked Pilate to have Him killed.”* We do not know how much these Jews (or the God fearing Gentiles) in Antioch of Pisidia knew about the charges, trials, humiliation, and crucifixion of Jesus, but Paul, having been both a strict Pharisee and fanatical enemy of the church, lays it out for them. The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem did accuse Jesus of blasphemy, but had no grounds for the charge. They never let that stop them. They would not settle for a lesser charge, or penalty. They wanted Him dead. The high priest had stated that it would be better for Jesus to be killed than for all of them to risk the wrath of Rome if they failed to control the situation in Judea. They could not pass the death penalty, so they took Him to Pilate, the Roman governor, with trumped up charges and demanded

that he have him killed. They also worked up the masses to the point that they stood before Pilate and shouted, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” It would be interesting to know how many of those people who were crying “Crucify Him”, were in that number who shouted “Hosanna” to Him during the Royal Entry.

13:29 - FULFILLED ALL. *“When they had fulfilled all that had been written about Him, they took Him down from the tree and put Him in a tomb.”* The very David, whose name the invoked, had been inspired to write about the crucifixion 1000 years in advance (Ps. 22). These Jewish leaders had fulfilled that prophecy, as well as those we find Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets.

TREE. This is not “strictly a tree, but wood as already in Acts 5:30; Acts 10:29 and later in Galatians 3:13. Strictly speaking, it was Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who took the body of Jesus down from the cross, though the Jews had asked Pilate to have the bones of Jesus broken so that his body would not “remain on the cross during the Sabbath (John 19:31). Paul does not distinguish the details here” [ATR]. The burial of Jesus was “an act of honor and love by the disciples who took charge of his body. His enemies oversaw the burial and placed guards to watch the tomb. Paul views this as the last act of opposition toward the Messiah” [NCWB].

13:30 - GOD RAISED. *“But God raised Him from the dead...”* Paul skips quickly over numerous details, apparently in order to get to the Resurrection. There was limited time and he needed to get to the Good News. Religious leaders and Roman soldiers murdered Him “But God raised Him from the dead.” They had falsely accused him, condemned Him, and murdered Him, but God demonstrated both the innocence of His Son and His power over death. God alone can raise one from the dead. The New Testament is filled with miracles and signs, but the crowning miracle of the New Testament is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and those early apostles proclaimed it wherever they went. Belief in the resurrection of Jesus is essential to salvation (Rom. 10:8-9).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ becomes a major thrust of the Gospel. While the death of Christ is the watershed in the drama of redemption, the resurrection of Christ “was inevitable if His death was to be efficacious. If His death conquered sin, it would also conquer the chief fruit of sin which was and is death” [HLE: 185].

13:31 - HE APPEARED. *“(A)nd He appeared for many days to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now His witnesses to the people.”* Jesus was seen over a period of 40 days (Acts 1:3) by those close disciples who had traveled with Him to Jerusalem for the Passover. There were many eyewitnesses to the risen Christ and their testimonies were compelling. Those witnesses were still bearing witness of the Resurrection to “the people” (the Jews). No mention is made here of Paul’s own vision of the risen Lord (1 Cor. 15:8).

13:32 - PROCLAIM TO YOU. *“And we ourselves proclaim to you the good news of the promise that was made to our forefathers.”* Paul continues to focus on the Resurrection in his message. Paul and Barnabas had traveled all this distance to proclaim to them “the good news” that Jesus had fulfilled the promise God had made to their Jewish forefathers.

13:33 - GOD HAS FULFILLED. *“God has fulfilled this to us their children by raising up Jesus, as it is written in the second Psalm: You are My Son; today I have become Your Father.”* God made a promise to their forefathers (vs. 32), and He has fulfilled that promise to their children by raising Jesus from the dead. They were very familiar with the Second Psalm, so now Paul rightly applies that to Jesus. It has no other application of fulfillment.

13:34 - SINCE HE RAISED HIM. *“Since He raised Him from the dead, never to return to decay, He has spoken in this way, I will grant you the faithful covenant blessings made to David.”* God raised Jesus from the dead, never again to return to decay, as Lazarus and the widow’s son at Nain did. He did not die again and thus, He becomes the first fruits of the Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:3; Rom. 6:9). “You” in the Greek is plural even though it applies to Jesus. To Jesus, “the Holy One” (13:35), was “promised the sure and holy things of David. David was promised an eternal kingdom, but this kingdom could only be fulfilled in Christ and by his resurrection (the quote comes from Isa. 55:3, LXX) [NCWB].

Jesus, whose authority was declared through the Resurrection, promised that those who believe in Him will receive “the faithful blessings made to David.” Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant and His resurrection is the proof and authentication of the covenant. Paul will explain further in the next verse.

13:35 - HE ALSO SAYS. *“Therefore He also says in another passage, You will not allow Your Holy One to see decay.”* Here, the “therefore” explains the “covenant blessing” in the previous verse. The quotation is from 16:10 and it shows that “Jesus did not see corruption in his body, a flat contradiction for those who deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus” [ATR].

13:36 - FOR DAVID. *“For David, after serving his own generation in God’s plan, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and decayed.”* David lived, he died, and he was buried. He was not raised from the dead. In the books of the Kings and the Chronicles of the Kings we read of one king after another and their lives are summarized up in the words, He lived (so many years), he died, and he was buried with his fathers. Not one of them was raised from the dead.

13:37 - THE ONE. *“But the One whom God raised up did not decay.”* His point is that the words, “You will not allow Your Holy One to see decay”, could not have applied to David, since he did die and decay. The One whom God did raise did not see decay. Upon the news of the illness of Lazarus, Jesus delayed so that so that his friend had been dead four days before he arrived at his home. There could have been no question that decay had begun. Jesus’ body did not decay.

13:38 - LET IT BE KNOWN. *“(T)herefore, let it be known to you, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you...”* When you find the word “therefore” in the Bible it is a good idea to study the verses before it for the argument and then look at what follows for the conclusion or result. It is through this Man (Jesus), about whom Paul has been preaching that the forgiveness of sin is available to these “brothers”. This is critical: The Jews had the Old Testament Scripture, they had the Law and the prophets, and that was God’s gift to them until the coming of

Jesus. From this time onward, forgiveness of sin is in Jesus and in Jesus alone. Of the forgiveness of sins, Walker wrote, “Only He who bore them and died to expiate them (John 1:29) has the right to remit them” [Walker, Thomas, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Moody Press, 1965, p. 297 - after this, WALKER].

It is always interesting to see Franklin Graham on a news program. He is my favorite guest for one simple reason: no matter what the subject is, before he is finished he will stress to all, Jew, Catholic, or pagan, that you must believe in Jesus Christ to receive everlasting life. He has shared that with genuine compassion with Alan Colmes who is a Jew. Of course, that may be the reason we do not see him on Fox News any more often than we do. They don’t mind talking with him about his ministry, *The Samaritan’s Purse*, they just don’t want to hear that Jesus is the only one who can forgive sin.

It is amazing how ready many in the news are to reject the Prince of Peace who offers forgiveness of sin and an eternity in heaven in favor of the evils of Islam, a religion which began with a make-over of a pagan god by Mohammed. Liberal lawmakers and liberals in the media are pushing for hate legislation that would allow authorities to arrest and prosecute Christians who point out the evils of Islam, but they are not concerned about Christians who are targeted by “secular progressives”, the term for liberals popularized by Bill O’Reilly, who is obviously playing for ratings with many such claims, as well as his pseudo-fights with guests. This man professes faith in Jesus, but like so many, avoids telling people that He is the only One who forgives sin.

13:39 - EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES. *“(A)nd everyone who believes in Him is justified from everything, which you could not be justified from through the law of Moses.”* This is “a complicated sentence in the Greek, though not unusual for Paul” [HLE: 187]. “Everyone” includes both Jews and Gentiles. This message was welcomed by the Gentiles and some of the Jews, but strongly resisted by many of the Jews gathered there that day.

Robertson goes into more detail in commenting on this verse than some. First, he points out that “This is a characteristic Greek sentence with the principal clause at the end and Pauline to the core” [ATR]. He then provides a literal rendering: “And from all the things from (apo not repeated in the Greek, but understood, the ablative case being repeated) which ye were not able to be justified in this one every one who believes is justified” [ATR]. The latter part of this verse gives us the heart of Paul’s preaching and teaching about Jesus Christ. This is the theme of his writing on soteriology (the study of salvation) and it is the theme of both the Epistle to Galatians and the Epistle to the Romans.

“The failure of the Mosaic law to bring the kind of righteousness that God demands is stated. This is made possible in and by (en) Christ alone. **Paul's favourite words occur here, pisteuô, believe, with which pistis, faith, is allied, dikaiô, to set right with God on the basis of faith.** In Rom 6:7 Paul uses apo also after dikaiô. These are key words (pisteuô and dikaiô) in Paul's theology and call for prolonged and careful study if one is to grasp the Pauline teaching. Dikaiô primarily means to make

righteous, to declare righteous like *axioû*, to deem worthy (*axios*). But in the end Paul holds that real righteousness will come (Rom 6:1-8:39) to those whom God treats as righteous (Rom 3:1-5:21) though both Gentile and Jew fall short without Christ (Rom 1:1-3:31). This is the doctrine of grace that will prove a stumbling block to the Jews with their ceremonial works and foolishness to the Greeks with their abstract philosophical ethics (1Co 1:23-25). It is a new and strange doctrine to the people of Antioch” [ATR].

Paul is declaring a new doctrine, the doctrine of grace, which was indeed new to the people of Antioch, as it was to Jews and Gentiles wherever the Gospel was proclaimed. In my commentary on Galatians in The Bible Notebook Series (PastorLife.Com web site, Georgia Baptist Convention, Dr. Mike Minnix, Editor) I discuss the three theories of Justification. It is absolutely essential that we understand them, so I am going to insert them here:

THREE THEORIES OF JUSTIFICATION

There really are but three theories of Justification. Some groups, or individuals, may not want to be placed in either of these categories, either because they do not want to be categorized, or because they honestly believe they do not belong in either category. But aside from some cultic belief, or New Age claim that you just need to discover that you are God, or that you are the Christ you seek, everyone does fit into one of these categories.

1. JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS

Paul wrote to the Galatians, “Knowing that a man is **not justified by the works of the law** but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for *by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified*” (Gal. 2:16 NKJV).

”For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, **not of works, lest anyone should boast**” (Eph 2:8-9 NKJV).

2. JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE PLUS WORKS

Man is not saved by any combination of grace plus works. Nor, can he be saved by grace and then maintain his salvation by works. Paul was shocked that the Galatians thought they could be saved by grace plus circumcision. He was equally shocked by the implication that one could be saved by grace and then come back and add works later. How could they not see the folly of such a preposterous teaching? He wrote, ”Are you so foolish? *Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?*” (Gal 3:3 NKJV).

Paul was inspired to reveal to us through the Epistle to the Romans that grace and works are

mutually exclusive approaches to God and His salvation. Either, in any measure, cancels out the other. No one is saved by grace “plus” anything else, be it baptism, good works, or set of rules, regulations, and revelations. Jesus Christ is totally, completely adequate, as John MacArthur stresses in two of his books - *Charismatic Chaos* and *Our Sufficiency in Christ*. See Romans 11:6 (NKJV):

”And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.

But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.”

3. JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE

1) (Gal 2:16) - “Knowing that a man is **not justified by the works** of the law but **by faith in Jesus Christ**, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified” (bold added).

2) (Gal 2:21) - “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”

3) (Eph 2:8) - “**For by grace you have been saved through faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (bold added).

4) (Rom 5:1) - “Therefore, **having been justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (bold added).

5) (Rom 8:1-4) - “There is therefore now **no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit**. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (bold added).

There are three theories of justification and every denomination subscribes to one of these theories. There are people who believe one is saved by good works. Once when I was in seminary I talked with the pastor of a church in a county-seat town. The pastor seemed capable and committed to his church. He was loved and respected by the members. Initially, I was impressed with the minister, but as we talked I discovered that he placed a lot of emphasis on activities, but little on sound doctrine. I asked him what he told people they had to be saved. He responded enthusiastically, “I tell them they have to go to church and do right.” In other words, justification by works.

A Jewish rabbi spoke to a group at a Baptist college. A student asked him, “What do you see as the main difference between Jews and Christians?” Without any hesitation, He replied, “You Christians believe that all you have to do is believe on someone else (Jesus) did in order to have salvation. We Jews believe we have to work for what we get.” He couldn’t have stated it better.

Many believe in justification by grace plus works. These fall into two categories. First, there some

who teach that in order to be saved you must believe in Jesus and be baptized, or believe and do good works, or live up to Biblical standards (or abstain from certain things). Second, there are many who teach that one receives salvation by grace and grace alone. However, after he is saved by grace, he must live up to certain things, or abstain from certain things. Failure to do so will result in the loss of salvation. That is justification by grace plus works; the former group adds works in order to obtain salvation, and the latter in order to maintain one's salvation.

To hold that after a person is saved he must either do certain things, or abstain from certain things in order to keep his salvation is to transfer the saving power of God from Justification to Sanctification. The Christian works (serves, ministers) because he has been saved by grace through faith - unto good works. He works because he is saved, not in order to maintain his salvation. A distinction must be made between the root of salvation (Justification) and the fruit of salvation (Sanctification). To subscribe to this view is like nailing a sign to the Cross that says, NECESSARY BUT INADEQUATE (Essential, but Insufficient).

Fortunately, there are those who hold the third view - salvation by grace and grace alone. As seen above, this is the Scriptural position. Many other passages teach that salvation is by grace and grace alone (pure grace). This theory is Scriptural, but there is more. If you accept the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, you can accept the doctrine of security of believers. If you accept what the Bible has to say about security of believers you will have greater assurance of salvation and if you have assurance of salvation, you will find greater joy in your salvation.

J. Wilbur Chapman often illustrated God's grace with the testimony given by a certain man in one of his meetings:

"I got off at the Pennsylvania depot as a tramp, and for a year I begged on the streets for a living. One day I touched a man on the shoulder and said, "Hey, mister, can you give me a dime?" As soon as I saw his face I was shocked to see that it was my own father. I said, "Father, Father, do you know me?" Throwing his arms around me and with tears in his eyes, he said, "Oh my son, at last I've found you! I've found you. You want a dime? Everything I have is yours." Think of it. I was a tramp. I stood begging my own father for ten cents, when for 18 years he had been looking for me to give me all that he had."

What a wonderful illustration of the way God longs to treat us, if we will only let Him [Bible Illustrator, Parsons Tech., 9-22-88, #1445].

13:40 - BEWARE. *“So beware that what is said in the prophets does not happen to you...”* The warning is applicable and necessary. Sadly, many of those present were about to fulfill the predictions of those prophets. Paul, without a doubt, could see in the expressions on the faces of some of those worshipers in the synagogue that they were about to do exactly what the prophets foresaw. Clarke understood just how pertinent and timely this warning was. Paul is warning that:

“If you reject these benefits, now freely offered to you in this preaching of Christ crucified, you may expect such judgment from the hand of God as your forefathers experienced, when, for their rebellion and their contempt of his benefits, their city was taken, their temple destroyed, and themselves either slain by the sword, or carried into captivity. **It is evident that St. Paul refers to Habakkuk 1:5-10**; and in those verses the desolation by the Chaldeans is foretold. **Never was there a prophecy more correctly and pointedly applied.** These Jews did continue to slight the benefits offered to them by the Lord; and they persevered in their rebellion: what was the consequence? The Romans came, took their city, burnt their temple, slew upwards of a million of them, and either carried or sold the rest into captivity. How exactly was the prophecy in both cases fulfilled” [CLARKE, bold added].

13:41 - YOU SCOFFERS. *“Look, you scoffers, marvel and vanish away, because I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will never believe, even if someone were to explain it to you.”* Paul does not mention which prophet he is quoting, but, as noted above, it seems obvious that he refers to Habakkuk 1:5ff. “These words were originally a warning against the approaching destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans and the subsequent Babylonian captivity. Here they accurately describe the disaster that awaits the generation that Paul is speaking to” [NCWB]. Clarke, Barnes, and others discuss in detail various manuscripts and conclude that Paul is quoting, not the Hebrew, but the Septuagint (LXX). Robertson understood that “Paul has hurled a thunderbolt at the close” [ATR] of this sermon.

Bill Keller sends a daily Internet newsletter, Lifeprayer, to subscribers. On August 2, 2007, he covers several subjects, including some that have an application to “scoffers”. He writes:

“One of the most vocal and chief Christian haters in the media today is Bill Maher. On his HBO program “Real Time with Bill Maher,” he takes every opportunity he can to belittle and castigate people of faith as being stupid, unenlightened, and mindless idiots. My PR firm has been close several times to getting me booked as a guest on his program, but like most cowards, Maher is not looking for someone who will stand up to him and challenge his beliefs, but weak people representing Christianity who he can bully, intimidate, and use as the punch lines for his sick and irreverent jokes. “Two new movies out that slam the Christian faith are “The Ten” and “I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry.” “The Ten” is a comedy that spoofs the Ten Commandments, featuring a portrayal of Jesus deflowering a young virgin. Another anti-Christian movie now out is, “I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry.” This movie is little more than a pro-homosexual propaganda that makes a mockery of Gods’ Holy Institution of Marriage. Blaspheming Christ and slamming Christians is alive and well in Hollywood in 2007! I am often curious why these great film makers in Hollywood don’t have the guts to mock and lampoon the false religion of Islam. They know there will be a bounty on their heads and movie theaters will be burned to the ground!” [Bill Keller, Lifeprayer].

I AM DOING. The Lord is doing “a work that you will never believe, even if someone were to explain it to you.” That was happening in the First Century and He is doing a mighty work in our day, but mockers and scoffers will not recognize it. Today, with around the clock news programs, we not only see scoffers, we see a church that is too shallow to defend the faith. A Louisiana senator’s immorality was revealed by Larry Flynt, who has made millions as publisher of a magazine which I have heard is pornographic (though I have never see a copy). The senator confessed his sin, stated that he had asked the Lord to forgive him, that and he had received His forgiveness and his wife’s forgiveness. Reporters did not understand it when his wife asked them not to follow them to church. Bob Beckel, who works for liberal politicians, appeared on the Hannity and Colmes program on Fox and arrogantly gloated over the exposure of the sin in an effort to identify all “right-wing” Christians with the senator’s immorality and hypocrisy. This man was a scoffer.

Everywhere you look there is evidence of scoffers in our midst, people who make every effort to hinder Christianity in America. They are willing to give a pass to Islam, a pagan religion which is seeks to impose its oppressive beliefs on the whole world. It is especially disappointing to hear an American Jew defending Islam in what seems an effort to weaken the influence of Christianity in America. It is true that some Christians have discriminated against Jews, but it is also true that in the First Century Jew often persecuted Christians, especially Jewish Christians.

Some Muslims have fled an evil, oppressive, bloody, Islamic regime and come to America seeking freedom and peace, only to try to convert America into the system from which they were trying to escape when they arrived here. That is bad enough, but this situation is made much worse by enemies of the Cross, like the ACLU, by non-Christians scoffers, and liberal church members aggressively hinder the church, even to the point of promoting a religion that would take away their freedom, and force them to convert, or suffer the consequences. That situation is made worse by compromising Christians, by shallow Christians who are not equipped to defend the faith, by worldly church members who profess a faith to which they are ashamed to pay lip service, and by church members who often join the scoffers.

God is doing a mighty work in the world today, but most Christians in the West seem totally unaware of it. They are happy to watch some tel-evangelist make claims of the sensational miracles the Lord is doing through him but do not see what great works He is doing around the world. Sadly, **many committed Christians are unaware of what the Lord is doing because they are busy with what they are doing for Him.** I was on the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources, and a member of the Broadman and Holman Committee when the Holman Christian Standard Bible was published. LifeWay Church Resources, which publishes Sunday School literature for one hundred thousand churches, began using the HCSB along with the KJV. We created B & H Outreach International after the Islamic terrorists attacked America on nine-eleven, 2001. We were meeting at the LifeWay Conference center in Glorieta, NM at the time of the attacks.

Two years later, at another meeting of the board of trustees at the LifeWay Conference Center at Ridgecrest, NC., my friend Ken Stephens, President of B & H Publishing Group, announced that he and Phill Burgess were flying to Tokyo to meet with Chinese Christians to talk with them. The

outcome of that meeting is a new Mandarin translation of the Bible which is desperately needed to replace an older translation that is far from accurate, but one that has been used by the Lord to accomplish some amazing things.

I was chairman of the Broadman and Holman Committee when I called a denominational worker who is involved in keeping Christians informed. I see his name above articles on a regular basis, but when I asked him if he had heard about B & H Outreach International, he said, “No”. When I asked if he knew about the new Mandarin translation he said, “No”. When I asked if he was aware of the fact there are now more Christians in China (7%) than Communists (5%), he said, “No”. He was interested, but when I made arrangements for him to interview Ken Stephens and Vice President Phill Burgess to get the full story, I called back and spoke that man’s associate, who announced that she was busy and that she had a contact at LifeWay - and when she needed information she would contact her. God is doing a work that should amaze American Christians, but we are either too busy doing things for God to stop to see what He is doing, or we are simply not interested if it does not concern us personally.

Paul and Barnabas on Mission in Antioch

13:42 - AS THEY WERE LEAVING. *“As they were leaving, they begged that these matters be presented to them the following Sabbath.”* Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue before the general assembly dispersed (see next verse), probably in the midst of a great deal of excitement over the message they had just heard. “They begged” is imperfect: they continued to beg them to come back the following Sabbath to share more with them about “these matters.” Apparently both Jewish worshipers and God fearing Gentiles wanted them to come back the next Sabbath and tell them more about the messiah.

13:43 - AFTER THE SYNAGOGUE. *“After the synagogue had been dismissed, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who were speaking with them and persuading them to continue in the grace of God.”* After Paul and Barnabas left the assembly the leaders of the synagogue dismissed the congregation and some of the worshipers overtook Paul and Barnabas, apparently not wanting to wait until the next Sabbath to hear more about Jesus and the salvation he offers to those who believe in Him.

JEWS AND DEVOUT PROSELYTES. Many of the Jews and some “devout proselytes” followed them to hear more about the Messiah. Vincent explains that the word “proselyte” meant “Originally, one who arrives at a place; a stranger; thence of one who comes over to another faith” [Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament, in the Bible Navigator electronic library, LifeWay Christian Resources - after this, VINCENT]. Vines adds that

“in the NT it is used of converts to Judaism, or foreign converts to the Jewish religion, Matt. 23:15; Acts 2:10; Acts 6:5; Acts 13:43. There seems to be no

connection necessarily with Palestine, for in Acts 2:10; Acts 13:43 it is used of those who lived abroad. Cp. the Sept., e.g., in Exod. 22:21; Exod. 23:9; Deut. 10:19, of the 'stranger' living among the children of Israel" [Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources - after this, VINES].

These "devout proselytes" were probably Gentiles who had been circumcised (proselyted), in contrast to the Gentiles were merely interested in learning about Jesus. Paul and Barnabas continued to teach the people informally in the street. In an informal setting, they encouraged these believing Jews and devout Gentile proselytes to continue in the Grace of God.

13:44 - FOLLOWING SABBATH. *"The following Sabbath almost the whole town assembled to hear the message of the Lord."* In keeping with their mission strategy, they would have been witnessing in the market place and possibly in private homes during the week, but on the following Sabbath they would be at the synagogue. They would continue to go to the synagogue until non-believing Jews forced them out and then they would take those who believed in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, and begin a church with them.

ALMOST THE WHOLE TOWN. Obviously, the whole town could not get into the synagogue, and only Jewish men would have been allowed to enter the main assembly room. This probably means that word of what Paul had said the previous Sabbath, and what he and Barnabas continued to teach during the week and a strong representation of the citizens of the town gathered at the synagogue the next Sabbath. They probably had an "overflow" crowd, with more on the outside than on the inside. It has been suggested that while Paul was preaching on the inside Barnabas, may have been speaking to those on the outside.

13:45 - WHEN THE JEWS SAW. *"But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to oppose what Paul was saying by insulting him."* We can be sure that Paul and Barnabas had been busy during the week, and we are probably safe in assuming that Jewish religious leaders living in a Gentile city in the First Century would have made an effort to keep their collective finger on the pulse of any movement they considered a threat, both to their security and their theological integrity. They may well have had members of the synagogue who were reporting to them.

FILLED WITH JEALOUSY. The Greek word is the word from which we get our word zeal. "The word here denotes wrath, indignation, that such multitudes should be disposed to hear a message which they rejected, and which threatened to overthrow their religion" [BARNES]. When I saw the word "jealousy" in this verse some key question came to mind. Were they jealous of Paul because they were influencing Jews or was it because they were reaching out to Gentiles? Or, was it both? They welcomed God fearing Gentiles to the synagogue - as long as they "stayed in their place" - but their primary concern was the Jewish population. Robertson helps clear it up for us by explaining that the word translated jealousy is in the "Genitive case of zêlos (from zeô, to boil) after eplêsthêsan (effective first aorist passive indicative of pimplêmi). Envy and jealousy arise between

people of the same calling (doctors towards doctors, lawyers towards lawyers, preachers towards preachers). So these rabbis boiled with jealousy when they saw the crowds gathered to hear Paul and Barnabas” [ATR].

I would only question one statement Robertson made. It seems to me that people are jealous of those they identify as their peers, people in their same social, professional, or economic class. They are envious of those they perceive as ranking above them, even if they will not acknowledge that they are above them in rank (socially, financially, professionally, or in talent).

BEGAN O OPPOSE. Jewish leaders openly opposed them, implying that they interrupted the service to oppose the missionaries. They “began to oppose what Paul was saying by insulting him.” The rabbis would have been the obvious leaders. Driven by jealousy, they began to oppose what Paul and Barnabas preached and taught. The focus of their opposition would have been the claim that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. A specific point of contention would have been the Resurrection. It seems possible that many of the Jews who had been giving favorable attention to the missionaries at first turned against them under the influence of the rabbis during the week, and then when the Gentiles showed up at the Synagogue, they resented it and opposed Paul and Barnabas. It also seems that the attraction of the Gentiles to the Gospel of the Messiah stirred up all the Jewish pride in their race.

13:46 - PAUL AND BARNABAS BOLDLY. *“Then Paul and Barnabas boldly said: “It was necessary that God’s message be spoken to you first. But since you reject it, and consider yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles!”* This is one of the most remarkable testimonies to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those early Christians. Peter and John boldly proclaimed the truth before the Sanhedrin (4:13). Peter and John prayed for boldness (4:29) and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke with boldness (4:31). Now, Paul and Barnabas speak boldly. This was the first of many defenses Paul would make on his three missionary journeys, and in the years following them, as he stood before mobs, kings, and governors.

IT WAS NECESSARY. They followed their mission strategy in proclaiming the message of the Messiah first to the Jews and only turning to the Gentiles when the Jews forced them out of the synagogue in whatever city they proclaimed the message. There is more to it than that, however. They were under a divine mandate to take the Gospel to the Jews first. Now, “They had done their duty and had followed the command of Jesus (Acts 1:8). They use the very language of Peter in Acts 3:26 (*humin prôton*) ‘to you first.’ This position Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles will always hold, the Jew first in privilege and penalty (Rom 1:16; Rom 2:9, 10)” [ATR]. The word Luke uses denotes a violent rejection of the message [VINCENT].

CONSIDER YOURSELVES. Paul could be rather pungent at times: “and consider yourselves unworthy of eternal life.” For other examples of his satire, see the Epistle to the Galatians.

TO THE GENTILES. He announces that because of their hostility toward them and toward the Gospel they were turning to the Gentiles. This is a “first” in Acts, and it is a first for Paul. This was

a dramatic moment for Paul and Barnabas, and it was prophetic of what was to come.

13:47 - THE LORD HAS COMMANDED. *“For this is what the Lord has commanded us: I have appointed you as a light for the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”* In the Great Commission Jesus commands us all to be His witnesses. The Great Commission is both general and specific. It is general in that it includes all believers. It is specific in that it outlines His program for the church and for all believes. Then, there is the command that was uniquely the call to preach the Word of God. Paul had been appointed and commanded to be “a light for the Gentiles.

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH. Jesus had stated that, just as soon as His followers were empowered by the Holy Spirit (at Pentecost), they were to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and unto the “ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Paul and Barnabas were specifically commanded take the Gospel to the “ends of the earth”, but believers of every generation are empowered by the Power of Pentecost to take the Gospel “to the ends of the earth.” Social programs and charitable work are good, but what believers are commanded to do is to proclaim Jesus as the Savior to the world.

It is amazing that Paul and Barnabas found Jesus in the Old Testament Scripture, when some modern preachers seem to have trouble finding him in the New Testament. Bill Pace retired at age 65 and moved to China where he teaches conversational English, and where he leads Chinese people to faith in Jesus Christ. He has been there six years now, and when he recently came home to celebrate his mother’s 97th birthday, he and I met for lunch at the Cracker Barrel in West Monroe, Louisiana. Bill has had a passion for souls since the day he was saved in his mid-thirties. He received training in soul winning and then served on the staff of a few churches before retiring to go to China. One day, before he retired from the ministry in America, he knocked on the door of a home and was invited in to visit - with a Protestant minister. He assumed he knew how the man would respond, but asked anyway, “Do you believe in Jesus Christ?” The “minister” said, “Yeah, I believe in He, She, or It.”

A Catholic priest who has been my friend for a number of years told me that he received training in counseling at Methodist Hospital in Memphis with chaplains of various denominations. One day, another chaplain made the statement that God was just an idea. My friend asked if the man would have lunch with him and when the were eating lunch he asked the man if he had been serious. He was. The Catholic priest sat there witnessing to the Protestant chaplain who was identified with a denomination that was synonymous with soul winning in the early days of American history. Finally, seeing he was getting nowhere, he told the man he would pray for him. He added, “That really set him off!”

13:48 - GENTILES...REJOICED. *“When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced and glorified the message of the Lord, and all who had been appointed to eternal life believed.”* When Paul and Barnabas, like Peter and John, were filled with the Holy Spirit they spoke boldly. There is something unique about the new life in Christ. New believers in Jesus found hope and joy, neither of which was inherent in the religions of the world.

Boldness is one of the characteristics of a Spirit-filled believer, but not the only characteristic. Some who claim to be filled with the Holy Spirit seem to forget the fruit of the Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law" (Gal 5:22-23). When a professing Christian creates friction or divisions through their preaching, teaching, music, prayer group, or home Bible Study, that person should reexamine both his or her prayer life, Bible study, and the claim that the Spirit was leading them.

The following article, posted by Broadman Press, July 31, 2007, powerfully illustrates both the power of the Gospel of Jesus to liberate those who are slaves to sin and Satan, and the joy that comes to the hearts of those who are saved.

NEW DELHI (BP)--Faith is taking a foothold among people in the Yadav occupational caste of dairy workers and cattle farmers, who number 54 million throughout India, Nepal and Bangladesh. Two of their stories follow: -- Brijesh*, a Yadav who attended a conference of Yadav believers earlier this year. "Jai Masih! (Victory to the Messiah!) My God makes impossible things possible." "I have two sons, two daughters and a wife. Before we came to Christ, we were from Hindu background. We were involved in all kinds of idol worship. I had many struggles in my life, so I worshiped many idols." "One time, a servant of the Lord came to me. This man told me that the more I practiced idol worship, the more struggles I would have in life. 'But the God I serve will take away your struggles and difficulties,' he said. Through that servant of the Lord, I accepted Christ as my personal Savior. "He gave me a New Testament to study. In Scripture, I found Matthew 11:28, 'Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.' He gave me rest, and now I am growing in Him. "I am not literate ... but I believe that even though I don't know how to read and write that God has chosen me. God has told me to go and tell and preach the Good News.-- Yash*, a believer ministering among India's Yadavs. "I was born in a Hindu village in India. It was my desire from childhood to know who is my god. I used to follow all kinds of Hindu rituals, rules and regulations. This is how I began searching for God. "At first, I wanted to know the real and true god, but I used to think, 'Who is that true god?' On Thursday in my village, we would worship the banana tree. We would pour water on the roots of the banana tree as a religious practice. We used to perform puja (Hindu worship practices). We used to wrap the tree in clothes. Then we would take our religious book and read under the banana tree. "After all this, still I could not find the true god. Soon my body looked the same as that of Job, who after having all kinds of wounds on his body, nobody recognized him. "One day, a sadhu (a Hindu ascetic) came to me and said that one day I would be a very big man with a very good figure. That sadhu gave me some instructions. He gave me something and instructed me to soak it into milk and pour it out in the sun. "For one month, I practiced what the sadhu said. Continually I poured the water on the banana roots. Then one day I saw a temple and an evil spirit told me to go inside and worship. So, I went inside and worshiped there for three hours along with

many other people. "For one year continually, I would go to the temple and worship every day for three hours. Every morning I would take a bath and then go to worship the idol in the temple. Then in the evening after work, again I would take a bath and go to worship." One day I met a man who was totally blind. Because of his blindness, the man could not even walk properly, but that man had the Gospel of Christ. He told me about Jesus. "Lots of people were surrounding him. When I got to where I could see, there was this blind man. He was preaching about Christ and telling about the idols. He was saying that they have eyes but cannot see, ears but cannot hear, and mouths but cannot speak. Then after this, all the people left. I stood alone with this man. "I questioned the blind man. 'Your hair is so long. Your legs are so weak. Your clothes are so dirty. You have not taken a bath in many days. How can you speak such good words from your mouth? Tell me, where did you learn these words?'" Then this man told me about Jesus Christ and the church. He told me to visit the church. On the first Sunday I went to church, I saw some people singing and praising the Lord. Also, they were preaching. I took a keen interest to visit the church again. "I used to go to the temple on Thursdays to worship and then to the church on Sundays. I decided that I would go to each place to see where I would worship. Whichever one could give me full satisfaction in my heart, then that god I would accept." One night I had a dream. The idol came and told me that I should not go to church. Another day I had a dream, a vision in which I saw a fire. In the midst of this fire, I saw Jesus Christ and I saw His hand. "Then I finally decided that I would go to church. I would pray to God. I would continue in my faith. I began to pray to God, and then God gave me His word. I took water baptism and now I am serving the Lord. "In the village that I have come from, I want to return and tell Christ to them where nobody knows. Please pray that many people will come to know Christ through me." Ghirish*, a Yadav church planter in India. *Names changed for security purposes.

13:49 - THE MESSAGE. "So the message of the Lord spread through the whole region." The tense is imperfect, denoting the continual diffusion of the Gospel throughout the region by Paul and Barnabas and by new converts. To follow the spread of the Gospel through the missionary journeys of Paul one needs to take note of this statement. Paul and Barnabas were following a mission strategy, not stumbling in the dark. That strategy called for them to follow the major Roman roads to the major population centers, where they would go to the local synagogue on the Sabbath, and if invited, preach to the Jews and Gentiles who had come to fear the Lord. They would continue to preach and teach in the synagogue until the non-believing Jews turned against them, and in essence, threw them out of the synagogue. Then they would turn to the Gentiles, taking with them the Jewish converts who chose to worship with them. The next step in evangelizing that region followed in a logical order. New believers, filled with a new hope and with joy, witnessed to local citizens and to people who came into the city from smaller towns and villages throughout the region to trade in the market place. Those who were saved would then take the message of salvation through Jesus Christ back to their villages. In this way the Gospel was spread throughout the region.

ILLUSTRATION: A number of years ago I discovered my first historical novel by Alan Eckert, *The Frontiersman*, a well documented story about Simon Kenton, who at age fifteen hit an older young man so hard he thought he had killed him. Young Simon fled from the area, taking the name Simon Butler. I recently read something about Simon Butler written by someone who obviously did not know that his real name was Simon Kenton. Kenton was a young giant, quiet, but powerful, and dangerous when attacked.

One evening he was sitting at a table in a tavern when a boisterous young Lieutenant came into the establishment, and seeing the gigantic frontiersman, decided to entertain his friends by bullying the backwoodsman. The young officer had been drinking and he was proud of his fighting ability, but he made a big mistake. He hit Simon Kenton. Kenton was a hard man to rile, but that did it. He hit the arrogant young officer one time and walked out of the establishment, leaving an unconscious Lieutenant Andrew Jackson on the floor.

Simon Kenton was so skilled in the forest that his fame spread and he served as a guide with Simon Girty at one time. He also served as a guide for George Washington. Daniel Boone said he was the only man he ever went into the woods with that he didn't feel like he had to "look out for". He was with Daniel Boone on one occasion when they were caught outside the fort and attacked by Indians. They ran for the gate but Daniel Boone was wounded in the leg. Kenton scooped him up and ran with him, and when he was cut off short of the gate, he threw Boone into three Indians, knocked them down, then scooped up the famous frontiersman again and rushed through the well guarded gate.

Simon Kenton was highly respected by his neighbors, as well as the frontiersmen who knew him. He was known as a peaceful man as he grew older, but when he was invited to an open air revival meeting, he attended, not because he was a Christian, but because friends invited him. He sat quietly, listening to the evangelist. After the crowd was dismissed they milled about waiting for the food they had brought to be served. Simon Kenton approached the evangelist and asked him to take a walk with him. When they were out of the hearing of everyone else, Simon told the minister he would like to talk with him, but first he must promise that he would never breathe a word of what he said. The preacher agreed. Simon Kenton wanted to know how to be saved and once the evangelist shared to message of salvation, he prayed to receive Jesus Christ as his Savior.

When the minister finished praying, Simon Kenton left him and ran back into the clearing, shouting, "I've been saved! I've been saved!" When things calmed down a little the evangelist approached him and said, "I thought you wanted to keep this a secret." Kenton exclaimed, "This is too good to keep it a secret!"

That is why the Gospel spread from Antioch throughout the region of Pisidia and other province. It was too good to keep it a secret and the Holy Spirit directed blessed the testimonies of those excited new believers.

13:50 - BUT THE JEWS. *“But the Jews incited the religious women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their district.”* There may not have been many Jews in Antioch, since only one synagogue is mentioned, but they had influence. The joy and excitement of the Gentiles increased the wrath of the Jews. Paul proclaimed the Gospel of grace and liberty from the Law, and this infuriated the Jews.

In the comments on verse 49, we outlined Paul’s mission strategy. There was one point I left out in that summary. The final step came when the Jews became so infuriated that they would incite “the religious women of high standing and the leading men of the city” against Paul and his companions. Paul often continued in a city until the Jews persuaded these influential women and powerful men of the city to launch a persecution against them. They would either escape or be driven out of that city, whereupon they would move on to the next city and follow the mission plan the Holy Spirit gave them. Little did they realize how their persecution of these missionaries would further spread the Gospel throughout the region.

13:51 - SHAKING THE DUST. *“But shaking the dust off their feet against them, they proceeded to Iconium.”* Though Paul and Barnabas were not numbered among those disciples Jesus sent a mission trip, they would have been aware of His instructions: “If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that house or town” (Matt. 10:14). Later, Paul would face something similar to this in Corinth: “But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his clothes and told them, “Your blood is on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6).

ICONIUM. This was a large city about 45 miles southeast from Antioch of Pisidia, “located at the base of Mt. Tarsus at the borders of Lycaonia, Phrygia, and Pisidia” [NCWB]. Again, Paul and Barnabas follow their missionary strategy, which meant that they would follow the Roman road to another large city, where again they would go to the Synagogue of the Jews on the Sabbath.

13:52 - THE DISCIPLES. *“And the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.”* A disciple was one who was called to follow another and learn from him. The initial believers were called by Jesus to follow Him and for three years they followed Him and learned from Him. Now, Gentiles are called disciples and they commit themselves to following Jesus and learning from Him. This is amazing! There was no place for Gentiles in Judaism, but Jesus commands His disciples to win Gentiles to Him and to make disciples of them (Matt. 28:19-20)

FILLED WITH JOY. The imperfect tense shows that they continued to be filled with joy. The persecution had an opposite effect than that which the non-believing Jews intended. Jesus brought a new dimension to mankind, which included two things unknown in pagan religions. He brought hope and He brought joy. Pagan religions sought to gain the favor of a reluctant god, to appease and angry god, or simply to know some god who does not exist. Jesus revealed Himself to the world, and assured His followers that He “came to seek and save the lost.” He gave His life on the cross for our sins.

Those who believe in Christ receive eternal life. Jesus said, “I give unto them eternal life, and **they**

shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:28). He promised that (1) they won’t lose their salvation themselves and (2) no one else can take it away from them. That is the basis for hope, and hope is the foundation for joy. One only needs to read the Book of Philippians to gain an appreciation for the joy available to believers through Jesus Christ. A publisher told me that I should not use the word “joy” in the title of my commentary on Philippians because “joy is a women’s word. Men won’t buy it.” I decided on the title, *UNDEFEATED: Finding Peace in a World Full of Trouble*, but I maintained an emphasis on joy.

Jesus does not promise to make His believers healthy, wealthy, and wise, nor does he promise to make us happy. What he does promise is joy. Happiness is based on the Old English work for happenstance, and our happiness in the world often depends upon the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Joy does not come and go with changes in our circumstances. What we find in Jesus is an abiding joy that cannot be taken away from us.

Following a major heart attack in 1997, I spent seventeen days in the Intensive Care Units of two hospitals, including the time for surgery and recovery. Dr. Thomas Causey, my cardiologist, came into my room in ICR one day and stopped at the foot of my bed and exclaimed, “Dr. Sanders, the nurses out there are talking about your attitude! They cannot believe the way you are taking all of this.” I told him that I had submitted myself to the Lord and to the care of my doctors and nurses. I understood joy better at that time, and appreciated it more than I could ever recall. I was not happy with my circumstances, but I had a heightened sense of joy in my Savior.

THE HOLY SPIRIT. As mentioned in other places, The Book of Acts has often been called The Acts of the Apostles, but it may be more accurate to call it The Acts of the Holy Spirit. Paul and Barnabas had been commanded to go into the ends of the earth and proclaim the Good News to Jews and Gentiles. Now, both Jews and Gentiles who had become disciples are “filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.”

In any study of The Book of Acts, we should remind ourselves that Acts is the Book of History in the New Testament. Luke is telling us what happened. He reveals what the Holy Spirit was doing through the ministry of key believers like Paul and Barnabas. Any study of systematic theology must take us beyond Acts to the Epistles of Paul and the General Epistles. If you want to study Eschatology (the study of last things) you will not stop with Acts. If you want to study the gifts of the Holy Spirit you will want to go on to 1 Corinthians. If you want a good understanding of the doctrines of sin, salvation, and sanctification, make a careful study of Romans.

At the same time, we benefit greatly from a study of Acts. One subject that should capture our attention is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We do not find a definitive pattern in the Book of History. Some who were filled with the Holy Spirit spoke in other languages, some did not. At no point does Luke address an “unknown language” or a “private prayer language” in Acts. It becomes clear as we read the New Testament that believers are indwelt with the Holy Spirit at the point of salvation. After that, they will either be filled with the Holy Spirit or they, through their unfaithfulness will either quench the Holy Spirit or through sin, grieve the Spirit.

As far as we can tell here these new believers who received the Holy Spirit were filled with joy, and they went out and won others to the Lord. They became the nucleus for a new church in the pagan city of Pisidian Antioch. Visitors to Antioch who came to know Christ went back to their towns and villages to spread the Word there.

CHAPTER 14

Paul and Barnabas in Iconium

14:1 - THE SAME THING HAPPENED. *“The same thing happened in Iconium; they entered the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.”* The “same thing” denotes the pattern that was established in Antioch of Pisidia. They followed their mission strategy and experienced similar results. After the persecution in Antioch forced them to leave that city they went to Iconium, moving deeper and deeper into uncivilized pagan territory, but there were still enough Jews there to have a synagogue.

As they had done in Pisidian Antioch, they went to the Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath and, as in Antioch, they were invited to speak. Luke saw no need to record the message the same, Paul would have covered the call of Abraham, the covenant that was continued through Isaac and Jacob (Israel), the call of Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt after 400 years, Sinai, the conquest of Canaan, and the covenant with David. He would have then revealed that the covenant had been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. He had been crucified and buried, but God raised Him from the dead on the third day. Those who believe in Jesus receive everlasting life.

JEWES AND GREEKS BELIEVED. The response to the message was phenomenal: “a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.” This means that a great number of both Jews and Greeks were saved at the synagogue on that first Sabbath. By “Greeks”, Luke means Gentiles, as contrasted with the Hellenistic Jews, Jews who had grown up in a Gentile culture and spoke Greek. As in Antioch, there were some Greeks who attended the Synagogue services. There would have been some Greeks there who believed in the God of Israel (those who feared God), as well as those who may have heard that there would be some interesting guests at the synagogue that Sabbath. There was a “wall of separation” that separated Jewish men from Jewish women, and a wall that separated Jews from Gentiles.

The fact that they reached out to Gentiles did not mean that they ever turned their backs on the Jews. All one has to do is read Romans to see Paul’s deep burdened for the Jews. We live in a day in which we hear charges of racism associated with a lot of people and situations. What we learn from Acts is that Jesus broke down the middle wall of separation, as Paul would later write to a predominantly Gentile church in Ephesus:

“At that time **you were without the Messiah, excluded from the citizenship of Israel**, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, with no hope and without God in the world. **But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah**. For He is our peace, **who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility**. In His flesh, He did away with the law of the commandments in regulations, so that He might create in Himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace. [He did this so] that He might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross and put the hostility to death by it” (Eph 2:12-16, bold added).

Who can forget one of the most moving moments in world history when President Ronald Reagan stood before a wall of separation between free Germans and Germans enslaved by Communists, one of the greatest evils in history, surpassing even Hitler, but possibly not the Islamist movement. President Reagan declared, “Mr. Gorbochev, tear down that wall!” That was a shot heard around the world over and over. Jesus came to demolish an even greater wall of separation. God forbid that we build new walls!

14:2 - JEWS WHO REFUSED. *“But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up and poisoned the minds of the Gentiles against the brothers.”* This was often the response to the Gospel: “Some were persuaded by what he said, but others did not believe” (Acts 28:24). To refuse to believe in Jesus is to reject Him, to disobey Him. “The two meanings run into one another. To disbelieve the word of God is to disobey God” [ATR].

As in Antioch, those Jews who “refused to believe stirred up and poisoned the minds” of the leaders of this Gentile city against “the brothers”. This implies that these Jewish leaders had influence among the Gentiles and knew how to use it. Two points should be highlighted at some point, and this is a good a place as any. First, considering the times and circumstances, it seem logical that their influence among the Gentiles would have been economic, since they avoided social and cultural amalgamation. That statement is complimentary, not derogatory in any way. The Jews were in the minority, which may well have led to discrimination. Many of them were very astute business men who knew that their survival demanded cooperation with and support for each other. It also demanded financial investments in the city in which they lived.

In the second place, Jews were behind much of the persecution of early Christians. Even though that is a fact, that in no way justifies any measure of anti-Semitism on the part of any Christian at any time. Dr. Leo Eddleman was a missionary to Israel before World War II forced him to leave. An American of German descent, he loved Israel deeply during the time Hitler and his Nazis were trying to eradicate the entire race. He was deeply interested in the nation of Israel as long as I knew him. On one occasion, Dr. Eddleman told me that Jewish leaders following the Second World War determined to do certain things to assure their survival. For one thing, they would keep the story of the Holocaust before the world. For another thing, they would champion the cause of others who have faced discrimination. Hollywood helped with that before they became enamored with Islam, a

religion that, should they realize their goal and take over America, would totally control both the entertainment media and the news media. Influential Jews were so successful in publicizing the Holocaust that even Christians forgot that Hitler and his evil forces killed 22 million people. For decades we have only heard about the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust. Christians have not made the same effort to remind the world of the slaughter of millions of Christian.

Around 1939, Dr. Eddleman was preaching to a group of Jews in Israel when a tall young Jewish man stood up and challenged, “Why are you preaching to us about Jesus when all the wars against the Jews have been started by Christians?” When asked for an explanation, the young man declared, “Hitler is a Christian. Stalin is a Christian. Mussolini is a Christian.” Many Jews believe that Christianity is anti-Semitic. Some Christians may well be anti-Semitic, and if they are they must repent. No one supported the cause of African Americans more “religiously” than many Jews during the second half of the Twentieth Century. They championed the cause of the underdog and victims of discrimination.

What is the attitude a Christian should hold toward Israel and toward Jewish people? We must continue to pray for Israel and for our Jewish friends. We must bear a witness to Jewish people. Their rejection of Jesus is no reason for followers of Jesus to reject them. When we win a Jew to faith in Christ we trust that he will win many more to Him. I witnessed to one Jewish man for twenty years and he died without the Lord. It was several years before he would actually listen. I would listen to his condemnation of Christians without condemning him. He would say, “I am a Jew, but I am not religious.” I would try to point out that I am not into religion either. Christianity to me is not a religion but a relationship. I would tell my friend that I am indebted to Jews because Jesus came to earth as a Jew. In the end, he died without the Lord, having disobeyed the Lord.

14:3 - THEY STAYED THERE. *“So they stayed there for some time and spoke boldly, in reliance on the Lord, who testified to the message of His grace by granting that signs and wonders be performed through them.”* For “some time”, possibly for several months, they “spoke boldly” in the power and under the guidance of the Lord. Jesus “testified to the message of His grace” by granting signs and wonders through Paul and Barnabas. The “message of His grace” is “another of those phrases gradually working their way into the ‘kerygma’ (preaching of the Word), this time stressing that aspect of divine mercy which pursues undeserving men to bestow on them benefits of the Gospel” [HLE: 194]. The signs and wonders came from the Lord and drew people to Him. He was the scope and focus, not the missionaries. The time of peace could not last long with spiritual revival spreading. Renewed persecution was bound to follow.

14:4 - DIVIDED. *“But the people of the city were divided, some siding with the Jews and some with the apostles.”* The division here is within the Gentiles, some siding with the Jews and some with “the apostles”. Whenever the Gospel is preached it causes divisions between those who accept the message and those who reject it. Repentance demands a changed life and that change often results in the rejection of the believer by friend and even family members who reject the Gospel. Jesus asked, “Do you think that I came here to give peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on, five in one household will be divided: three against two, and two against three” (Luke 12:51-52).

APOSTLE. This is the first time Paul and Barnabas are called apostles. An apostle was one sent out by another. He is sent out under the authority of the one sending him, with authority to act for him. Interestingly, "...in the Four Gospels, the word "apostle" does not play a strong role. The Twelve is the preferred term (Luke 6:13; 8:1; 9:1,12; 18:31; 22:3,14,47; compare 22:30)" [Holman Bible Dictionary - after this, HBD]. It was not Matthew or John, but Luke is that has been called "the Gospel of the apostles, especially when read in light of its continuation in Acts" [HBD]. It is in Acts that the role and ministry of apostles receives more attention. The apostles "were eyewitnesses of the ascension (1:9) and heard the angelic promise of His future return (1:11) [HBD]. The qualifications for the original apostles "were clear: participation in Jesus' earthly ministry beginning with His baptism and a witness of the resurrection (1:21-22)" [HBD]. Others called to be apostles include James and Barnabas.

14:5 - AN ATTEMPT. "*When an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to assault and stone them...*" This suggests a rush by this mixed crowd of Jews and Gentiles toward the missionaries, or their lodging place with the intention of stoning them [WALKER: 307], though some believe this did not progress beyond intent. By "their rulers", Luke probably means the rulers of the synagogue, not the rulers of the city. Robertson holds that this

"probably denotes not an actual attack so much as the open start, the co-operation of both Jews and Gentiles (the disaffected portion), "with their rulers" (sun tois archousin autôn), that is the rulers of the Jewish synagogue (Acts 13:27). The city officials would hardly join in a mob like this, though Hackett and Rackham think that the city magistrates were also involved as in Antioch in Pisidia" (Acts 13:50) [ATR].

Paul had once treated followers of Christ shamefully, dragging them from their homes, arresting them, torturing them to try to force them to confess wrong doing, and finally voting for their death (according to his testimony before Herod Agrippa II in Acts 26:9-11). Now, he is the victim.

14:6 - FLED. "*(T)hey found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian towns called Lystra and Derbe, and to the surrounding countryside.*" It is not surprising that word of a planned organized attack would reach some believers, who in turn would warn the apostles. It may well be that by the time the mob rushed the place where they had stayed, they had already fled to Lystra.

LYCAONIAN TOWNS. Lyconia was the name of a large country in the interior of Asia Minor [HBD]consisting mostly of level plains. It was part of the province of Galatia.

LYSTRA. Paul continued going to the major cities along the major Roman roads, cities of influence. An imperial highway connected that connected Antioch of Pisidia with Iconium ran through Lystra and Derbe. Lystra was located about 18 miles southwest of Iconium. A Roman colony had been established there in 6 B. C. By Augustus to defend against enemies to the south. Derbe was a frontier city of the Galatian province. As a point of interest, one writer observes that "Luke's accuracy as a historian has been vindicated here. Though Iconium was also a

Lycaonian city its citizens were primarily Phrygian. In location and nature Lystra and Derbe were Lycaonian (cf. “Lycaonian language,” v. 11) [BKC].

14:7 - EVANGELIZING. “*And there they kept evangelizing.*” This implies “extensive evangelistic work perhaps with the assistance of disciples from Antioch and Iconium since Paul and Barnabas could not speak Lycaonian” [ATR]. This would have involved both personal witnessing and public preaching.

Evangelizing in Lystra

14:8 - IN LYSTRA. “*In Lystra a man without strength in his feet, lame from birth, and who had never walked, sat...*” There is no mention of a synagogue at Lystra, which indicates that the Jewish population was either very small or non-existent. Paul and Barnabas may have done some open-air preaching, even though they may have had a problem with the language. They could speak Greek and many of the people would have used Greek as a language of commerce. Some would have used Latin as the official language, but they may have used an interpreter.

In Lystra, there was a man who was lame from birth, and this man would have been known to many of the citizens. In other words, this was not someone Paul and Barnabas brought with them in order to fake a miracle. He had never even sat up, let alone walked.

14:9 - HEARD PAUL. “*(A)nd heard Paul speaking. After observing him closely and seeing that he had faith to be healed...*” Paul was probably preaching in the open so that he could observe that this severely handicapped man was listening to him and ascertained that “he had faith to be healed.” Clarke asked,

“How did this faith come to this poor heathen? Why, by hearing the word of God preached: for it is said, the same heard Paul speak. And it appears that he credited the doctrine he heard, and believed that Jesus could, if he would, make him whole. Besides, he must have heard of the miracles which the apostles had wrought, see Acts 14:3; and this would raise his expectation of receiving a cure” [CLARKE].

14:10 - STAND UP. “[Paul] said in a loud voice, “*Stand up straight on your feet!*” And he jumped up and started to walk around.” There was nothing subtle, underhanded, or deceptive going on here. Paul loudly commanded this severely handicapped man to “Stand up straight on your feet!”, and immediately, the man “jumped up and started to walk around.” Only a person who has been unable to walk, or unable to walk with a normal stride, can fully appreciate what is involved in such a miracle as this. Because of the pain I was experiencing in my left foot, my secretary asked if I would like for her to call her family’s foot specialist. I asked her to make the call, totally oblivious to the years of suffering I was to face as a result of medical errors, both from this doctor and another “foot specialist”. I could walk a short distance but the pain was intense. I would in time be able to

distinguish between the pain with which I had to live and the pain that signaled a significant set-back that would require a few weeks to regain any progress I had previously made.

I tried to walk but could only move one foot ahead of the other and place it down flat. I sat in a parking lot and watched people walk. I watched their feet to try to determine what they were doing that I could not do. I well remember watching as a man would step down and then bend his ankle as he made the next step. I could not see what I was doing wrong. Walking is something I had taken for granted. In my youth I had been extremely physical. I once had my brother James count my deep knee bends before going to school for football training. I was afraid that other players may have been working out while I was simply working - out in the cotton fields. I did one thousand deep knee bends. The thought blows my mind today, but I did it.

I lived in Tunica County, MS, and walked a mile and a quarter to the Quitman County line to catch the school bus to ride to Sledge. I worked my way through college and seminary walking cotton fields in the Mississippi Delta for the Quitman County ASCS (a department of the USDA). Only a few weeks before the pain began in my left foot, we were vacationing on Table Rock Lake and I would get up early and put my young son Mark on my shoulders and walk down the side of a steep Ozark hill to the boat dock and then run back up the long, steep hill. This could not be happening to me! When I closed my eyes at night I would see myself running up that hill with Mark on my shoulders. Night after night I prayed that I would be better the next morning.

Instead of things getting better, the pain was extended to my right foot because of “appliance” that were wrong for my feet. Finally, after sitting on a bar stool to preach for many years, I was persuaded to try another doctor at the Fort Worth Bone and Joint Clinic. There, Dr. Henry McDonald asked me to sit down and raise my leg. He immediately told me that muscles shorten from pain or inactivity, and that “it is impossible for you to make a normal step” because the muscles in your legs have shortened and must be stretched before a normal stride would be possible. The therapy produced results, but it was the Lord who eventually gave me the strength to stand to preach and to walk as I had not walked in years.

For a man to stand up and immediately begin walking is amazing, but this man did it. His handicap was not psychosomatic, and even if it had been (as absurd as that is) after years of inactivity he would not have been able to walk without extensive therapy.

One writer has observed a comparison between this miracle and a similar one we have seen earlier in Acts. “Paul’s healing of this infirm man closely parallels Peter’s healing in chapter 3. In each case the cripple was lame from birth (3:2; 14:8); both Peter and **Paul** gazed at the one **to be healed** (3:4; 14:9); and both healed men responded by jumping and walking (3:8; 14:10). This shows Paul was equal to Peter in his apostleship” [BKC].

14:11 - THE CROWDS. *“When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have come down to us in the form of men!’”* The crowds were ecstatic as they observed the man walking around before them. They began shouting in

the Lycaonian language, which Paul and Barnabas did not understand, that “the gods have come down to us in the form of men.” If Paul was preaching in Greek, most of the people would have understood him, but in their excitement they began shouting in their native language. Paul and Barnabas did not understand until preparations were made to offer sacrifices to them.

14:12 - STARTED TO CALL. *“And they started to call Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the main speaker.”* They called Barnabas Zeus (Jupiter), whose shrine had been erected just outside the city, probably because Barnabas was older and more imposing in appearance. Paul was called Mercury, the messenger of the gods and spokesman for Zeus. Mercury (Hermes) was eloquent in speech, and in legend, the inventor of speech.

“Zeus was the chief god and Hermes the messenger equivalent to the Roman gods Jupiter and Mercury, respectively. Why then would Barnabas be referred to as Zeus when Paul was the leader? The answer is that Paul was the spokesman and would therefore be called Hermes and Barnabas, the more retiring of the two, would be seen as Zeus, the dignified, behind-the-scenes god” [BKC].

Dr. William R. Cooper of England spent 25 years researching historical records in his effort to try to satisfy his mind as to whether or not the Genesis record is true or reliable. The results of his research are found in his incredible work, *AFTER THE FLOOD* (New Wine Press, England, 1995). Dr Cooper has a note that is both surprising and applicable in Appendix 3, The Nations of Japheth:

1. Japheth. The father of all Indo-European peoples, it would be surprising indeed if his name had gone unremembered among them. As it is we find that the early Greeks worshiped him as **lapetos**, or **lapetus**, whom the regarded as the son of heaven and earth, the father of many nations. Likewise, in the ancient Sanskrit vedas of India he is remembered as **Pra-Japati**, the son and ostensible Lord of Creation. As time went by his name was further corrupted, being assimilated into the Roman pantheon as **lupater**, and eventually as **Jupiter**... Both the early Irish Celts and the early Britons traced the descent of their royal houses from Japheth, as did also the early Saxons who corrupted his name to Scheaf” [COOPER: 199].

14:13 - PRIESTS OF ZEUS. *“Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the town, brought oxen and garlands to the gates. He, with the crowds, intended to offer sacrifice.”* Both the temple and the statue to Zeus was located just outside the city. The priests of Zeus brought an oxen and garland which they would place on the oxen in preparation for offering it as a sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas. “Customary worship and celebration were about to be performed in honor of Paul and Barnabas” [NCWB].

14:14 - THE APOSTLES. *“The apostles Barnabas and Paul tore their robes when they heard this and rushed into the crowd, shouting...”* Barnabas and Paul were horrified when they realized

that the priests were intending to sacrifice to them. “Their tearing of clothes was a way of showing strong aversion to blasphemy. Usually rips were made four or five inches into the neckline of the garment” [BKC].

14:15 - WE ARE MEN ALSO. *“Men! Why are you doing these things? We are men also, with the same nature as you, and we are proclaiming good news to you, that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them.”* They were shocked at the move to worship them and cried out emphatically and loudly for them to stop. They insisted that they were men the same as they, and that they were proclaiming the “good news” about the true God, whom they should worship.

These people had no Old Testament background, so to identify the true God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would have been pointless. In dealing with pagans, they focused on Creation. We should worship the God who made everything, not the god who could make nothing.

14:16 - HE ALLOWED. *“In past generations He allowed all the nations to go their own way...”* For centuries, since Babel, God had permitted the nations of the world “to go their own way”, meaning that He had not coerced them into believing in Him. At the same time, He clearly revealed His desire to see the message of His salvation declared among the nations of the world. This verse has led to a lot of questions throughout the ages. “Some interpret Acts 14:16 to mean that God will not judge the heathen who lived before the Apostolic Age. However, verse 16 must be taken with verse 17. Up to the time of the church, God gave no direct revelation to the **nations** (i.e., Gentiles) so they were responsible only for their reactions to the general revelation discernible in Creation (cf. comments on 17:27, 30 and Rom. 1:18-20)” [BKC]. Robertson reminds us that “This philosophy of history does not mean that God was ignorant or unconcerned. He was biding his time in patience” [ATR].

14:17 - A WITNESS. *“(A)lthough He did not leave Himself without a witness, since He did good: giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, and satisfying your hearts with food and happiness.”* This verse clarifies the previous verse. God may have “allowed all the nations to go their own way”, but that does not mean that He did nothing to reveal Himself to them, and he does not excuse their rejection of His revelation. For further study on this subject, see the first chapter or Romans.

14:18 - THEY BARELY STOPPED. *“Even though they said these things, they barely stopped the crowds from sacrificing to them.”* There was both a language barrier and a religious barrier involved here. It was all they could do to stop these people from sacrificing to them. One can only imagine the horror of this experience for the missionaries.

14:19 - THEN SOME JEWS. *“Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and when they had won over the crowds and stoned Paul, they dragged him out of the city, thinking he was dead.”* Word of what was happening in Lystra reached the non-believing Jews in Antioch and Iconium they sent representatives to Lystra to stir up the crowds against the missionaries. They stoned Paul, and

dragged him outside the city and left him for dead. This was the Jewish method of execution, and stones remain a popular weapon in Palestine today.

Some suggest that Jews from Antioch and Iconium may have simply been traveling on business, but these Jews may well have been keeping up with Paul and Barnabas. It is not unreasonable to assume that word was spread along the Roman highway from Lystra to the other cities in the area. Jewish leaders were more than a little interested in keeping up with what they were doing.

“Not satisfied with having expelled them from Antioch and Iconium, they still pursued them. Persecutors often exhibit a zeal and perseverance in a bad cause, which it would be well if Christians evinced in a holy cause. Men will often travel farther to do evil than they will to do good; and many men show more zeal in opposing the gospel than professed Christians do in advancing it” [BARNES].

In notes I made in a study of Acts in the mid-seventies, I found the note that the intensity of the Jews’ opposition was seen by the way they kept dogging the steps of the missionaries. They had walked a long distance to get to Lystra, and even though they may have gone there on business, they may have been determined to drive them out of the entire country.

WON OVER THE CROWDS. The people of this area were notoriously fickle. This was a reputation to which Paul seems to allude in the Epistle to the Galatians: **“You foolish Galatians! Who has hypnotized you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was vividly portrayed as crucified? I only want to learn this from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now going to be made complete by the flesh?”** (Gal 3:1-3, bold added).

They were easily persuaded to try something, but they were also easily persuaded to give that up in favor of something new. The Jews easily turned the crowds against Paul and Barnabas and it seems that once they saw their mistake they may have been embarrassed by what they had almost done and wanted to destroy them for what they may have seen as a deception.

14:20 - HE GOT UP. *“After the disciples surrounded him, he got up and went into the town. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.”* Believers came to his aid (encircled him), and as they surrounded him he got up and walked, not away from the town, but into the town! That required both faith and courage. We may infer from this that he had been miraculously healed. **“He would hardly have been ready to travel had his recovery been merely natural [NCWB].**

The next day he departed with Barnabas for Derbe. He was not about to quit. John Mark had quit with far less incentive. He moved on to the next city to begin preaching the good news there. Robertson adds an interesting speculation about some who may have been in that crowd that surrounded Paul that day:

“The would-be murderers left and a group of disciples gathered round to see if Paul

was dead or alive and, if dead, to bury him. In that group Timothy may very well have been along with Eunice and Barnabas. Timothy, a lad of about fifteen, would not soon forget that solemn scene (2Ti 3:11). But Paul suddenly (apparently a miraculous recovery) rose up (anastas) and entered the city to the surprise and joy of the disciples who were willing to brave persecution with Paul” [ATR].

Return to Lystra

14:21 - EVANGELIZED. *“After they had evangelized that town and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch...”* Paul and Barnabas evangelized Derbe, a smaller city where they apparently had no trouble with the Jews. We are not given the details but it is reasonable to assume that they evangelized Derbe as they had Lystra, assuming a small Jewish population. If there had been a significant Jewish population they probably would have begun in the synagogue as they had in Antioch and Iconium.

RETURNED TO LYSTRA. He was only about 160 miles from his hometown of Tarsus, but instead of going there he retraces his steps to the cities where churches had been established on this missionary journey. The Holy Spirit was their navigator, or they might have taken the shortest way back to Antioch in Syria and the church that had sent them out on this mission trip. If they had chosen the quickest way they would have gone by

”the Cilician Gates or by the pass over Mt. Taurus by which Paul and Silas will come to Derbe in the second tour (Acts 15:41-16:1), but difficult to travel in winter. **But it was necessary to revisit the churches in Lystra, Iconium, Antioch in Pisidia and to see that they were able to withstand persecution.** Paul was a Roman citizen though he had not made use of this privilege as yet for his own protection. Against mob violence it would count for little, but he did not hesitate. Paul had been stoned in Lystra, threatened in Iconium, expelled in Antioch. He shows his wisdom in conserving his work” [ATR, bold added by this writer].

After having been stoned at Lystra a short time before this, one might wonder why they would have gone back there. In reality, he had not run from Lystra after he was stoned. Instead, he had spent the night in the city before leaving. He is going back, not to evangelize the city but to help the new church there. Nor will this be the last they will see of Paul. From Lystra, the apostles would go back to Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia to check on those churches.

14: 22 - STRENGTHENED. *“(S)trenghening the hearts of the disciples by encouraging them to continue in the faith, and by telling them, “It is necessary to pass through many troubles on our way into the kingdom of God.”* Here the purpose in the return visit to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia is stated: “strengthening” and “encouraging” the churches. “By warning and by promise, Paul and Barnabas strengthened (cf. 15:32, 41) and encouraged the believers. Previously Barnabas had encouraged the believers in Antioch of Syria (11:23). The warning consisted

of a prediction of **many hardships** and the promise was the anticipation of entering **the kingdom of God**. The latter term certainly describes the eschatological reign of Christ on earth" [BKC].

HEARTS. Others render the Greek "souls". Eddleman notes that the word (*pseuchas*) "is sometimes used to refer to the whole man: body, mind, heart and soul" [HLE: 199]. However, he added correctly that "fragmenting man is hardly a biblical concept" [HLE: 199].

DISCIPLES. A disciple was a learner, or a followers. Paul and Barnabas had taught them when they visited those churches the first time, and now they will go back to teach them the things that are essential for them to know. They returned because the people needed to be taught sound doctrine, warned about coming trials, and encouraged to remain faithful to the Lord.

"After having been initiated in the principles of the heavenly doctrine, they needed line upon line, and precept upon precept, in order that they might be confirmed and established in the truth. **Though it was a great and important thing to have their heads, their understanding, properly informed, yet, if the heart was not disciplined, information in the understanding would be of little avail; therefore they confirmed the SOULS of the disciples.** As there must be some particular standard of truth, to which they might continually resort, that their faith might stand in the power of God, it was necessary that they should have such a system of doctrine as they knew came from God. **These doctrines were those which contained all the essential principles of Christianity, and this was called THE FAITH;** and, as they must have sound principles, in order that they might have righteous practices, so it was necessary that they should continue in that faith, that it might produce that obedience, without which even faith itself, however excellent, must be useless and dead" [CLARKE, bold added].

All believers should be taught to expect to face trouble on their journey with the Lord. The missionaries wanted to encourage the members of these churches to remain faithful even during persecution.

14:23 - APPOINTED ELDERS. "*When they had appointed elders in every church and prayed with fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*" Their purpose is stated clearly: (1) they appointed elders; (2) they prayed and fasted with the saints; (3) They committed them to the Lord. Church polity, government, and organization vary from church to church and from denomination to denomination, but here we find the basic essentials for a church: sound doctrines, organization, approved leaders, and a commitment to the Lord. Paul wrote to Titus, "The reason I left you in Crete was to set right what was left undone and, as I directed you, to appoint elders in every town" (Titus 1:5). It seems that we have a parallel situation here and that this is likely what Paul and Barnabas were doing in these churches.

“Elders” are mentioned in Acts 11:30. Paul would later give the requirements expected “in these ‘elders’ or ‘bishops’ (Php 1:1) as in 1Ti 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9. It is fairly certain that these elders were chosen to correspond in a general way with the elders in the Jewish synagogue after which the local church was largely copied as to organization and worship. Paul, like Jesus, constantly worshipped and spoke in the synagogues. Already it is plain, as at Antioch in Syria (Acts 11:26), that the Christians can no longer count on the use of the Jewish synagogue. They must have an organization of their own” [ATR].

The use of the plural here implies a body of elders in each church. “These elders were not novices in the faith (1 Tim. 3:6); they were probably Jews who came out of the synagogues where they had been steeped in the Scriptures. Thus elders from the synagogues became elders in the churches” [BKC]. Elder (*presbuteros*) was the Jewish name and bishop (*episkopos*) the Greek name for the same office. The election and ordination of elders was a serious matter, and they were formally set apart in a church service. It was done in a public meeting following prayer and fasting. Paul and Barnabas committed these men to the Lord and then continued on their journey that would lead them back to Antioch of Syria.

14:24 - PASSED THROUGH. “*Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia.*” They are now retracing their steps on their return trip.

14:25 - SPOKE THE MESSAGE. “*After they spoke the message in Perga, they went down to Attalia.*” They had gone through Perga on the way from their landing after leaving Cyprus and now they stop to preach there before going on to Attalia, which was “a seaport on the gulf of Pamphylia was an important trade center for both Egypt and Syria” [NCWB].

14:26 - BACK TO ANTIOCH. “*From there they sailed back to Antioch where they had been entrusted to the grace of God for the work they had completed.*” They had left Antioch as a team made up of Barnabas; the seasoned, compassionate leader, Saul his brilliant, committed, driven, younger partner; and his cousin John Mark, the young man with a lot of potential. They returned the seasoned missionary team of Paul and Barnabas. John Mark had disappointed them, but he still had potential, if only someone would give him another opportunity! They had completed the first step in the implementation of the final part of the Great Commission. They had gone deep into Gentile country. They had broken new ground and they were excited about the harvest. Now, they will report on “the work they had completed.”

14:27 - GATHERED THE CHURCH. “*After they arrived and gathered the church together, they reported everything God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.*” Two things should be noted here: (1) they had returned to Antioch, the church where they had served, where they had been called and where the saints had laid their hands on them, and supported them with their prayers. They looked to this church for prayer support, and even though we are not told that they had supported them financially, there may have been some initial assistance. Paul would later write that only the church at Philippi had supported him financially. At Corinth,

for example, Paul worked as a tentmaker to support their work. Regardless, of that, Antioch was their sponsoring church, their “home church”.

Missionaries today need support. Some individual missionaries go to various churches or individuals and ask for support, but most missionaries are “sent out” by the missionary board of their denomination. Southern Baptists, for example, have both the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and International Mission Board (IMB) and each entity supports around 6,000 full time missionaries, along with many short-term missionaries. The financial support comes from 40,000 - 45,000 churches who prayerfully determine a percentage of their undesignated receipts which they will give through the Cooperative Program for the support of missions, ministries, and the administration of those programs.

(2) They gave a report. The missionaries are dependent upon their supporting church or denomination, they are accountable to them, and whether they are sent out by their denomination, a local church, or a group of local churches, they should report to them on a regular basis. It is only right to report to the church or denominational entity that appoints them and supports them. It is also essential if they are to keep the support. Missionaries report to their mission board and that board sends reports to local churches and denominational news agencies on a regular basis. This encourages Christians to pray for them and it motivates them to support their work financially.

HE HAD OPENED THE DOOR. This is a report on what God had done, not what Paul and Barnabas had done. God had opened “the door of faith to the Gentiles.” Paul would be thrust into the forefront of the mission movement by the Holy Spirit and by circumstances that demanded his message or his stand on issues. It is hard to imagine anything more paradoxical than a self-serving “minister”, but sadly, some have proved to be just that. We all like to receive praise, expect a certain amount of credit for what we do, and “give the Lord the credit”, but we must continually guard against the promotion of self in the ministry. John the Baptist set the example when he said, “He must increase, I must decrease.” How do we maintain that focus? God has given us His Word, and He permits us come into His presence, in the name of His Son, in the power of His Spirit.

14:28 - CONSIDERABLE TIME. *“And they spent a considerable time with the disciples.”* This must have been a glorious time, as these saints heard the report on all God had done through them. They probably spent several months there sharing the good news about what the Lord had done, not only in the church at Antioch of Syria, but also in other churches throughout the area.

There would be two more great missionary journeys recorded in the Book of Acts and Luke, who wrote this Book of History in the New Testament, would accompany Paul, Silas, and Timothy during a significant amount of the time. There would be many other missionary trips, including those by Peter, John, and the other apostles.

Sadly, as long as Christians were being persecuted the number of believers grew phenomenally and churches sprang up all over that part of the world, but once Christianity was proclaimed the official religion of the empire believers became complacent and the church ceased to be the light to the

world as the Lord had commanded. It would be centuries before a modern mission movement would begin and missionaries would, once again, go out to proclaim the Gospel as Paul and Barnabas had during that first great mission trip. Names like William Carey, Ann and Adoniram Judson, Luther Rice, Annie Armstrong, and Lottie Moon would, in time, become familiar to children growing up in evangelical churches. In America, while Jonathan Edwards preached brilliant and powerful sermons, he was humbled by the a young man who lay dying in a bed in his home. David Brainerd, who was engaged to the daughter of Edwards, poured out his life in reaching out to the Native Americans of his area. The hand of the Lord was on his ministry just as surely as it had been on those First Century missionaries. The Lord's hand has never been shortened.

Baptist Press, August 22, 2007, released a story about Christian missionaries from South Korea who were captured by the Taliban in Afghanistan. The article begins:

“A large sign outside the multi-story Shinsegae department store in downtown Seoul reads, "Pray for the safe return of the hostages in Afghanistan." It is written in Korean, Arabic and English.“But as Korean Christians pray, church and mission agency leaders are struggling with how best to adapt to environments and cultures where a Christian presence is unwelcome and often dangerous. They are discussing how best to complete the task of taking the Gospel to ‘the ends of the earth,’ while protecting those under their watch who have been called to difficult places.”

The article reminds readers that:

“A group of 23 Korean aid workers, mostly women, from Saemmul Presbyterian Church was kidnapped by the Taliban on July 19 while riding aboard a bus in the Ghazni province of Afghanistan. Two of the male hostages, 42-year-old church staff member Hyung Kyu Bae and 29-year-old Sung Min Shim, were executed by the Taliban. Two of the women volunteers, Ji Na Kim, 32, and Kyung Ja Kim, 37, were released and returned to Seoul on Aug. 17.

While Christians in America often sit in front of the new HDTV, “R” rated programs that glorify everything God condemns and condemning everything God desires of His people, the Christians in South Korea have demonstrated an obedience to our Lord's Great Commission. While American Christians build bigger houses and buy bigger SUVs, committed Christians in South Korea are taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

“Since the early 1900s, the Korean church has sent more than 14,000 Christian workers to countries around the world. In recent years, South Korea has become second only to the United States as a mission-sending country. The Korean Foreign Mission Board, for example, has 580 workers in 48 countries.

““Korean mission agencies have a goal to send 100,000 workers to countries around the world by 2030,’ Lee said. ‘In the past we have bragged about the willingness of our people to go to dangerous places with little thought to what that danger might actually involve. Now, we know that we must also concern ourselves with the safety

of our personnel and show greater maturity as we approach our task."
"Still, Lee is committed to achieving the vision God has given to Korean Christians to share God's love around the world. There are 7 million Koreans scattered across 184 countries. My prayer is that the Christians among them will take an active role in reaching the world where they live,' he said" [BP - 8-22-07].

CHAPTER 15

Trouble in Paradise?

NOTE: In Chapter 15 we will be looking at the Jerusalem Conference, the first of its kind in the history of Christianity. There had been other reports, including Peter's report on his experience in taking the Good News to Cornelius and those at his home. This was a church conference in which key leaders, including some of the apostles, were in attendance. Luke writes of the conference in Acts and Paul will write about it in Galatians. In this study of Acts 15, reference will be made to Galatians 2 and the two passages should be studied together. I will be quoting from my earlier study in Galatians in THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK, a verse by verse study of that book written a number of years ago. It is one of many such studies in this series found of the PastorLife.Com web site, the official site of the Georgia Baptist Convention (Editor, Dr. Mike Minnix, lists them under Commentaries).

15:1 - SOME MEN...FROM JUDEA. *"Some men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers: 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom prescribed by Moses, you cannot be saved!'"* These men were evidently members of the circumcision party who had lost the debate with Peter after he had gone to the home of Cornelius. They have gathered their forces now for another battle. They had heard the news about the conversion of Gentiles and they sent members of their party to Antioch of Syria to try to convince them that they must be circumcised before they can be saved. In this study we will call these men, and others of their persuasion "Judaizers".

There is no doubt that John Mark had told the saints in Jerusalem about the success of the missionary journey through Cyprus, and they must have heard other reports about the conversion of Gentiles. They were upset when they heard that Simon Peter had gone into the home of Cornelius, and troubled by reports that Gentiles had been saved and received the Holy Spirit exactly as He had come upon Jewish believers. (See chapter 11). Some of those men had obviously not been convinced by Peter and this is an issue they will not let rest. They had received reports from Antioch and had worked themselves up to the point that they would travel to Antioch in Syria to teach the new Gentile converts that they must be circumcised, or convert to Judaism, before they could be saved. They were on a mission! Salvation is of the Jews, they believed, and one must first become a proselyte

and then he could be saved. Robertson expands this somewhat:

“...(E)choes of the jubilation in Antioch in Syria would be certain to reach Jerusalem. **The Judaizers in Jerusalem**, who insisted that all the Gentile Christians must become Jews also, **had acquiesced in the case of Cornelius and his group** (Acts 11:1-18) after plain proof by Peter that it was the Lord's doing. **But they had not agreed to a formal campaign to turn the exception into the rule and to make Christianity mainly Gentile with a few Jews instead of mainly Jewish with a few Gentiles.** Since Paul and Barnabas did not come up to Jerusalem, the leaders among the Judaizers decided **to go down to Antioch and attack Paul and Barnabas** there. They had volunteered to go without church action in Jerusalem for **their activity is disclaimed by the conference** (Acts 15:24). In Gal 2:4 Paul with some heat describes these Judaizers as ‘false brethren, secretly introduced who sneaked in to spy out our liberty’ [ATR, bold added by this writer].

BEGAN TO TEACH. This is imperfect: they kept on teaching their doctrine. They were sincere, dogmatic, and tenacious. There is no fanatic like a religious fanatic. There may be a temptation to call these men racist, but that is not the issue. Jews would accept an Ethiopian as a proselyte, but not a eunuch. They welcomed people of all races who accepted circumcision and the Law of Moses. They would have no fellowship with other descendants of Shem who rejected circumcision as a sign that they obeyed the Mosaic Law.

YOU CANNOT BE SAVED. The world already had its share of religious fanatics, and now we are introduced to Christian fanatics. There is no reason to deny that they were genuinely saved, but there is every reason to conclude that they were not followers of the truth Christ taught. All they could see was that Yahweh had sealed the Abrahamic Covenant with the commandment to circumcise all the men and to circumcise all the male babies when they were eight days old (Gen. 17:11ff). All those who refused circumcision would be cut off by God. These Judaizers should have seen, along with other believers, that God had opened the door to Gentiles, but they were blinded by their legalistic approach to the Law and by their former attitude toward all Gentiles. They could accept Gentiles of any race, just as long as they became proselytes to Judaism, as symbolized by circumcision.

The Holy Spirit had set aside Paul and Barnabas to take the Gospel to Gentiles and He had worked powerfully through them. There are people today who insist that theirs is the only way to salvation. Mitt Romney, a leading candidate for the office of president of the United States in 2008, openly claims that Mormonism is simply another Christian denomination, while his church teaches that theirs is the only church. Pope Benedict announced, in 2007, that the Roman Catholic Church is the only true church, the only church that can offer salvation. He based on his claim that Peter was the first pope, a claim not supported by history, and problematic based on the fact of Peter's wife, who traveled with him on mission trips (and his mother-in-law, whom Jesus healed in Capernaum). The Church of Christ claims to be the only true church.

I attended a USDA training school in Jackson, MS, when I was a very young man and was surprised when our teacher began talking about getting out of the meeting so he could go to a prayer meeting. The previous time when I had been around him he talked about getting out of the meeting so he could go get a beer. I asked him what had happened and he volunteered to come to my hotel room and tell me about it. He had become a part of a charismatic group and he was totally committed to their teachings. After some time, I asked, “Are you saying you have to speak in tongues to be saved?” He said, “No, I am not saying you have to speak in tongues to be saved, but I have never seen anyone who was saved who didn’t speak in tongues.” I said, “Well, you are looking at your first one right now.” Neither convinced the other. I believe he was saved, and I think he acknowledged the possibility that I was.

15:2 - ENGAGED THEM. *“But after Paul and Barnabas had engaged them in serious argument and debate, they arranged for Paul and Barnabas and some others of them to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this controversy.”* This was not mild disagreement, nor was it resolved through friendly persuasion. Paul and Barnabas “engaged them in serious argument and debate.” My wife Becky and I were attending the retirement banquet for Dr. Jimmy Draper, the President and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources at the Renaissance Hotel in Nashville when one of the speakers told us that Dr. Draper had flown to Houston to be with his family when his father was having surgery. Dr. Draper and the young man’s father had ridden together when they were in seminary and remained close friends. The young man told us that Dr. Draper asked him at some point how many his church ran in Sunday School. By his own words, he very strongly challenged him, “Why do you always ask how many we run in Sunday School? Why don’t you ever ask how we engage the culture?” He spoke with such intensity that I have to wonder if he and Luke would use the same definition of “engage”. Later, Ed Ethridge of Dallas, said in our Broadman and Holman Committee, “We don’t need to engage the culture, we need to confront the culture!” Paul and Barnabas were not engaging in “dialog” with these Judaizers, they were confronting them. Paul, in the Second Chapter of Galatians makes it clear that he was not about to compromise on this issue. This was no sociological debate, or philosophical dialog.

Luke gives an overview of the debate with the Judaizers, but Paul reveals just how serious this controversy was in his letter to the Galatians:

“But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. For he used to eat with the Gentiles before certain men came from James. However, when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, because he feared those from the circumcision party. Then the rest of the Jews joined his hypocrisy, so that **even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy** (Gal 2:11-14, bold added by this writer).

In Jerusalem, Paul had stood face to face with Peter; in Antioch, he faces him with his hypocrisy. Paul, a Hellenistic Jew confronts Peter, a Palestinian Jew, and other Jewish believers, including Barnabas, with their hypocrisy. This was a pivotal point in the implementation of the Great Commission and its application to the whole world.

NOTE: One point must be stressed here. There are those who have held that the controversy over the Hellenistic widows and orphans in Jerusalem (Acts 6) was a threat to the very existence of the church. It was not! Luke's account shows how the early church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, dealt with a controversy, and came through it stronger and more focused than ever. The same thing applies here. There was a controversy that would not be so easily settled, but rather than being a threat to the existence or future of the church, it demonstrates how Christians should deal with controversy.

TO THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS. When no consensus could be reached, “they arranged for Paul and Barnabas and some others of them to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this controversy.” Luke did not identify the others, but Paul reveals the identity of one of the fellow travelers: “Then after 14 years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, **taking Titus along** also. I went up because of a revelation and presented to them the gospel I preach among the Gentiles—but privately to those recognized [as leaders] —so that I might not be running, or have run, in vain” (Gal 2:1-2, bold added).

There is every reason to conclude that this was an autonomous local church. They were not summoned to appear before the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, and they were not sent by a person or board with authority over them. They reached an understanding that this issue must be settled before the new missionary thrust into the Gentile world could go forward.

15:3 - SENT OUT. *“When they had been sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, explaining in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and they created great joy among all the brothers.”* They had not been sent to Jerusalem by authority of church leaders, or with authority to act for the church. They had been sent out with the prayers of the saints for a resolution of the controversy. The only One with authority over Paul and Barnabas was the Holy Spirit.

PASSED THROUGH...EXPLAINING. As they proceeded toward Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas visited the churches in Phoenicia and Samaria to share to report the good news about what God was doing among Gentiles. Also, they were not about to miss an opportunity to proclaim the Good News of salvation through Jesus wherever they went. In Phoenicia (to Gentiles) and in Samaria (to those outcasts who nonetheless, revered the Law of Moses), they explained ‘in detail the conversion of the Gentiles.’ They had Titus with them to share his personal testimony, and to be their “test case” in Jerusalem, a fact not mentioned here, but stressed by Paul in Galatians. The news was an occasion of great joy and celebration.

15:4 - AT JERUSALEM. *“When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, the apostles, and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.”* This implies a formal reception for the representatives of the church in Antioch. They were received by the whole church, not just the council which would meet to deal with the issues that had brought these men to Jerusalem.

THEY REPORTED. Apparently, Paul and Barnabas were given an opportunity to give their report about what had happened among the Gentiles on their missionary journey. Paul mentions this in Galatians 2. They gave an orderly report of their activities. There is a theological side to their faith, and there is also the practical application of it, and Paul and Barnabas reported on what they had seen and experienced. Reports of a mighty movement of the Holy Spirit on a mission field today is encouraging to the church or denomination that sent out the missionaries. They will, however be alert to any report that those missionaries teach sound doctrine (as in the case of a so-called private prayer language debate). Today, we have the New Testament as a guide, but at that time those believers did not have the advantage of referring to it.

15:5 - OF THE PHARISEES. *“But some of the believers from the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses!’”* These believers stood up, apart from the congregation, as soon as they heard the report. This was another of those critical moments in the history of the early church. These men were believers who were still members of the “party of the Pharisees” and they still held very narrow views with regards to Gentiles. Once again, it must be stressed that Christianity was not about to be sidetracked at this time. A crisis arises and the church deals with it.

By the words, “It is necessary”, they reveal that they are dogmatic. They stood up and made their charges at the peak of the jubilation and praise. It is clear from verse 6 that this general meeting was adjourned and the private conference to which Paul alludes in Galatians 2:1-10 follows.

The Jerusalem Conference

Acts 15 & Galatians 2

5:6 - APOSTLES...ELDERS. *“Then the apostles and the elders assembled to consider this matter.”* After the general assembly had been dismissed, a small group of apostles and elders went into “executive session” to deal with the controversy. They did not know anything about Roberts Rules of Order, but they had the wisdom to enter what we today would call an executive session to deal with the issue. During my very first meeting as a member of the Broadman and Holman Committee as a member of the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources, Dr. Ed. Blum met with us to discuss translation work on the proposed Holman Christian Standard Bible. Someone questioned the need for a new translation of the Bible and after it became obvious that we were not going to settle all the issues in a meeting with President Ken Stephens, the vice-presidents of B & H Publishing Group, and our guest present, someone made a motion that we go into executive session. After doing so, those who were familiar with the issues dealt directly the key issues and then we voted to go forward with the new translation. The chairman of one of the committees that exercised oversight over one of the divisions that make up LifeWay makes motions after that committee had discussed the issue and framed the motions for the plenary session. In the plenary session, every member might not hear a motion or a point in the debate. Even though I have never seen greater harmony on a board that dealt with so many issues effecting so many people (16.2 million Southern

Baptists), with a budget that approached one-half billion dollars, the number of people in a plenary session demanded that the key committees do their work and then bring reports and motions. I was chairman of the Broadman and Holman Committee, after serving on the committee for a number of years, and I discovered the importance of dealing with critical issues in a smaller group.

NOTE: The following is an excerpt from this writer's study from Galatians in THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK (found on the PastorLife.Com web site, edited by Dr. Mike Minnix of the Georgia Baptist Convention. Comments on Galatians 2 are found in APPENDIX I at the end of this volume.)

Because of the uproar of the Judaizers, Paul had to be very careful to assure a victory for the Gospel. He met with a small group of leaders, not because he was inferior to them, but because with an issue like this a group like the Judaizers could throw more heat on the subject than light. Such a militant group can be an intimidating influence. Two things stand out: Paul is being led by the Holy Spirit, and he is now becoming a key Christian leader of the early church. Not too long before this he was Barnabas' associate - it was then Barnabas and Saul, now it is Paul and Barnabas.

"Who were 'them which were of reputation?'" He names three of them (Cephas, James, and John) but does not say if there were other apostles present. James is the half-brother of the Lord (the other James, the brother of John was dead (Acts 12:1f). There may also have been others present, possibly a select group of leaders. By gaining the support of this group the open conference could be approached with a greater degree of confidence. This group could shape the decision of the public conference.

Paul had an opportunity to meet with leaders of the church face to face and he won them over. During the next public conference (15:7-29) the general conference ratified the views of Paul, Barnabas, Peter, John, and James (the half-brother of the Lord). This was a triumph of the first magnitude and it saved Christianity from the bondage of Jewish ceremonial sacramentalism. Christianity would never be simply a sect of Judaism.

This may have been the only time Paul and John ever met, but it is interesting to recall the work John did in the very area Paul and Barnabas had visited, and in the area where Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke, Titus, and others would work in the future. Actually, John made his headquarters in Ephesus, a church founded by Paul after this conference, but his influence was known throughout the region. Where Paul broke the ground, John sowed the seed, and God gave the harvest.

NOTE: we will want to remember that Paul tells us in Galatians that he had Titus with him as a test case, though Luke does not mention that here. The following is another excerpt from this writer's study of Galatians in THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK Series (see also APPENDIX I):

"Paul had Titus there on the scene to test his victory. They did not compel Titus to

be circumcised. There is an obvious connection between this case and that of Timothy whom Paul circumcised (Acts 16:3). In Timothy's case circumcision seemed expedient because he was a half Jew and would be working with Jews who would not accept him otherwise. Circumcision had nothing to do with his salvation, it simply removed a stumbling block with the Jews. Paul, however, had no intention of having Titus circumcised. He is very clear about that. To yield in this instance would be an admission that circumcision, hence all the Jewish ceremonial law, was essential to salvation" [see Appendix].

Paul had taken Titus there as a test case. That took courage on his part, but even more on the part of Titus. Paul not only wanted an opinion, he wanted the opinion put to a test. To these Judaizers, circumcision was indispensable; to Paul, grace is sufficient.

15:7 - MUCH DEBATE. *"After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them: "Brothers, you are aware that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the gospel message and believe."* Apparently, the Judaizers were given an opportunity to state their position and defend it. There are times today when people are given an opportunity to defend a defenseless position, but at some point a fruitless debate must be ended, but believers must be careful not to do more harm than good when that time comes. I was a very young man when a number of fellow pastors expressed their determination to present a motion at an upcoming denominational meeting. Some of them talked with me a number of times and I listened to them but had the impression that they were making a big issue of a small matter. As the time for the meeting approached, a friend told me they had talked with the man who would moderate the meeting and he told them he would not recognize them if they stood to make a motion. I had listened to them for some time and I was uncomfortable with whatever the issue was. When I was told that the moderator had told them the chair would not recognize them, I said, "I don't agree with your position but I will do everything within my power to see that you have an opportunity to make your motion and defend it." I do not recall the issue or the outcome of it, but I am convinced that unity was preserved because they were given an opportunity to express their opinion.

PETER STOOD UP. This is our last look at Simon Peter in Acts, but Paul will tell us more about him (see Galatians 2:11). In Galatians 2:14, he mentions him as Cephas (meaning rock). In Corinth, the church was divided into factions with groups swearing allegiance to either Cephas, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ (1 Cor. 1:12). Paul also wrote to the deeply divided church in Corinth asking, **"Don't we have the right to be accompanied by a Christian wife, like the other apostles, the Lord's brothers, and Cephas?"** (1 Cor 9:5, bold added). From this we know that Peter continued his ministry to Gentiles, including going on missionary journeys. Paul also tells us that Jesus' brothers and Simon Peter traveled with their wives. Peter would be inspired to write two powerful NT epistles. In 2 Peter 3:15, he mentions the wisdom with which Paul wrote.

It is interesting to note that even though Peter makes a powerful speech, he is not the central figure at the Jerusalem Conference. James, the half-brother of our Lord is the presiding officer. Peter stood up and greeted them as "Brothers", a term of respect for fellow Jews, and now a term of respect for fellow believers in Jesus Christ. He then reminds them of that earlier meeting when he shared with

them his experience in taking the Gospel to the home of Cornelius, with the results that they had received salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and were filled with the Holy Spirit in the same measure as the Jewish believers. He states, “You are aware that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the gospel message and believe.” Seemingly, the Judaizers could live with a small exception to their conviction that Gentiles had to be circumcised before they could be saved, especially if they could be confined to a small enclave in Caesarea. Now, things had gotten out of hand. Peter is here reminding them that the Lord had used him to take the Gospel to those Gentiles.

“In the early days” denotes the early days when the Gospel message was being proclaimed only in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. It may have been 12 years, and possibly 15 years since the Lord had sent him to the home of Cornelius [NCWB], which would have made that experience close to the time when Paul had been put on the ship to go back to Tarsus after meeting the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. In my study of Galatians (Appendix I) I made the following note with reference to he date:

The Jerusalem Conference (Apostolic council) was probably held in A. D. 51, though many writers hold to different dates. Paul's first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion was about A. D. 38, meaning his conversion on the Damascus Road would have been in AD 35-36 [GALATIANS: Free By the Grace of God!].

When I was in college and seminary, my professors all subscribed to the A. D. 51 date for the Jerusalem Conference, but in recent years I have discovered that many others date it around A. D. 49 [BKC]. The date, however, is not our most important consideration.

15:8 - AND GOD, WHO KNOWS. “*And God, who knows the heart, testified to them by giving the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us.*” Peter states a fact upon which they all could agree: God “knows the heart.” That truth demands the obvious conclusion that only God really knows the heart, a fact that non-believing counselors cannot fully grasp, and may deny. In the letters to the seven churches in Revelation, Jesus claimed perfect and complete knowledge of every church. We may know whether or not another person has submitted outwardly to a ritual, ceremony, or code of ethics, but God knows the heart. He does give use a certain spirit of discernment that helps us to know the heart of a fellow believer.

GIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT. Gentiles in the home of Cornelius had heard the message of salvation, believed in Jesus Christ, were saved, and given the Holy Spirit, with no distinction made between them and the Jews in Jerusalem. The gift of the Holy Spirit was irrefutable proof that Gentiles are saved in the same way as Jews. These same Judaizers had accepted this fact, however reluctantly, and the facts had not changed.

NOTE: Those Gentiles in the home of Cornelius were given the Holy Spirit when they believed - before they were baptized, and not as a “second blessing” at some later time.

15:9 - HE MADE NO DISTINCTION. “*He made no distinction between us and them,*

cleansing their hearts by faith.” God, the only One qualified to make a distinction, made no distinction between Jew and Gentile in granting salvation to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

CLEANSING THEIR HEARTS. God cleansed the hearts of those Gentiles by faith, not ritual. From the time of the Abrahamic Covenant, circumcision had been the symbol of that covenant. The symbol of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ is baptism, and that symbol is meaningless unless one has been born again by grace, through faith. Robertson restates Peter: “In the matter of faith and conversion God treated us Jews as heathen and the heathen as Jews” [ATR].

15:10 - WHY...ARE YOU TESTING GOD. “*Why, then, are you now testing God by putting on the disciples' necks a yoke that neither our forefathers nor we have been able to bear?*” Peter states the issue powerfully and pointedly. These same people had accepted the fact 12 (or 15) years earlier, so why are they “testing God” now. Barnes states the question and then expounds on it:

“Why, since he has shown his determination to accept them without such rites, do you provoke him by attempting to impose on his own people rites without his authority, and against his manifest will? The argument is, that God had already accepted them. To attempt to impose these rites would be to provoke him to anger; to introduce observances which he had shown it was his purpose should now be abolished” [BARNES].

The position of the Judaizers was a challenge to God when He had opened the door to Gentiles and they were trying to slam that door in their face.

A YOKE. Peter’s image was especially powerful with this audience. The yoke of the law as prescribed by later rabbis was very heavy, whereas Jesus said, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:29f). We can thank Him that we may carry around a heart filled with joy rather than a mind burdened by ritual and ceremony. Peter is declaring that neither their Jewish forefathers, nor those present could bear the burden of the yoke these Judaizers were trying to place on the Gentiles.

“Requiring Gentiles to be circumcised to obey the Mosaic Law would have had two results: (a) the Jews would **test** (*peirazete*) **God** (cf. Deut. 6:16) and (b) they would put **on the necks of the disciples** an unbearable **yoke** (cf. Matt. 23:4). To “test” God is to see how far one can go with God (cf. Acts 5:9). Putting a yoke on the disciples’ necks was an appropriate way to state the second result, for “taking the yoke” was used to describe Gentile proselytes coming into Judaism. It spoke of an obligation.

In discussing the question Peter referred not only to Gentiles but also to all believers coming under the Law. The term “disciples” was used of both Jews and Gentiles” [BKC].

NOTE 1: The study of God’s Word must be more than an academic exercise. The same Holy Spirit who supernaturally inspired the Scripture, and supernaturally preserved it, supernaturally illuminates

the hearts of believers who study the Word of God today so that they may both understand it and make an application of it in everyday life.

NOTE 2: Throughout this study I have avoided forcing ethnic, gender, and cultural applications as some have done and continue to do. Let us state it clearly: These Judaizers would have accepted a black person, an oriental person, a Native American, or a person who was a mixture of all the races, just as long as they submitted to circumcision. Today, 24 hour news networks can have a microphone and camera in anyone's face before they know what is happening. They even manufacture racial slurs, as though there were not enough out there already. We see politicians playing to various groups, dictated too often by the latest polls. When it comes to the church, we must be sure that we make distinctions as the Lord makes distinctions. We must not expect too much of others based on their race, gender, or national origin - nor are we to expect too little of them! We must not excuse immorality, for example, because "they" have "always lived like that." The church must see people as God sees them. To do otherwise is to place a heavy yoke on them. Thomas Sowell, one of the most brilliant writers in the world, loses me with his knowledge of economics, and he amazes me with his understanding of racial and cultural issues. He is a black man who says it is a burden when someone assumes that he may not be a legitimate scholar because he is identified with a group of people who score below the national average on some tests. He is also brilliant enough to know when someone "gives him a pass" because he is an African American. I grew up around black people, worked with them, and visited with the. At one time, I visited the Hinds County jail in Jackson, MS on a weekly basis, and on those visits I preached to blacks and to whites. I witnessed one on one with black men and white men. During that time, I was going to the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman every Sunday morning before going to preach at the church I served. I helped the chaplain baptize a lot of people at Parchman. I baptized over 40 people, and many of them were African-Americans. Some of my most treasured moments were spent in worship with black people at the prison. Then, I would go to college of seminary and be called a racist by those who never did any more than pay lip service, if I suggested that the Lord expects the same commitment from blacks he expects from whites. If I were black, that attitude would trouble me. We must not place superficial yokes on the necks of any other person based on physical traits.

15:11 - THROUGH THE GRACE OF GOD. " *On the contrary, we believe we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way they are.*" The Gospel Peter and Paul preached was indeed "on the contrary" to the false gospel the Judaizers were preaching with such zeal. They, the Judaizers, believed that grace plus something else was essential for salvation - grace plus circumcision. If those Judaizers seemed very narrow, consider those today who believe in salvation by grace plus baptism, grace plus membership in one particular denomination, or grace plus good works. Those Judaizers did not have the New Testament to guide them as we do today. In the study in Galatians in THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK, this writer has included a brief study of the Three Theories of Justification (see Appendix I), which are summarized below:

THREE THEORIES OF JUSTIFICATION

There really are but three theories of Justification. Everyone fits into one of these categories.

1. JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS

Paul wrote to the Galatians, “Knowing that a man is **not justified by the works of the law** but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for ***by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified***” (Gal. 2:16 NKJV). He states it clearly in his letter to the Ephesians: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, **not of works, lest anyone should boast.** (Eph 2:8-9 NKJV)

2. JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE PLUS WORKS

Man is not saved by any combination of grace plus works. Nor, can he be saved by grace and then maintain his salvation by works. Paul was shocked that the Galatians thought they could be saved by grace plus circumcision. He was equally shocked by the implication that one could be saved by grace and then come back and add works later. How could they not see the folly of such a preposterous teaching? He wrote, “Are you so foolish? ***Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?*** (Gal 3:3 NKJV)

Paul was inspired to reveal to us through the Epistle to the Romans that grace and works are mutually exclusive approaches to God and His salvation. Either, in any measure, cancels out the other. No one is saved by “grace through” (plus) anything else, be it baptism, good works, or set of rules, regulations, and revelations. Jesus Christ is totally, completely adequate, as John MacArthur stresses in two of his books - *Charismatic Chaos* and *Our Sufficiency in Christ*. See Romans 11:6 (NKJV): “And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.”

3. JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE

In the New Testament, Paul and others make the case very clearly:

1) Galatians 2:16 - “Knowing that a man is **not justified by the works** of the law but **by faith in Jesus Christ**, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified” (bold added).

2) Galatians 2:21- “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.

3) Ephesians 2:8 - “**For by grace you have been saved through faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (bold added).

4) Romans 5:1 - Therefore, **having been justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

5) Romans 8:1-4 - “There is therefore now *no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

There are three theories of justification and every denomination subscribes to one of these theories. There are people who believe one is saved by good works. Many believe in justification by grace plus works (see Appendix I for more).

To hold that after a person is saved he must either do certain things to be saved, or abstain from certain things in order to keep his salvation is to transfer the saving power of God from Justification to Sanctification. The Christian works (serves, ministers) because he has been saved by grace through faith - unto good works. He works because he is saved, not in order to maintain his salvation. A distinction must be made between the root of salvation (Justification) and the fruit of salvation (Sanctification). To subscribe to this view is like nailing a sign to the Cross that says, NECESSARY BUT INADEQUATE (Essential, but Insufficient).

Fortunately, there are those who hold the third view - salvation by grace and grace alone. As seen above, this is the Scriptural position. Many other passages teach that salvation is by grace and grace alone (pure grace). This theory is Scriptural, but there is more. If you accept the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, you can accept the doctrine of security of believers. If you accept what the Bible has to say about security of believers you will have greater assurance of salvation and if you have assurance of salvation, you will find greater joy in your salvation.

Justification by grace, through faith, is a critical doctrine and it is imperative that Christians seek to understand what the Bible has to say on the subject. When Martin Luther discovered the truth about Justification through faith, he launched the

Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Luther wrote, “When the article of justification has fallen, everything has fallen.” He added, “This is the chief article from which all other doctrines have flowed.” He insisted that “It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour” [Boice, James Montgomery, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*: 416]. John Calvin said that Justification by faith is “the main hinge on which religion turns” [Boice: 416].

15:12 - FELL SILENT. “*Then the whole assembly fell silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul describing all the signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.*” Such was the influence of Simon Peter - or was it the power of the Holy Spirit? - that the aggressively vocal Judaizers fell silent after Peter spoke to them. They had accepted his testimony earlier about the conversion of Cornelius and other Gentiles at his home earlier?

LISTENED. The verb is imperfect, they kept on listening. Paul and Barnabas were able to tell of their experience on this great missionary journey without interruption. All of the Judaizers would not be convinced but their influence was obviously diminished so that the entire congregation could hear Paul and Barnabas. At this point, it may have been the presence of Barnabas more than the preaching of Paul that persuaded the people to listen. He had a long and outstanding track record with these people. Many there may have been beneficiaries of his compassion. He was not called the Son of Compassion (or Encouragement) without a reason.

SIGNS AND WONDERS. God had done “signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles” that were comparable to the signs and wonders he had done through Peter, John, James, and others in Jerusalem. These signs and wonders were divine credentials for their work among the Gentiles. God Himself was the power behind the signs and wonders, Paul and Barnabas were the human instruments of His grace.

15:13 - JAMES RESPONDED. “*After they stopped speaking, James responded: ‘Brothers, listen to me!’*” James is not speaking to Paul and Barnabas but to the assembled believers. This is James the half-brother of Jesus, not the brother of John (who was the first apostle to become a martyr in A. D. 44). James was not a follower of Christ until he received a post-resurrection visit from Jesus. By this time he was the unquestioned leader of the church in Jerusalem. The other apostles would take the Gospel unto the “ends of the earth”, but James would stay in Jerusalem as the leader of the church during times of great joy, and times of great sorrow. Robertson reasons that “It was expected that James, as President of the Conference, would speak last. But he wisely waited to give every one an opportunity to speak. The challenge of the Judaizers called for an opinion from James” [ATR]. He went on to state that “Furneau thinks that he may have been elected one of the twelve to take the place of James the brother of John since Paul (Gal 1:19) calls him apostle. More likely he was asked to preside because of his great gifts and character as chief of the elders” [ATR].

“Listen to me” suggests that James recognizes the fact that this is a matter of great urgency. This was indeed a moment of historical significance, and as the moderator of this meeting, he asks for the

full attention of those present. James supported Paul's thesis that salvation is received by grace through faith. When some misunderstandings arose concerning the relationship between faith and works, it was James who was inspired to write an epistle which deals with the subject.

15:14 - SIMEON HAS REPORTED. *"Simeon has reported how God first intervened to take from the Gentiles a people for His name."* James, in using the Hebrew and Aramaic for Simon, shows that he is identifying Peter with the Jewish Christians. He is one of them. "How God first intervened" is crucial "because it affirmed that Paul and Barnabas were not the first to go to **the Gentiles**. As Peter had already said (Acts 15:7-11) the question had actually been settled in principle (chaps. 10-11) *before* Paul and Barnabas went on their first journey" [BKC].

15:15 - THE PROPHETS. *"And the words of the prophets agree with this, as it is written..."* The words of the prophets are in harmony with the words of the prophets. "The Jewish rabbis often failed to understand the prophets as Jesus showed. The passage in Amos refers primarily to the restoration of the Davidic empire, but also the Messiah's Kingdom (the throne of David his father," Luke 1:32)" [ATR].

15:16 - AFTER THESE THINGS. *"After these things I will return and will rebuild David's tent, which has fallen down I will rebuild its ruins and will set it up again..."* James cites Amos 9:11-12, but "includes all of the OT prophecy addressing the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's plan" [NCWB]. The scope and focus of the remarks by James will be obvious. "The 17th verse is quoted literally from the Septuagint; but in the 16th the general sense only of the passage is retained" [BARNES].

DAVID'S TENT. This is a poetic picture of David's throne [ATR], which the Jewish believers would recognize from the Davidic Covenant: "The Lord declares to you: The Lord Himself will make a house for you. When your time comes and you rest with your fathers, **I will raise up after you your descendant**, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom" (2 Sam. 7:11-12, bold added). Some see the fulfillment of this in what Jesus Christ accomplished in establishing His church. The idea is that He established His kingdom in the hearts of those who accept Him as Savior and Lord. Others see the fulfillment in the millennial reign of Christ. It is possible that James is aware of an end-time fulfillment, but makes an application for the church age.

15:17 - SO THAT. *"(S)o that those who are left of mankind may seek the Lord- even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does these things..."* In verse 16, James more or less paraphrases the passage from Amos, but here he quotes literally from the Septuagint (the LXX), rather than from the Hebrew. Robertson explains the difference:

"Here the Gentiles are referred to. **The Hebrew text** is quite different, "**that they may possess the remnant of Edom.**" Certainly the LXX suits best the point that James is making. But the closing words of this verse point definitely to the Gentiles both in the Hebrew and **the LXX, 'all the Gentiles'** (panta ta ethnê). Another item of similarity between this speech and the Epistle of James is in the phrase "my name is

called" (epikeklêtai to onoma mou) and Jas 2:7. The purpose of God, though future, is expressed by this perfect passive indicative epikeklêtai from epi-kaleô, to call on. It is a Jewish way of speaking of those who worship God" [ATR, bold added].

As noted above, many interpret this eschatologically (eschatology is the study of last things or end time events). Regardless of one's approach, "The point of citing this passage was to show that Gentiles would be brought into God's new economy through a relationship with the Jews" [NCWB].

James is certainly making an application for the church age, though he may well have understood this to have an end-time fulfillment.

"When God would recover the fallen house of David, a remnant of Gentiles would be included in the restoration. This kind of speaking primarily fits end-time prophecy—when the Davidic kingdom will be established on earth with the Jews at the center and the Gentiles on the circumference, sharing in the messianic blessings but not necessarily becoming proselytes (see Longenecker). Thus, James interpreted Peter's words eschatologically" [NCWB].

The Bible Knowledge Commentary, though brief in many comments, carries an explanation that merits our consideration, even though the comments are lengthy:

"Another problem, the major one, involves interpretation. What did Amos mean when he wrote these verses, and how did James use the passage? Several observations need to be noted before the passage is interpreted: (1) James did not say Amos 9:11-12 was *fulfilled* in the church; he simply asserted that what was happening in the church was **in full agreement** with the Old Testament **prophets**. (2) The word "prophets" is plural, implying that the quotation from Amos was representative of what the prophets in general affirmed. (3) James' main point is clear: Gentile salvation apart from the Law does not contradict the Old Testament prophets. (4) The words **After this** are neither in the Masoretic text nor the Septuagint; both have "in that day." Any interpretation of the passage must consider these factors" [BKC, bold in the original].

Having laid a foundation the same writer goes on to explain that students of the Word of God will interpret these verses in one of three ways.

"Those who hold to **amillennial** theology say the rebuilt house (*ske-ne-n*, "tent") of David is the church which God is using to preach to the Gentiles. While this view at first appears plausible, several factors oppose it. (1) The verb **return** (*anastrepsō-*) used in Acts 15:16 means an actual return. Luke used it only in 5:22 ("went back") and here (he did not use it in his Gospel); in both occurrences it describes a literal, bodily return. Since God's Son has not yet returned bodily, this rebuilding has not taken place. (2) Christ's present ministry in

heaven is not associated with the Davidic throne elsewhere in the New Testament. He is now seated at the right hand of God (Ps. 110:1; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22). When He returns He will sit on David's throne (2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:4; Matt. 19:28; 25:31). (3) The church was a mystery, a truth not revealed to Old Testament saints (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:5-6; Col. 1:24-27); so the church would not be referred to in Amos.

"A second view of the passage is commonly held by **premillenarians**. According to this view there are **four chronological movements** in this passage: **the present Church Age** ("taking from the Gentiles a people for Himself," Acts 15:14), **the return of Christ to Israel** (v. 16a), **the establishing of the Davidic kingdom** (v. 16b), and **the turning of Gentiles to God** (v. 17). While this does interpret these verses in a logical fashion, this approach has some difficulties. (1) The quotation begins with the words "After this." Premillenarians assert James used this phrase to suit his interpretation of the passage. But since the quotation begins with "after this" James must be quoting the sense of Amos 9:11. Therefore this phrase looks back, not to Acts 15:14, but to Amos 9:8-10, which describes the Tribulation ("a time of trouble for Jacob," Jer. 30:7). (2) If the temporal phrase "after this" refers to the present Age in Amos 9:11, Amos would then have predicted the church in the Old Testament.

"A third view, also **premillennial**, may be more plausible. James simply asserted that Gentiles will be saved in the Millennium when Christ will return **and rebuild David's fallen tent**, that is, restore the nation Israel. Amos said nothing about Gentiles needing to be circumcised. Several factors support this interpretation: (1) This fits the purpose of the council. If Gentiles will be saved in the Kingdom Age (the Millennium), why should they become Jewish proselytes by circumcision in the Church Age? (2) This approach suits the meaning of "in that day" in Amos 9:11. After the Tribulation (Amos 9:8-10) God will establish the messianic kingdom (Amos 9:11-12). James (Acts 15:16) interpreted "in that day" to mean that "at the time when" God does one (the Tribulation) He will then do the other. In that sense James could say "After this." (3) This interpretation gives significance to the word "first" in verse 14. Cornelius and his household were among the first Gentiles to become members of Christ's body, the church. Gentile salvation will culminate in great blessing for them in the Millennium (cf. Rom. 11:12). (4) A number of prophets predicted Gentile salvation in the Millennium, as James stated in Acts 15:15 (e.g., Isa. 42:6; 60:3; Mal. 1:11)" [BKC].

This writer recognizes several points. First, we are not all going to agree on the interpretation. Second, I find a lot more preachers around today who hold to the pre-millennial view than when I was in seminary. Third, we must avoid forcing our interpretation of end-time events on others. Fourth, we can have fellowship with those who

may not agree with us on the application James has in mind here. Whatever James had in mind as he spoke to that assembly, he intended for Paul and Barnabas to take back with them and share it with both Jews and Gentiles in Antioch of Syria, and throughout the region where they had established churches on their missionary journey. Furthermore, he wanted to see this issue settled once and for all. Regardless of the ultimate fulfillment, they must agree on an opinion that would serve as a doctrinal statement until the Lord returns.

15:18 - KNOWN. “(W)hich have been known from long ago.” Various Bible students deal search for the literal meaning and the application here. Robertson, from his perspective as an amillennialist, says,

“James adds these words, perhaps with a reminiscence of Isa 45:21. His point is that this purpose of God, as set forth in Amos, is an old one. **God has an Israel outside of and beyond the Jewish race, whom he will make his true ‘Israel’** and so there is no occasion for surprise in the story of God’s dealings with the Gentiles as told by Barnabas and Paul. God’s eternal purpose of grace includes all who call upon his name in every land and people (Isa 2:1; Mic 4:1). This larger and richer purpose and plan of God was one of the mysteries which Paul will unfold in the future (Rom 16:25; Eph 3:9). James sees it clearly now. God is making it known (poiôn tauta gnôsta), if they will only be willing to see and understand. It was a great deliverance that James had made and it exerted a profound influence on the assembly” [ATR, bold added].

Barnes holds that God “sees everything future; he knows what he will accomplish; he has a plan; and all his works are so arranged in his mind, that he sees all things distinctly and clearly. As he foretold these, it was a part of his plan; and as it was a part of his plan long since foretold, it should not be opposed and resisted by us” [BARNES].

15:19 - IN MY JUDGMENT. “Therefore, in my judgment, we should not cause difficulties for those who turn to God from among the Gentiles...” Students of the Word will be well advised to pause and consider the significance of any passage in which they find the word “therefore”. It holds before us the basis for a conclusion or for an action, and then states that conclusion or action. James has listened to the objections of the Judaizers. He had listened to Paul and Barnabas, and he has listened carefully to Peter. He is ready to make a judgment. He may well have been elected as moderator for this very reason. There is no indication that he had ecclesiastical authority over the Judaizers, let alone Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. In other words, there is nothing here that would violate the principle of the autonomy of the local church. He is not issuing a ruling, as much as an opinion. Robertson agrees: “James sums up the case as President of the Conference in a masterly fashion and with that consummate wisdom for which he is noted. **It amounts to a resolution** for the adoption by the assembly as happened (verse Acts 15:33)” [ATR, bold added].

WE SHOULD NOT. James, as moderator, says, “we should not cause difficulties for those who

turn to God from among the Gentiles...” He courageously states his opinion, and in doing so he seems to summarize the feelings of most of those present. Rather than impose restrictions on Gentiles, he says that they should cause difficulties for them. “Those who turn to God” is in the present tense, implying a work that is in progress and advancing rapidly [NCWB].

15:20 - WE SHOULD WRITE. *“(B)ut instead we should write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from blood.”* It was the opinion of James that they should send a letter to the church at Antioch of Syria, informing them of their opinion on the subject. Rather than create difficulties for those who were turning to God, they should encourage them, and at the same time, suggest some practical guidelines.

ABSTAIN. The word for abstain means to hold one’s self back. Idolatry, immorality, and murder were common sins among paganism. James lists some practical restrictions. These guidelines have nothing to do with how Gentiles are saved, but everything to do with fellowship between Jews and Gentiles in the church. One is not saved by abstaining from certain things any more than he is saved by doing certain things, as we have seen in the Three Theories of Justification (see notes on 15:11). If the Gentiles want to have fellowship with Jewish believers in the church there are three things they should consider:

1) They should “abstain from things polluted by idols.” The reference is to things sacrificed to idols. This would take away all identification with idolatry. This was a serious problem for both Jewish and Gentile Christians. In the first place the Gentile believer might be invited by family or friends to a function which involved activities in a pagan temple. They might visit with family members and find that the meat served had been a part of an animal that had been offered as a sacrifice to a pagan god. Paul would have to deal with that later.

2) They should abstain “from sexual immorality”. Immorality was common among the Gentiles. Paul would write to the church at Corinth, encouraging women to dress in such a way that they would not be confused with the temple prostitutes of the city. Idolatry and immorality are often linked together, and if in fact, they were often combined in some ancient societies. In fertility cults young women were devoted to religious prostitution. Christians must separate themselves from such behavior to the point that there would not even be an appearance of evil. Some girls and young women today should focus more on dressing saintly than dressing sexy.

3) They should abstain “from eating anything that has been strangled.” This is peculiar to this verse and to 21:25. Jews were forbidden to eat flesh from any animal which had not been drained of blood.

4) They should abstain “from blood.” All four things which James mentions are covered in Leviticus 17:1-18:30).

Bible students offer consider several possibilities here, usually involving the question of whether or not James was compromising. One suggested that it was a compromise, but a good one [NCWB]

“Many Bible teachers say these are only ceremonial matters. The food polluted by idols is explained in verse 29 as “food sacrificed to idols” (cf. 21:25). This then, it is argued, looks at the same problem Paul discussed (1 Cor. 8-10). The abstinence from sexual immorality is explained as referring to the marriage laws of Leviticus 18:6-20. The prohibition against eating blood is taken to refer to Leviticus 17:10-14. All three prohibitions according to this interpretation look back to the Jewish *ceremonial Law*” [BKC].

James’ fourfold prohibition was clearly intended to form a basis of agreement between the Jewish Christians and Gentile believers. He is not compromising the victory at the Jerusalem Conference, but making some practical concessions to Jewish feelings. The issue here then is not how one is saved, but guidelines from fellowship within the church.

The church once stressed various restrictions, but today some have conformed to the world to the point that their greatest fear seems to be the label of intolerance. The church has every right to insist that members abstain from things that glorify the world, reward bad behavior, and encourage behavior that will hinder the outreach of the church in to the community. The fact that some may well have been intolerant in the past is not grounds for accepting questionable behavior today. The First Psalm should be our guide. When one begins to comfortably walk by, or with sinners, there is the temptation to sit down with them (participate in their sins). When one makes a practice of frequenting places where sinners go, and then sits down with them often enough to be desensitized to the danger or potential harm to one’s self or to others, then there will be the temptation to participate in the sin.

NOTE: I am not speaking in a vacuum here. My wife could chronicle the moral decline of our culture by citing the decline in civility, decency, and attitude of sixth grade students over the past 25 years. During one ten year period, she says, she saw a change from the time when students said, “Good morning, Mrs. Sanders”, to the time when many did not even speak, to the time when many would run into a teacher in the hall and never say, “excuse me”.

My older son John is the juvenile prosecutor for the Ouachita Parish District Attorney’s office, and even though his work is of a confidential nature, he has gained an insight into the behavior of children, young people, and their parents that would shock most pastors, teachers, and parents. He can point to one school that has a good reputation and say, “You wouldn’t believe the cases of sexual abuse I have worked involving students from that school.” Behavior that used to be dealt with in the classroom is not dealt with in the courts. It is getting bad when my wife tells a student to say hello to her son when he goes to court!

Today, children talk freely about body parts and body functions, regardless of the audience. Many parents who take their children to Sunday School every Sunday permit them to watch movies and television programs that are filled with violence, profanity, vulgarity, and immoral speech, dress, and behavior. The church in America and Europe is conforming to the world. South Korea may some day be sending missionaries to America!

15:21 - SINCE ANCIENT TIMES. *“For since ancient times, Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, and he is read aloud in the synagogues every Sabbath day.”* From “ancient times” means since the giving of the Law at Sinai. There were lapses, and their ancestors had often paid a high price for neglecting the Mosaic Law.

MOSES. James uses the name Moses to designate the Mosaic Law. Everyone in the assembly would understand that. Services began with the reading of the Law and the Prophets every Sabbath Day in every synagogue. “All the Jews, knowing the requirements of the law, would be glad to see Gentile Christians observe the moral laws set forth by the council” [NCWB].

The Letter to the Gentile Believers

15:22 - SELECT MEN. *“Then the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, decided to select men from among them and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas, called Barsabbas, and Silas, both leading men among the brothers.”* James had proposed that a letter be written to the Gentile believers about whose conversion the conference was held. He had heard the claims of the Judaizers, as well as the testimonies of Paul and Barnabas, and Simon Peter. Sensing a consensus, he had proposed a letter to the Gentiles which would state their agreement that Gentiles are saved by grace through faith and that they do not have to convert to Judaism in order to be saved.

With “the apostles and the elders, with the whole church,” they decided to send two men back with Paul and Barnabas to reassure the Gentile believers in Antioch of Syria that no restrictions should be placed on Gentiles in order for them to be saved. They did not have to submit to circumcision.

They sent “Judas, called Barsabbas, and Silas”, both of whom were “leading men among the brothers”, back with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to reassure the believers there that the saints in Jerusalem stood by what was written in the letter from the James. While there is no argument among scholars as to the identity of Silas, there is a debate as to the identity of Judas. One commentary states, “This was not the brother of James (1:13) who was surnamed Thaddeus (Matt. 10:3), nor the brother of Joseph called Barsabas (1:23)” [NCWB]. Robertson states that he is “Not otherwise known unless he is a brother of Joseph Barsabbas of Acts 1:23, an early follower of Jesus” [ATR]. Another commentary has an interesting take on the two men:

“**Silas** was one of these **two men**. This is in keeping with Luke’s style of bringing someone on the scene unobtrusively who later becomes a main character (cf. v. 40). These two **leaders**, also “prophets” (v. 32), may have represented two groups in the Jerusalem church—**Judas**, probably a brother of Joseph (cf. 1:23), for the Hebrew section; and Silas, a Roman citizen (cf. 16:37), for the Hellenists” [BKC].

While this makes a wonderful story, and while it would have been a glorious thing for the kingdom of God, I have reservations. All of the Judaizers do not seem to have been persuaded. Some were simply overruled. As we learn from Galatians, Judaizers hounded Paul into Galatia, attacking him and the Gospel he preached with a vengeance. They relentlessly and viciously sought to destroy the

messenger and the message. It would seem more likely that both Silas and Judas enthusiastically supported the decision (or opinion) of the conference, though it is possible that one or both may have been won over by Paul and Barnabas, or by Peter and James.

Silas is the abbreviated form of Silvanus. He not only went to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, he would replace Barnabas when the Holy Spirit led Paul to go on a second missionary journey.

What we are not told here is that Paul had Titus with him as a test case, but he was taking no chances. He wanted the saints at the Jerusalem Conference to make the right decision, and then he had Titus on hand for them to prove that they would apply the principle honestly. He wrote to the Galatians:

“Then after 14 years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, **taking Titus along** also. **I went up because of a revelation** and presented to them the gospel I preach among the Gentiles—but privately to those recognized [as leaders]—so that I might not be running, or have run, in vain. **But not even Titus who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.** [This issue arose] because of false brothers smuggled in, who came in secretly to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, in order to enslave us. **But we did not yield** in submission to these people for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain for you” (Gal. 2:1-5, bold added for emphasis).

15:23 - THIS LETTER. *“They wrote this letter to be delivered by them: From the apostles and the elders, your brothers, To the brothers from among the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings.”* Luke used “they” to denote James and the other apostles and elders (v. 22). It would be delivered by Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and Judas (v.22), and it was addressed not just to Gentile believers in Antioch of Syria, but also to those in Cilicia. The Jerusalem Conference was an historical event and “This is the first mention of letter writing as an aid to the development of Christian community. The combination of written and oral transmission emphasized an important decision here as it did in the OT (Exod. 17:14) [NCWB].

15:24 - WE HAVE HEARD. *“Because we have heard that some to whom we gave no authorization went out from us and troubled you with their words and unsettled your hearts...”* In earlier volumes in THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK, I placed some emphasis on the Luke’s account of progress reports. At first, numbers were added unto the fellowship of believers, but in time the numbers were multiplied. The Holy Spirit inspired Luke to record these and other progress reports, such as the acts of gifts by Barnabas and others help meet the needs of the widows in the early church. Luke tells us that the apostles and elders received reports from other places where the Gospel had been proclaimed. For example, they heard about the work of Philip in Samaria and sent John and Peter to investigate the reports and to offer their assistance. It was because of the reports from Antioch that Barnabas had gone there to check on the work and to stay to provide leadership.

The reports to which the letter refers was probably the testimony of Paul and Barnabas at the

conference. However, they may well have heard both positive and negative reports from others before the conference.

NO AUTHORIZATION. The Judaizers who had “troubled” them had gone out on their own. They had not gone out under the auspices of the church at Jerusalem, or the apostles and elders. The church had no authority over another church. Those churches that believe in the autonomy of the local church point to this as a model for them. No doubt, those in which we find a hierarchy may also point to this as a model. The letter does use the word “authorization”, from which some might infer a hierarchy, but others might conclude that they had not given those trouble makers authorization for the simple reason that they had no authority with which to authorize them.

Dr. Jimmy Draper shared these seven “Baptist Essentials” with members of the Board of Trustees of LifeWay Christian Resources at Glorieta, September 11, 2001. I asked his permission to use his list and he graciously consented. He stressed that there are many distinctives, but there are seven essentials, to which most members would subscribe. He added that Dr. Morris Chapman had prepared a similar list and they both agreed on the essentials.

- 1) Salvation by grace through faith, plus nothing.
- 2) The Lordship of Jesus Christ
- 3) Sufficiency of Scripture
- 4) Autonomy of the Local Church
- 5) Religious Liberty
- 6) Trinitarian view of God (One in essence, three in person)
- 7) The Great Commission

Denominations with a different form of government often do not understand Southern Baptists. Simply stated, all denominational workers work for the local churches that make up the membership of the denomination, and denominational executives and other workers have only the authority assigned them by messengers from the local church. Baptist headquarters in any state may contact a local church and offer assistance or suggest a program, but they have no authority over that church.

If someone imposes himself on the local church he does so without the authority of the denominations. No one from a mega-church has authority to call the plays for a smaller church. This letter clearly states that those trouble makers were acting on their own, not for the church at Jerusalem. However, “They may have pretended to be representatives from the Jerusalem church in an attempt to bring these Christians back into legal and judicial bondage” [NCWB].

15:25 - UNANIMOUSLY DECIDED. *“(W)e have unanimously decided to select men and send them to you along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul...”* This letter does not tell us whether or not the Judaizers excused themselves, were simply silenced, or possibly were in agreement at the time, but we do know that there were some there who were not about to give up the fight. For more on the way they would follow Paul and create serious trouble among the Galatian churches, see this writer’s study in Galatians in THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK.

We can be sure the apostles and elders were in agreement, and this may indicate that those who were present when the unanimous decision was made joyfully to send Silas and Judas with Paul and Barnabas to affirm the opinion of the Jerusalem Conference . Gentiles are saved by grace through faith, without being required to be circumcised (the symbol of the Abrahamic Covenant), or convert to Judaism first.

It is an occasion for joy when members of a church do anything unanimously, but there are times when a unanimous vote is not possible. One pastor was told by the chairman of the pastor search committee that the vote to extend the call to him was overwhelming, but not unanimous. He quickly added, they did not vote against you, they voted against me. This man does not like me and he and his family voted against you because of his animosity toward me. When a committee meets, if it votes that any decision coming out of the committee must be unanimous, one person can control the committee. That is the tyranny of the minority. Unanimity, always desired but not always possible, is often a testimony to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

OUR BELOVED. In verse 23, these Jewish followers of Christ call Gentile believers their brothers: “From the apostles and the elders, your brothers, To the brothers from among the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia.” Here, they write, that they are sending the other men with “our beloved Barnabas and Paul.” We cannot miss the fact that the Jerusalem Conference was one of the first great victories of its kind in the history of Christianity. From that moment on, all true believers should consider themselves brothers and sisters in Christ.

This does not mean that we will all agree doctrinally, or that we will blend culturally or socially. There may be language barriers. My pharmacist Monica is a gracious and committed Christian. She is Chinese American and a member of a Chinese Baptist church. As soon as the new Mandarin translation of the Gospel of John was completed, I asked Phill Burgess, Vice-President of B & H Outreach International, to send me some copies. It has the new Mandarin translation on the left page and the HCSB on the right. I carried either seventy-five or one hundred copies to her so she could make them available to Chinese Christians in Monroe, Shreveport, and New Orleans, LA, and in Jackson, MS. Monica has asked me if I would preach at her church, and then asked, “Have you ever preached with an interpreter? Have you ever preached with someone standing beside you speaking in another language?” I am anticipating the privilege of worshiping with Chinese brothers and sisters who speak a different language.

Lu is a lady from China who married an American who was working in China. They now live in America, but I had an opportunity to give her a number of copies of the Gospel of John in the Mandarin and HCSB so she could take them to China. She was especially happy that she could take her mother and aunt a copy. Those saints in China are my brothers and sisters. Perhaps most English speaking Christians would agree, but that brings up another question: Do we call our neighbor our brother or sister? And, do we mean it? Do we treat all our neighbors as brothers and sisters, or just those in our own socio-economic category?

There are Christians who feel strongly that there should be no denominational distinctions, so they refer to themselves as independent, or non-denominational. Others are very loyal to their denomination, often because of certain doctrines or because of the style of worship. Christians may choose to worship with those who hold the same doctrinal beliefs, or prefer the same worship style, but they must present a united front to a lost world and cooperate in ministry and evangelism.

15:26 - RISKED THEIR LIVES. *“(W)ho have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* The recipients of this letter would know of times when Paul and Barnabas had risked their lives for Christ. Robertson writes that Paul uses the “Perfect active participle dative plural of paradidōmi, old word, to hand over to another, and with psuchas, **to hand over to another their lives**. The sufferings of Paul and Barnabas in Pisidia and Lycaonia were plainly well-known [ATR, bold added]. Paul had been stoned and left for dead “for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Christians reveal a lot about themselves by the pronouns the use. The word “our” compliments the word “brothers” (vs. 23). When asked to teach them to pray, Jesus did not say teach them to pray “my” Father, but “our” Father. “Our Father” settles two relationships: our relationship with God and our relationship with one another.

Once again, these Jewish believers affirm that they are brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus is His personal name, Christ his title (the Anointed, or the Messiah). “Our Lord” settles forever our relationship with Him.

15:27 - JUDAS AND SILAS. *“Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who will personally report the same things by word of mouth.”* The apostles and elders, along with the whole assembly, sent Judas and Silas, who would both deliver this letter and affirm the content. They would be able to testify that this was the opinion and conviction of those present at the Jerusalem Conference when they unanimously decided to send the letter. The Judaizers might show up later and try to make their case for circumcision, but never again could they honestly claim that they had the support of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. That would not stop them from making such claims, as we see in Paul’s letter to the Galatians.

15:28 - THE HOLY SPIRIT’S DECISION. *“For it was the Holy Spirit’s decision-and ours-to put no greater burden on you than these necessary things...”* The Holy Spirit was “inwardly guiding these men as they dealt with this problem. Leaders of all Christian communities must rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit in making decisions and in dealing with problems and questions that believers encounter” [NCWB]. James, in a sense, recognized that he was only the human instrument, the Holy Spirit was presiding at the conference. Robertson sees this as a

“Definite claim that the church in this action had the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That fact was plain to the church from what had taken place in Caesarea and in this campaign of Paul and Barnabas (verse Acts 15:8). Jesus had promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth (John

16:13). Even so the church deliberated carefully before deciding. What a blessing it would be if this were always true! But even so the Judaizers are only silenced for the present, not convinced and only waiting for a better day to start over again” [ATR].

How does one know when a decision is that of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit may well be given credit for opposing positions within the church. In fact, that may be all too common in the church of any age. In every decision there is a potential for division. Satan will inspire those under his influence to give the Holy Spirit credit for his work. Paul was inspired to write, “And no wonder! For Satan himself is disguised as an angel of light. So it is no great thing if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their destiny will be according to their works” (2 Cor 11:14-15). That being the case, is it any wonder that those who are constantly doing the works of the flesh rather than bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5) often proclaim their righteousness the loudest?

It was my privilege to be a part of the executive committee of the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources when we heard the recommendation from the Presidential Search Committee that we recommend Dr. Thom Rainer as President and CEO. A year later, Dr. Rainer brought to the board a recommendation that create a new Research Division within LifeWay, and name Dr. Brad Waggoner as Vice President over that division. We agreed unanimously, based on Dr. Rainer’s stated reasons for the need for specialized research. No longer would we be dependant upon someone else’s polls alone on any issue.

Later, at the full board meeting, it was my privilege to sit with Dr. Waggoner at breakfast prior to a very long day of meetings. Someone at our table must have mentioned the Emergent Church movement and when Dr. Waggoner responded, I asked for a fuller explanation. I really became interested when he said that you not only have the “emergent church”, you also have the “emerging church”. He explained the difference. I had forgotten the distinction he made, but I have often thought of the conversation. Recently, I contacted him and asked him to distinguish between the two movements. He graciously sent me his Power Point presentation on this subject and I will share only the first part here to show how divisions persist in the church, and to show just how subtle they may be:

Characteristics of Postmodernism

- 1. Rejects the authority of reason and all claims to objective truth
- Globalization (local narratives)
- Pluralism
- Customization & Subjectification of truth
- Humans are “social constructs”

Postmodernism, The Emergent Church

Characteristics of Postmodernism

6. Distrustful of institutions, hierarchies, centralized bureaucracies and male dominated organizations

Characteristics of the Emergent Church

7. Missional living
- Narrative theology
 - Christ-likeness
 - Authenticity
 - Creative approaches to worship and spiritual reflection
 - Minimalist and decentralized organizational structure

Characteristics of the Emerging Church

13. A flexible approach to theology
- Reanalyze the Bible within varying contexts with the goal of revealing a multiplicity of valid perspectives rather than a single valid interpretation
 - Creative, experiential worship with ancient traditions (not “seeker-driven”)

What Drives This Movement?

16. D.A. Carson in his book, *Becoming Conversant with the Emergent Church*, indicates that many of the emergent leaders are driven by “protest”.
17. Protest against past church experiences
18. Protest against the “ills” of modernism

[Power Point introduction to the subject of the Emerging Church and the Emergent Church by Dr. Brad Waggoner, Vice President, LifeWay Christian Resources].

I asked for permission to use this material and received the message: “Sure. Hope this is helpful. Brad.” Just as Brad Waggoner offer a defense against divisive movements today, the apostles and elders had to deal with a less subtle and more clearly defined division in that long ago situation. The Holy Spirit had taken control of the conference in Jerusalem, and while the Judaizers had caused a great burden to those Gentile believers in Syria, the apostles and elders, under His influence, were determined not to burden them with anything that was not necessary.

15:29 - THAT YOU ABSTAIN. *“(T)hat you abstain from food offered to idols, from blood, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these things, you will do well. Farewell.”* The only burden imposed by the Holy Spirit and endorsed by those present at the Jerusalem Conference was the practical abstinence from traditional pagan practices that would be a serious hindrance to fellowship between Jewish believers and Gentile believers within the church. They had discussed the importance of this “burden” (vs. 28) before James wrote the letter (see vs. 20).

I have a confession. I have never moderated a business meeting in which any of these dietary restrictions have been an issue. Then, what is the application to us today? Fellowship within the church may be strained over issues like consumption of alcoholic beverage, dancing, gambling, entertainment, dress, Sunday activities, literature, discipline, the sanctity of life. How should a Christian deal with these issues? We can depend on the Holy Spirit to help us, and we must first look to the help He has already made available to us. He miraculously inspired the writing of Scripture, He has miraculously preserved it, and He miraculously illuminates the hearts of believers so that they may understand it and apply it. He inspired Paul to give us a guideline in his First Epistle to the Corinthians:

“Food will not make us acceptable to God. We are not inferior if we don’t eat, and we are not better if we do eat. **But be careful that this right of yours in no way becomes a stumbling block to the weak.** For if somebody sees you, the one who has this knowledge, dining in an idol’s temple, won’t his weak conscience be encouraged to eat food offered to idols? Then the weak person, the brother for whom Christ died, is ruined by your knowledge. Now when you sin like this against the brothers and wound their weak conscience, you are sinning against Christ. Therefore, **if food causes my brother to fall, I will never again eat meat, so that I won’t cause my brother to fall**” (1 Cor 8:8-13, bold added).

When I was a student at Mississippi College, I served as pastor of the Dockery Baptist Church between Cleveland and Ruleville, Mississippi. I had been pastor only a brief time when someone asked me, “Do you play cards?” That individual did not ask if I played poker, but did I play cards? I could comfortably answer that I did not. I did not bother to tell the lady that I grew up playing checkers and dominoes. I decided that it would be better to abstain from card games than to offend another church member, or to create a problem in the church. The only exception has been children’s card games with my sons when they were young.

Response to the Letter

15:30 - TO ANTIOCH. *“Then, being sent off, they went down to Antioch, and after gathering the assembly, they delivered the letter.”* By “they”, Luke means Paul and Barnabas, accompanied by Silas and Judas. They were given a send off by James and the other leaders in Jerusalem. Luke uses the traditional Jewish terminology for going to or returning from Jerusalem: “They went down to Antioch”. When one went to Jerusalem, he ascended, speaking topographically, but there was more to it for the Jewish worshiper. In America we say, “up north” or “down south”, but to the ancient Jew there was a religious connotation. The Lord told Jeremiah that Jerusalem, following the Babylonian Captivity, was the symbol of God’s presence with His people.

GATHERING THE ASSEMBLY. The members of the church at Antioch had prayerfully sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem where, they trusted, a major issue might be settled. It stands to

reason that they would be anxiously awaiting word from the conference. They would have been easily assembled when word was spread that Paul and Barnabas had returned.

15:31 - THEY REJOICED. *“When they read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.”* The letter from James had both practical and theological implications for the saints in Antioch. Paul probably read the letter and when the people heard it they rejoiced. Even with all the strife, persecution, and threats, there was real joy in the churches in the First Century. It is typical of Luke to point that out for us. A lack of joy is an indication that there is something wrong in the church.

15:32 - JUDAS AND SILAS. *“Both Judas and Silas, who were also prophets themselves, encouraged the brothers and strengthened them with a long message.”* Judas and Silas had been called for a special ministry. The Old Testament prophet was called of Yahweh either to foretell future events, or to proclaim (forth-tell) God’s message for those of their generation. In the early days of the church there were prophets who were apparently given a message from the Lord to deliver to the saints to help under special circumstances. When Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write that he had no word from the Lord on a subject, and then expressed a personal opinion, it does not mean that those comments were not inspired, but that Jesus did not specifically address it when He was on earth, or that Paul had no prophetic word from Jesus on that particular subject. Many interpret 1 Corinthians 13:10 to mean that once the New Testament was completed (and possibly circulated to a significant degree), there would be no need for this particular gift.

Judas and Silas were preachers whose primary calling was to proclaim the Gospel. They had been sent by Paul and Barnabas to affirm the content of the letter. “They probably emphasized the need for unity between Jewish and Gentile believers and the principle of Christ’s free love upon which that unity was based” [NCWB].

15:33 - SENT BACK. *“After spending some time there, they were sent back in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them.”* Typically, Luke summarizes an extended period of time with the words “some time”. After ministering to and worshiping with these saints in Antioch for “some time”, Judas and Silas returned to Jerusalem where those who had sent them would be waiting for a report.

15:35 - REMAINED IN ANTIOCH. *“But Paul and Barnabas, along with many others, remained in Antioch teaching and proclaiming the message of the Lord.”* The first great missionary team remained for some time in Antioch, preaching “the message of the Lord.” Evangelistic preaching to the lost was essential, but there is another part of the Great Commission that often suffers from a lack of emphasis. Jesus commanded His disciples to win the lost and disciple them. When I was still a young pastor, and far more inexperienced than I knew then, I accepted the call as pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church, Nederland, Texas. I followed a number of outstanding pastors. There was Manley Beasley, a mighty man of God who had been used of the Lord to bless so many, both as pastor and evangelist. There was another who left to become professor of Bible for a Baptist college. Then, there was George Clarke, a gifted writer and administrator, who resigned when he accepted the position of Editor for the Church Administration Magazine for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board (now LifeWay Christian Resources). Bob Moore, a deacon and good friend,

told me that Clarke told the deacons that he viewed his primary work in that church to be the edification of the saints. That loosely means to build them up by training them, or teaching them. Paul and Barnabas would not have neglected this aspect of the work.

Making the Worst of a Good Situation!

15:36 - AFTER SOME TIME. *“After some time had passed, Paul said to Barnabas, Let’s go back and visit the brothers in every town where we have preached the message of the Lord, and see how they’re doing.”* Again, “some time passed”, denoting possibly another period of time after the “some time” mentioned in verse 33. A lot of things can happen while people are “spending some time” in a church. For one thing, Silas had returned to Jerusalem, but in verse 40 he is back in Antioch. There is no contradiction here. Not only did Silas return, Simon Peter went to Antioch, where he worshiped and had fellowship with the saints until Judaizers from Jerusalem showed up, and then both Peter and Barnabas, who had helped win the victory in Jerusalem, compromised. Paul tells us in Galatians that he confronted Peter to his face over his hypocrisy (see Gal. 2:11-21).

PAUL SAID TO BARNABAS. Paul is the undisputed leader at this time. He was uniquely gifted, uniquely trained, uniquely called, and uniquely empowered by the Holy Spirit for his work. The Holy Spirit revealed that it was time to go back to visit the churches planted on their great mission trip. They sensed the need to preach to those Gentile believers again and to check on their welfare.

15:37 - BARNABAS. *“Barnabas wanted to take along John Mark.”* The imperfect tense implies that Barnabas persisted in his wish and intention. Paul did not trust the young man who had turned back on the previous missionary journey, but Barnabas wanted to give him another opportunity to prove his commitment to the Lord.

15:38 - BUT PAUL. *“But Paul did not think it appropriate to take along this man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone on with them to the work.”* Luke reveals here that Mark had turned back, not for any good reason, but because when the going got rough, Mark got going - back to the comforts of home, back to family, and back to the home church. Who was right, and who was wrong? Only the Lord knows, but nothing takes Him by surprise. He had a plan that will expand the outreach to the uttermost part of the world and He would not be deterred by this argument.

Most of us can recall a time or incident that will enable us to identify with John Mark more than with Paul, or even Barnabas. There has been a time when we quit, wavered, faltered, or failed before some work was finished. We sinned. We confessed our sin and repented and the Lord gave us another opportunity, “a second chance”, to prove our commitment to Him. At a time like that one is blessed if he has a friend like Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement, to stand by him, rather than a driven, committed man like Paul who had no patience with those less committed, less focused, or less courageous.

During my days in seminary and for several years after I graduated, I considered Dr. Leo Eddleman to be my mentor. I loved him and respected him, but one day when we were talking about his education and ministry, I had the distinct impression that as much as I benefitted from our friendship, I would not have wanted to work under him. Here was a man with a discipline I could hardly imagine. He told me the greatest regret he has was the way he wasted his life from age 15 - 19, when he could have learned five languages. He allowed himself one date per year from age 19-26. He did nothing to make me feel that I lacked that kind of discipline, but I was well aware of it.

15:39 - A SHARP DISAGREEMENT. *“There was such a sharp disagreement that they parted company, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed off to Cyprus.”* In verse 38, Luke says that “Paul did not think it appropriate to take along this man who had deserted” them in Pamphilia. From this statement it would seem that was stating it mildly. He was determined not to take John Mark with them again. Barnabas was just as determined to take him. Paul was totally unyielding, but Barnabas stood up to him. The man who had befriended young Saul of Tarsus when he needed it now stands up for Mark. Who was right? The Lord knows. It is a temptation to side with Paul because the rest of the Book of Acts will focus on his missionary work, his rescue from a mob in Jerusalem, and the fulfillment of another part of his call that one might overlook after Luke spends so much time on his missionary journeys. He had been called to be the Lord’s witness to Israel, to Gentiles, and before kings and governors.

The Son of Encouragement gave his unyielding support to a young man who needed encouragement and a second chance. The man whom the Lord used to encourage a young Paul in Jerusalem, and later to recruit him to assist him in Antioch, will now part company with him. He took Mark and “sailed off to Cyprus.”

Who was right? We do not have to decide that. What we do know is that the Holy Spirit saw to it that this disagreement did not hinder the spread of the Gospel. We are given no more information on Barnabas, but we may infer that he was a good teacher and positive influence on Mark. The really good news is that the Lord was not through with Mark. Paul would later write to Timothy: “Make every effort to come to me soon, for Demas has deserted me, because he loved this present world, and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. **Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry**” (2 Tim 4:9-11, bold added).

The Holy Spirit salvaged victory from potential defeat and eventually, unity from division. One dictionary presents a summary of the ministry of Mark: “The evangelist; ‘John whose surname was Mark (Acts 12:12, 25). Mark (Marcus, (Col 4:10)) was his Roman name, which gradually came to supersede his Jewish name John. He is called John in Acts 13:5, 13, and Mark in Mark 15:39; 2Ti 4, etc.” [Easton Illustrated Bible Dictionary - EASTON after this]

What we glean from the Scripture is that Mark was the son of Mary, a godly woman living in Jerusalem. She seems to have been a prominent woman of means and influence (Acts 12:12). There is no mention of his father, but we are told that he was cousin of Barnabas (Col 4:10), who may well

have been a father figure to him.

Mark was exposed to the Gospel at an early age. He may have been the “young man” he mentions in Mark 14:51, who wrapped a sheet around himself and went out into the street to see what was happening the night Jesus was arrested. Someone caught hold of his sheet and fled he naked into the night. Such a humiliating experience he would never forget. Though he is not mentioned, it was at his mother’s house where Peter found many of the saints gathered together to pray for him when he was released from prison; and “it is probable that it was here that he was converted by Peter, who calls him his ‘son (1Pe 5:13)” [EASTON].

Three years had passed between the time Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas Pamphylia and the time of the “sharp disagreement” between Paul and Barnabas over him here. Even though there is no record of the work of Barnabas and Mark in Cyprus, word may have reached Paul that the young man had matured in the faith and become a faithful servant. Failure discourages some people and motivates others. It is possible that the memory of his desertion was highly motivating to him.

It is evident that he later became reconciled to Paul, “for he was with him in his first imprisonment at Rome (Col 4:10; Phm 1:24). At a later period he was with Peter in Babylon (1Pe 5:13), then, and for some centuries afterwards, one of the chief seats of Jewish learning; and he was with Timothy in Ephesus when Paul wrote him during his second imprisonment (2Ti 4:11). He then disappears from view” [EASTON]. The Holy Spirit inspired this same Mark to write the Gospel According to Mark, which some believe was the first Gospel account written.

15:40 - PAUL CHOSE SILAS. *“Then Paul chose Silas and departed, after being commended to the grace of the Lord by the brothers.”* The Holy Spirit had a mature, proven prophet on hand to replace Barnabas on Paul’s Second Missionary Journey. Paul had been able to observe him at the Jerusalem Conference, had traveled with him back to Antioch, and worked with him in Syria. He knew him and trusted him but the most significant thing is the role of the Holy Spirit in this decision.

COMMENDED TO THE GRACE OF THE LORD. As “the brothers” had prayerfully sent off Paul and Barnabas three years earlier, they now commend Paul and Silas to the grace of the Lord.” They prayed with them and pledged to continue to pray for them. The church did not finance their missionary efforts, but they supported them with their prayers. How do we know they did not support him financially? For one thing, Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he had refused to accept payment from them, preferring to support himself and others by working as a tentmaker. In addition, he writes to the church at Philippi: “I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, 4 always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, because of **your partnership in the gospel** from the first day until now” (Phil. 1:3-5, bold added). What does he mean by their “partnership in the gospel”? Perhaps he explains that later in that epistle:

“And you, Philippians, know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, **no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone.** For even in Thessalonica **you sent [gifts] for my need** several

times. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that is increasing to your account. But I have received everything in full, and I have an abundance. I am fully supplied, **having received from Epaphroditus what you provided**— a fragrant offering, a welcome sacrifice, pleasing to God” (Phil 4:15-18, bold added).

It is possible that the statement, “in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia” would allow for some limited financial support from others. However, the significant thing here is that the believers in Antioch of Syria committed Paul and Silas to the grace of the Lord.

15:41 - STRENGTHENING THE CHURCHES. *“He traveled through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”* Paul was a missionary, evangelist, and church planter, but he understood the need to “strengthen the churches”. It is absolutely right to evangelize. Our Lord commands it. However, I have observed some preachers who seem to seek a reputation as an evangelist (that gets them more revivals), and from time to time one hears of an evangelist who prides himself in his preaching and personal soul winning, but creates divisions in churches, casts doubts on other evangelists, and creates problems for pastors. I listened to the testimony of one evangelist say that when he felt the Lord calling him to preach, he really had to pray about becoming a preacher because “didn’t know if he had ever seen a real one.” I mentioned this evangelist to another pastor and he said, “Yes, we had him, but I won’t ever ask him again.” His preaching was doctrinally sound and his sermon delivery was outstanding, but rather than strengthen the church risked creating divisions in order to exalt himself.

When I was in seminary, I met and had opportunities to hear an evangelist whose popularity growing and invitations to preach began to pour in from all over the country. Several years later, as I sat listening to him deliver a message at a state convention, I recalled the impression I had back during my seminary days. Friends agreed that we loved to hear him preach, just as long as it was in someone else’s church. People loved his preaching but at times it took some for a church to recover from it. In fact, this man stumbled and ended up leaving the ministry.

Those who would “strengthening” a churches will (1) win lost people, (2) teach sound doctrine, and (3) teach and motivate members to win lost people and disciple those who are being saved. Luke tells us here that Paul and Silas revisited the churches planted on the the first missionary journey by Paul and Barnabas in order to strengthen them. Is there anyone around today who would accuse Paul of neglecting evangelism? It is not a question of either/or, but both/and. Jesus, in the Great Commission, commands us to win the lost, baptize them, and disciple them.

APPENDIX I

Galatians, Chapter 2

From
THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK
By
Johnny L. Sanders, D.Min.

E. Endorsement By Leaders of the Jerusalem Church, Galatians 2:1-10.

The visit to Jerusalem Paul discusses here is the one Luke described in Acts 15. The Jerusalem Conference (Apostolic council) was probably held in AD 51, though many writers hold to different dates. Paul's first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion was about AD 38, meaning his conversion on the Damascus Road would have been in AD 35-36.

In Galatia, the Judaizers were telling Christians that they could not be saved by simply believing in Jesus. They had to accept Jewish ceremonial law as a condition of salvation. They insisted that salvation was of the Jews and required the Gentiles to embrace Judaism, of which circumcised was the seal, in order to be saved. These demands had first been made in Antioch of Syria prior to the Jerusalem Conference. In both places these demands were a challenge to Paul's apostolic authority.

In 2:10 Paul reminds the readers that these same charges were brought up at the Jerusalem Conference and the issue had been resolved once for all. The Judaizers appealed to the authority of the Twelve, but then had already recognized Paul as an authentic apostle. Ignorance of, or rejection of the resolution of certain issues continues to plague the church today. There are people who bring up questions today that earlier Christians dealt with and in lengthy councils determined what the possible conclusions were. They might not have agreed, but theological positions were defined. When these issues are brought up we often have to try to determine the individual's definition of terms, and what knowledge he already has of the issue (grace, predestination, eschatology, or the Trinity).

This principle applies in practical areas, including moral issues and personal habits. Alcoholism is a serious problem in America and throughout the world, yet when we talk with certain people about the danger in social drinking, they snap back, "Jesus drank wine, didn't He?" Generation after generation of social drinkers ask the same question, without realizing that the question has been answered thousands of times in the past. Yes, Jesus drank wine, probably a naturally fermented wine with one part wine mixed with three parts water. A person who drank wine straight (not mixed with water) was criticized as a wine-bibber.

The Judaizers either did not know about the Jerusalem Conference, or knew about it and rejected the opinions expressed there. They could hardly have pled ignorance. Their early leaders were a group of fundamental Jewish Christians who were in Antioch of Syria when Paul and Barnabas arrive following the First Missionary Journey and reported that Gentiles were being saved. They openly, and vehemently insisted that no Gentile could be saved without first being circumcised (as proof that he accepted the Jewish Law). It was their opposition that precipitated the conference in Jerusalem, at which it was concluded that Gentiles are saved the same way Jews are saved, by grace through faith, and not by the works of the Law. Paul and Silas visited the churches established in South Galatia and informed them about the conference and the results.

The Judaizers had lost in Jerusalem but they would not accept defeated. They hounded Paul's steps stirring up opposition to Paul and his message. They should have known better and the members of the churches of Galatia should have known better than to believe them. It is a shame to think how much time they wasted from the ministry of the greatest missionary, the most brilliant theologian, the most important minister in the history of the church, as they forced him to go back over ground that had already been covered and deal with issues that had already been settled.

Before criticizing those ancient trouble makers, think of how many times churches today make decisions, not for the glory of God, but to accommodate some person who, like Diotrophes, loves preeminence among the members. Think how many times has a church changed its course because some people said, "I had to vote with my family." How many times has a church started a bus ministry just because a neighboring church had one? And how many churches have been motivated to build a family life center (gymnasium) when they saw one going up down the road at another church? How many churches have opened the door to gospel-rock music because they do not want to offend the new youth worker who insists that he can use it to reach young people? How many churches have permitted false doctrines to be taught in Sunday School because every one was afraid they might offend a person whose financial support they thought they had to have? Occasionally a person gets to the point that he (or she) thinks he is perfectly justified in telling the pastor what to preach and what not to preach. Someone else may try to manipulate members of the finance or building committee or control the election of deacon.

A denominational worker stopped by to visit a pastor who had just accepted the call to a new church. They discussed opportunities and goals for some time and then the conversation turned to some past problems. The denominational worker said, "At least, you do not have to deal with a man who was a member here years ago." He went on to describe a very small man with a good mind and big ego who announced to the pastor something he wanted to do. The pastor reminded him that the church had elected a committee to look into the matter and recommend a course of action. This man snapped back, "God called me to run the affairs of this church!"

In dealing with individuals or groups like this we would do well to follow Paul's example in dealing with the Judaizers. If your response is, "I am glad we do not have any of those people around today," you may be missing the fact that this Scripture has an application for the church of any age. There are some members in some churches who are just as mean spirited and just as vicious as the

trouble makers in Galatia. A retired denominational worker had watched a local church for decades. He talked with the new pastor about a certain man who had been a thorn in every pastor's side for many years, using every conceivable method of intimidation to control both the pastor and other members. Later, the pastor mentioned a problem with this man and the retired minister said, "He is just like a rattlesnake. If you don't ever cross him you won't have any trouble, but if you cross his path, he'll strike."

A person usually does not get like that overnight. New members do not usually start off like that. They take a step or make a statement to test the water. If members stand firm for the Lord they back off, at least for a while. But if the people, in thinking they are preserving peace, back away this type of person will take another step, and another. This kind of person, or a group of people can only take over a church if the people let them. This is exactly what had happened in Galatia. The only difference is that they were, perhaps, better organized and a little more determined.

A church I once served was committed to mission, usually ranking in the top three churches in the state in percentage giving to missions. We also helped sponsor two mission churches in south Louisiana. I took a group of young people and their workers to one of the mission churches to conduct a mission Vacation Bible School and revival in which I preached every evening. The bi-vocational pastor was also principal of a local school. While we were there he told me about a group from a charismatic church who decided that each one would begin attending another church in the area in order to spread the charismatic movement to those churches.

The pastor knew he was going to have to deal with the man who chose his church. After a worship service the man came to him and said, "The Holy Spirit gave you that message." He asked the man, "Do you really believe the Holy Spirit told me what to do?" the visitor answered, "Yes, I surely do." The pastor repeated his question and the charismatic man reaffirmed his conviction that the Holy Spirit was communicating with this pastor. He followed with, "You mean if I tell you that the Holy Spirit is telling me to say something to you right now you would believe me?" He assured him he would believe him. The pastor then said, "Right now the Holy Spirit is telling me to tell you that you should leave our church and go back where you came from because your presence here is divisive. Now do you believe the Holy Spirit told me to say that to you?" The man honestly replied, "If you tell me He told you to say it, I will have to take your word for it." He never returned.

That pastor is from what I refer to as the Barney Fife school. Americans have been in love with Barney Fife since he first appeared on television on the Andy Griffith Show. His response to a problem was, "You got to nip it! You got to nip it in the bud." Because the fickle Galatians did not nip this heresy in the bud, it spread through the churches of the region, severely hindering fellowship and arresting the growth of members, and obstructing the evangelistic ministry of the church. Now, Paul is inspired by the Holy Spirit to deal with this issue.

Paul, in this letter to the churches of Galatia must both defend his apostleship and correct the heresy spread by the Judaizers. For more on the controversy see Acts 15 for Luke's account. In this chapter he gives a brief account of the Jerusalem Conference, at which all these issues should have

been settled.

In Acts, Luke mentions five visits made by Paul to Jerusalem: (1) Acts 9:26, (2) Acts 11:30, (3) 15:1, (4) 19:22, and (5) 21:15. The visit Paul discussed in Galatians 2 is the same one Luke records in Acts 15.

2:1 - TO JERUSALEM. Fourteen years after he went from Damascus to Jerusalem to see Peter, he went to Jerusalem for the great Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15). A.T. Robertson wrote:

“Paul is not giving a recital of his visits to Jerusalem, but of his points of contact with the apostles in Jerusalem. As already observed, he here refers to the Jerusalem Conference given by Luke in Ac 15 when Paul and Barnabas were endorsed by the apostles and elders and the church over the protest of the Judaizers who had attacked them in Antioch (Ac 15:1f.). But Paul passes by another visit to Jerusalem, that in Ac 11:30 when Barnabas and Saul brought alms from Antioch to Jerusalem and delivered them to "the elders" with no mention of the apostles who were probably out of the city since the events in Ac 12 apparently preceded that visit and Peter had left for another place (Ac 12:17). Paul here gives the inside view of this private conference in Jerusalem that came in between the two public meetings (Ac 15:4,6-29) [Seedmaster Bible].

WITH BARNABAS...TITUS. Paul went to Jerusalem with Barnabas and took Titus. Barnabas was his fellow missionary. Titus was a Gentile and it seems that Paul both sought an opinion, and used Titus as a test case. Robertson has an interesting comment:

Titus is not mentioned in Acts 15 nor anywhere else in Acts for some reason, possibly because he was Luke's own brother. But his very presence was a challenge to the Judaizers, since he was a Greek Christian [Seedmaster Bible].

2:2 - BY REVELATION. When the controversy could not be resolved in Antioch, Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to Jerusalem to see if they could arrive at a consensus. The Judaizers may well have been appealing to the authority of the Apostles and other leaders in Jerusalem. The Lord revealed that he should go to Jerusalem to have this issue resolved in the most logical place and before the most logical group so that the Gospel could be preached without this hindrance in the future. Many of those gathered in Jerusalem would go into Gentile lands in the future and this issue needed to be settled once and for all.

It is also important to note that Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem. He did not go because he was summoned by either an apostle or the church at Jerusalem. He went voluntarily to try to determine that the course he had independently taken did not conflict with the message of the apostles and the Jerusalem church. The Holy Spirit was his authority, not Peter, not the other apostles, not James, not the church at Jerusalem. Peter had no authority over Paul and neither Peter, nor James had no authority over the church in Jerusalem. No hierarchy is being perpetuated in the

church at this point. They acted as they were led of the Holy Spirit.

COMMUNICATED...TO THEM...OF REPUTATION. Because of the uproar of the Judaizers, Paul had to be very careful to assure a victory for the Gospel. He met with a small group of leaders, not because he was inferior to them, but because with an issue like this a group like the Judaizers could throw more heat on the subject than light. Such a militant group can be an intimidating influence. Two things stand out: Paul is being led by the Holy Spirit, and he is now becoming a key Christian leader of the early church. Not too long before this he was Barnabas' associate - it was then Barnabas and Saul, not it is Paul and Barnabas.

Who were "them which were of reputation?" He names three of them (Cephas, James, and John) but does not say if there were other apostles present. James is the half-brother of the Lord (the other James, the brother of John was dead (Acts 12:1f). There may also have been others present, possibly a select group of leaders. By gaining the support of this group the open conference could be approached with a greater degree of confidence. This group could shape the decision of the public conference.

So far as we know Paul had not met John before. He had met Peter and James at in Jerusalem, but John was not there at the time of his visit following his flight from Damascus. "Lightfoot has much to say about the Big Four (St. Paul and the Three) who here discuss the problems of mission work among Jews and Gentiles. It was of the utmost importance that they should see eye to eye" [ATR, S'master Bible].

LEST... I SHOULD RUN ...IN VAIN. Paul had invested a significant part of his life in the mission to which he had been called by the Lord. He had done battle with the Judaizers and now he was prepared to debate them again. At issue was the very future of mission among the Gentiles. Paul and others who follow him in an effort to reach Gentiles for the Lord must go out with a common message. There could be no mixed signals. If they left Jerusalem in a state of confusion about how Gentiles could be saved, they results would have been disastrous. The kind of confusion created by the Judaizers in Galatia at the time Paul wrote this letter would have been commonplace. He had not come this far to lose, and he knew the support of these leaders was crucial.

His enemies were formidable and they were on their home turf. He had to be sure all his efforts were not in vain. The Judaizers may well have assumed that the twelve apostles and James the Lord's brother would side with them against Paul and Barnabas. Peter had already been before the Jerusalem Church for his work in Caesarea (Acts 11:1-18). James was considered a very loyal, and very conservative Jew. Furthermore, these leaders, like the Judaizers, were all Palestinian Jews, while Paul and Barnabas were Hellenistic Jews.

2:3-5. Paul here pauses to add an interlude about Titus. He obviously had a reason for taking Titus with him to the Jerusalem for the conference. He wanted to win a victory against the Judaizers and then use Titus for a test case. The conflict had developed when he and Barnabas had returned to Antioch of Syria to reported on the success of the Gospel on the First Missionary Journey. When

they reported that Gentiles were being saved, the Judaizers were quick to challenge them. They were led by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem to seek a solution to the conflict in a forum which included the early leaders of the Christian movement. Paul obviously anticipated a victory in Jerusalem and knew he would revisit those churches which were founded on the First Missionary Journey where he would report on the Jerusalem Conference. He knew there might be questions and by taking Titus, a Gentile, with him as a test case he could avoid further misunderstanding.

According to Acts 15 and Galatians 2, Paul met first with the leaders of the church; and then with a smaller caucus, probably to lay the ground work for the main meeting. After this he met with the larger group (and open meeting) to present his case. They agreed that Gentiles could be saved without having to be circumcised (accept Jewish law or become a Jew).

2:3 - TITUS. Paul had Titus there on the scene to test his victory. They did not compel Titus to be circumcised. There is an obvious connection between this case and that of Timothy whom Paul circumcised (Acts 16:3). In Timothy's case circumcision seemed expedient because he was a half Jew and would be working with Jews who would not accept him otherwise. Circumcision had nothing to do with his salvation, it simply removed a stumbling block with the Jews. Paul, however, had no intention of having Titus circumcised. He is very clear about that. To yield in this instance would be an admission that circumcision, hence all the Jewish ceremonial law, was essential to salvation.

2:4 - FALSE BRETHREN. Evidently some of the Judaizers or their sympathizers whom Paul and the other leaders had not invited slipped into the meeting in order to spy on them - as the type is predisposed to do. They were there to make a cunning, or deceptive, investigation for an evil purpose. The evil intent of these spies is highlighted in this verse by the double reference to their presence: "brought in unawares," and "to spy out our liberty" to the intent that they would pull them from the freedom of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, back into bondage of the works of the Law. It was that simple - - and it was that serious.

But, if they were truthful, they would have to report the opinion (by consensus of the leaders) reached, but they would also have to report that Paul had a Greek, Titus, with him and when Paul set him before them and asked what they would do with him, then agreed that Titus would not have to be circumcised.

2:5 - WE GAVE ...NOT AN HOUR. Paul and Barnabas stood against the Judaizers who challenged the Gospel they preached, and apparently demanded the circumcision of Titus. They would not give any ground to the enemies of grace, did not yield to their demands even for a for a minute. They would not yield on spiritual grounds and they would not yield to these false brethren in order to have peace or promote harmony. A compromise with false brethren, or false doctrine can only produce a false peace. We need unity, but unity must be in the Lord and according to "the truth of the Gospel."

The language is strong but it was call for in light of the deceitful behavior of these antagonists.

Robertson is right:

“It was a grave crisis to call for such language. The whole problem of Gentile Christianity was involved in the case of Titus, whether Christianity was to be merely a modified brand of legalistic Judaism or a spiritual religion, the true Judaism (the children of Abraham by faith). The case of Timothy later was utterly different, for he had a Jewish mother and a Greek father. Titus was pure Greek” [S'master Bible].

2:6 - SEEMED TO BE SOMEWHAT. They seemed to be something, not someone. We must avoid the temptation to jump to the conclusion that Paul is showing the arrogance of some among the intellectual elite who hold the uneducated in disdain. He had been trained as a Pharisee but he is not looking down with pharisaic contempt on unsophisticated Galilean fishermen. In the age of the psychologist in which we live a person might read this and conclude that the Thirteenth Apostle was having a little problem with his self-esteem as he recalled his appearance before what some have called "The Big Three" (James, Cephas, and John). But this is not ego talking. God does not recognize personal distinctions, and he will make none.

This is a long and complicated sentence, in which we find two parentheses. It seems on the surface that Paul may be putting down the three best known and most influential Christians of the day, but he really means no disrespect. His purpose is to assert his independence from them. He is a God-called Apostle, not a usurper.

WHATSOEVER THEY WERE. Literally, "What sort they once were." James had known Jesus all his life and Peter and John and his brother (James, the son of Zebedee) had followed Him for three years and formed the inner circle of Apostles. The apostle James had been martyred in AD 44. By AD 51, James, the half-brother of our Lord had taken his place with Peter and John as chief leaders of the church. The position, or relationship, they once had with Jesus was of no consequence to Paul. Why? Because "God accepteth no man's person" (no respecter of persons) and Paul has simply adopted the attitude of his Lord. What effect would it have on churches everywhere if all Christians adopted this attitude?.

Lightfoot held that these three leaders were the ones who suggested the compromise about Titus. Robertson, however, argues against this claim. He wrote, "That is a possible, but not the natural, interpretation of this involved sentence. The use of 'de' (but) in verse 6 seems to make a contrast between the three leaders and the pleaders for compromise in verses 4f" [ATR, S'Master].

ADDED NOTHING TO ME. Of the men of reputation and influences whom he names in vs. 8f (Peter, James, and John) Paul says, "They added nothing in the conference to me." The Judaizers had tried to win them, but when they understood Paul and Barnabas, they finally came over to their side, and as Robertson points out, "Paul won his point, when he persuaded Peter, James, and John to agree with him and Barnabas in their contention for freedom for the Gentile Christians from the bondage of the Mosaic ceremonial law" [ATR, S'Master].

We must remember Paul's purpose in writing about the Jerusalem Conference to the Galatians. Roots of the conflict between Paul and the Judaizers reached back to the conference and the controversy in Antioch of Syria which spawned it. In addition, they appealed to the authority of the apostles in Jerusalem to support their charges that Paul was not an authentic apostle. So, he makes the point that the top three apostles (James, like Paul was appointed by Jesus as an apostle), added nothing to his call, his appointment, or his qualifications as an apostle.

2:7 - CONTRARIWISE. After He had stated his case in the private conference, the key leaders, rather than support the Judaizers, boldly threw their support behind Paul and Barnabas. They openly supported them against the radicals who created the controversy as well as the compromisers of verse 4. This is a more reasonable interpretation than the view expressed by some that Peter, James, and John first proposed the circumcision of Titus, but were persuaded by Paul to change their minds and support him.

WHEN THEY SAW. What he is saying that, after they heard our side of the issue, "they saw that I had been intrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter with the gospel of the circumcision " (ASV). There was a clear understanding between the missionaries and the apostles in Jerusalem with regards to their sphere of ministry. Paul (and Barnabas) had been appointed to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, and Peter (and his associates) were appointed to the ministry of the Gospel among the Jews. In time, Peter and John would be working among the Gentiles. At the conclusion of the Third Missionary Journey, James, our Lord's brother, was unquestionably the leader (pastor), and most influential Christian in Jerusalem. The language denotes a distinction in the sphere of their work, not in the Gospel. They both preached the true Gospel - which is more than can be said of the Judaizers.

The point is that Paul had the support of the apostles in Jerusalem, contrary to the claims of the radical who stirred up the trouble Galatia. Therefore it is "hardly fair to the Three to suggest that they at first championed the cause of the Judaizers in the face of Paul's strong language in verse 5" [ATR, S'Master].

2:8 - WROUGHT EFFECTIVELY. For emphasis the author parenthetically repeats the conclusion of verse 7. The apostles, in the private conference concluded that just as God had called Peter to be an apostle to the Jews, He had called Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles. The Judaizers attacked his apostleship, but the top three apostles in Jerusalem clearly accepted it. Paul clearly recognizes Peter's apostleship and Peter recognizes Paul's apostleship, which conclusively refutes the claims that Paul was not a true apostle because he was not one of the twelve.

2:9 - WHEN THEY PERCEIVED. When James, Cephas, and John perceived the grace of God in calling Paul to declare the Gospel to the Gentiles the issue was settled - at least, it was settled in their minds. It should have been settled in the minds of the Judaizers. Unfortunately, there are some people who profess to know the Lord who are controlled by Satan to the extent that they will attack anyone who disagrees with them. They cannot accept constructive criticism. In fact, there are a few of them respond to any restraint or resistance with hatred.

A pastor once talked with me about a problem. When the Pastor Search Committee was dealing with him he became acquainted with members and their families. One lady in particular seemed excited about his moving onto the field and made it a point to tell him so the first Sunday he was there as pastor. The next morning she came to his office and announced, "I want you to do something about the messages on the sign out front," and throwing a copy of the Sunday bulletin on his desk and demanded that he "do something" about it. He paused, trying to think what he might say and then asked what she had in mind. She offered some suggestions and he said, "Well, I could talk with the deacons about it." Her smile disappeared and her eyes instantly became hard and cold and from that day she refused to speak to him. Like the Judaizers, she did not get her way and instead of seeking a reconciliation, she became bitter enemy.

RIGHT HANDS OF FELLOWSHIP. After Peter, James, and John perceived the grace that was given to him, they gave Paul and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship. This was a "Dramatic and concluding act of the pact for cooperation and coordinate, independent spheres of activity. The compromisers and the Judaizers were brushed to one side when these five men shook hands as equals in the work of Christ's Kingdom. In other words, they shook hands on it" [ATR, S'Master].

2:10 - REMEMBER THE POOR. They mutually agreed to keep the poor in mind and to abstain from immorality, from things strangled and from blood (Acts 15:20). This would not save anyone, nor would failure to observe dietary restrictions prevent salvation, but it would open the door for fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. The private meeting ended with the hands of fellowship and an encouragement to remember the poor, which Paul and Barnabas said they were already doing.

Paul does not mention the second general, or public meeting (Acts 15:6-29) but goes on to deal with Peter's conduct in Antioch. The Jerusalem was a complete success for Paul and Barnabas, for the Gospel of grace, and for these Gentiles to who he is writing. It was a victory the Judaizers could not prevent in Jerusalem, but were determined to win in Galatia.

F. Paul Rebukes Peter at Antioch, 2:11-14.

2:11 - ANTIOCH. Antioch was capitol of the province of Syria, not Antioch of Pisidia (Pisidian Antioch), which was one of the Galatian churches Paul and Barnabas founded on the First Missionary Journey. By AD 51 it was the center of Gentile Christianity (where believers were first called Christians) and it was in the process of becoming the center for the spread of the Gospel.

The Church in Jerusalem was still the most important church in the world, primarily because of all the great leaders in the church with a solid background in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Following the martyrdom of Stephen, Christians were scattered and everywhere they went they preached the Gospel. When word of the phenomenal success of the Gospel in Antioch reached Jerusalem they sent Barnabas to minister there. The work continued grow so rapidly that Barnabas

needed help, he went to Tarsus and found Saul whom he had befriended several years before in Jerusalem (see Acts 11). When news reached them that the saints in Jerusalem were in need, believers in Antioch sent relief by Barnabas and Saul (11:27-30). Later, as they "ministered to the Lord, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). Following this they, with John Mark, went on the First Missionary Journey, which saw Mark turn back and Barnabas and Saul continue to Galatia where churches were planted. Their report when they returned to Antioch that Gentiles were being saved precipitated the controversy and the Jerusalem Conference.

I WITHSTOOD HIM TO HIS FACE. After Barnabas and Saul (Roman, Paul among Gentiles) returned from Jerusalem, Peter came to Antioch to visit the believers. While he was there he behaved in such a way that Paul felt compelled to rebuke him to his face. In Jerusalem he had stood face to face with Peter as an equal; in Antioch he withstood him to his face as a superior (morally). ***2:12 - FOR.*** "For" points to the reason Peter was to blame and deserving of Paul's rebuke. The Christian must avoid of two temptations in a situation like this. The first is the temptation to remain silent when we should speak up, either to rebuke someone, or simply to take a stand on some issue. The other is to be too quick to rebuke or to condemn someone else. Most of us have been guilty of both at one time or another. We must know when to speak and when not to speak, and that is not always easy. Like Paul, we should be sure there is a good reason before we rebuke another person.

FROM JAMES. Does the statement "before that certain came from James" mean that Paul is implying that these "certain" people had been sent by James to Antioch to investigate reports of the conduct of either Peter or the other Jewish believers, as some scholars have suggested? There is little doubt that these believers from Jerusalem intimated that they "from James." But, as Robertson points out:

“That idea is inconsistent with the position of James as president of the conference and the author of the resolution securing liberty to the Gentile Christians. No doubt these brethren threatened Peter to tell James and the church about his conduct and they reminded Peter of his previous arraignment before the Jerusalem Church on this very charge” (Ac 11:1-18) [ATR, S'master].

It has been pointed out that the Jerusalem Conference did not discuss the matter of social relations between Jews and Gentiles. However, at the conclusion of the conference James wrote and read a "sentence" (opinion?) that would serve as a guideline for fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers (Acts 15:19ff).

HE DID EAT. The imperfect tense is used: It was his habit to eat with the Gentiles. Before Jews showed up from Jerusalem Peter regularly ate with Gentiles and obviously saw no problem with it. It may help to remember that these Jews "from James" were Palestinian Jews. Hellenistic Jews, like Barnabas, Saul, and others in Antioch had lived among Gentiles and were more open to association with Gentiles than the Palestinian Jews. Peter had previously been condemned for associating with Gentiles (Acts 11:1ff.).

HE BEGAN TO DRAW BACK. Here the imperfect means "he began to draw himself back" (or, he began to withdraw). Peter ate with Gentiles until Jewish Christians from Jerusalem showed up in Antioch and then he withdrew himself from them. His action was hypocritical in Paul's eyes and he says he rebuked him to his face. Not only was his action hypocritical, it placed in jeopardy the recent victory at the Jerusalem in which Peter had made the most persuasive speech. Peter was instrumental in winning the victory he was now compromising. The thought of Paul rebuking Peter might be disturbing to some people, but if there is anyone in all the New testament we could picture rebuking Peter it would surely be Paul.

2:13 - DISSEMBLED. The word denotes play acting, which is, in fact, hypocrisy. Not only was Peter hypocritical, he led others into the same sin. Peter was a powerful leader of men and often influenced others to trust and obey the Lord. But in this case he dishonored the Lord and led others to dishonor Him.

We learn some valuable lessons from this. In the first place, no one is so great in the Lord that he will not be tempted to sin, and Satan knows where we are most vulnerable. Satan knew Peter's Achilles heel. He had seen him deny Christ to a group of servants who could do no more than laugh at him. The Lord had to prepare him miraculously go to the home of Cornelius. And now, in Antioch, he seemed to have no problem eating with Gentiles until these Jews arrived from Jerusalem and he withdrew from the Gentiles.

It is this writer's conviction that Simon Peter withdrew from the Gentiles in Antioch when the Jews arrived because of the fear of ridicule. Why did he deny Christ to the servants? Jesus had secured the freedom of His disciples, so there was no immanent threat from the authorities. The servants had no authority and apparently presented no threat. the very worst thing could do was to ridicule him. What did God do to prepare Peter for the invitation to go to the home of Cornelius? In Acts 10:9-16 we find the account...

There is a second lesson we may learn from Peter. We are not told what Peter's reaction was to Paul's rebuke. But we do know what he did after denying Christ. The Bible tells us he repented (he went out and wept bitterly). We are not told that Peter repented in Antioch, but it may be inferred from the fact that God continued to use him and he was very effective among Gentiles. We know that from this time until his martyrdom in AD 68 Peter poured out his life for Jesus as he preached the Word to both Jews and Gentiles.

The third lesson we learn from Peter's sin is that the consequences of sin can be far reaching. We do not know what effect it had on the Gentiles who were slighted by Peter, though it is doubtful that they missed it. It might well have been their reaction that caused Paul to see the problem. But aside from the effects the sin had on the victims of his bigotry, there was another group that was greatly influenced by it. Paul informs us that "the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy" (2:13, NKJV). Christian leaders have an awesome responsibility to those less mature in the Lord's work. The fall of a few televangelists, a

few pastors, and some other Christians leaders in recent times has caused serious damage to the spread of the Gospel in America. Following news reports of the fall of evangelist, Jimmy Swaggart, Bobby Ready said, "Imagine the response I get when I tell people I am an evangelist from Baton Rouge."

After a contemporary Christian singer confessed to adultery and return awards he had received, a number of people asked me if I thought he should start singing in concerts and recording Christian songs again. When I expressed reservations, I was a little surprised by the reaction. "You have to forgive him, you have to forgive him!" I tried to explain that there is a greater issue than my forgiveness. If he has repented God has forgiven him and he can find a place of service. But once a person has held the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ up to nationwide ridicule and made the ministry the target of late-night TV jokes, that person had better be very sure that it is the Lord Who is leading them to resume that ministry. He will be forgiven if he repents and there are things he can do for the Lord, but before he goes back into the pulpit he should be as sure that it is God will as he was of his call to the Gospel ministry in the first place.

In the fourth place, we should make an application of the lessons we learn. The fear of ridicule is the besetting sin of many Christian witnesses today. There are strong, courageous men who tremble at the thought of asking a neighbor, "Does Jesus live in your heart?" God gave Peter a victory of the sin of the fear of ridicule and he will give his servant a victory of that fear today. He will replace the spirit of fear and cowardice with a spirit of boldness and assurance.

Why did Paul rebuke Peter instead of all the Jews? Why was he singled out? This was a solemn moment when Paul saw the victory of the Jerusalem Conference in danger of slipping away from them. Peter's influence was such that even Barnabas was joining the other Jews as they slinked off with Peter in his cowardice. The next question is, why did Paul write to the Galatians about his rebuking of Peter? The answer comes in two parts. First, Paul is the human instrument, the Holy Spirit the source of the message. In the second place, this answers the charge that Paul had been the student of Peter. In this case he was the instructor and Peter the student.

2:14 - THEY WALKED NOT UPRIGHTLY. When Paul saw Barnabas and the other Jews were following Peter's example he confronted him publicly. Peter had condemned himself - Paul had simply rebuked him. After the great victory in Jerusalem, would Peter now make the Gentiles become Jews before they could sit at the table with him? Would he *Judaize* them? In essence, he asked, "If you and I found that we could not be saved by the works of the Law, why impose this on the Gentiles?"

Paul rebuked Peter before the group because Peter had acted publicly and the other Jews were following him. After publicly supporting Paul in Jerusalem, he comes to Antioch and publically strikes at the very point settled in the Jerusalem Conference. The Lord blessed the fellowship in that there was no permanent rift between Paul and Peter or between Paul and Barnabas remained friends, even though they soon separated over John Mark.

Before condemning Peter, let's take a look in the mirror. How many church members dismiss certain people as prospects for their church because "they are not our kind? I sat with a friend at a state evangelism conference a number of years ago and listened to the pastor of a local church "share" outreach tips he used in his ministry. He told about flying from Mississippi to a northern state to visit a family that was moving to his city (obviously before any other pastor could get to them). At that point someone whispered, "Yes, but there are a lot of lost people living in the shadow of his church and he has never walked across the street to witness to them."

As a student pastor I was excited about a number of young people and children we were reaching. I was picking them up for services and taking them home afterwards. I mentioned a number of them to a church leader and her response was, "That's nice, but that's not helping our treasury at all."

The pastor of a growing church was invited to speak to an evangelism class at a seminary. He told about a rather sophisticated church that called him as an associate pastor. He began reaching a lot of young people so when he was asked to attend a deacons meeting he assumed they were going to encourage him, or possibly give him a raise. He was shocked when he was told, "Those are not our kind of people."

G. Justification Through Faith, 2:15-21.

Dr. Wayne Ward, Professor of Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, once called this section the most perfect summary of Paul's theology to be found in any of his letters. Bible students are well aware of the doctrinal content of Romans and Ephesians, but in our study of Paul's letter to the Galatians one may get caught up in the controversy between Paul and the Galatians and fail to appreciate the great depth of the divine truth which strikes at the very heart of the Gospel message.

2:15 - SINNERS OF THE GENTILES. The Jews thought of all Gentiles as sinners by contrast with themselves. To them the very word Gentiles was synonymous with sinners. It was commonly held that Gentiles were fit only for fodder for the fires of hell. Is Paul attributing this attitude to Peter, or simply reminding him that this is the attitude of the Jews from Jerusalem to which he is yielding? In Romans, Paul lists many advantages in being a Jew, but his attitude was not the same as the average Jew, who felt that as a member of the chosen race he was superior to other people.

The late Dr. W. W. Stevens began teaching in the Bible Department at Mississippi College about 1955 or 1956, a short time after the 1954 Supreme Court decision which opened the door to racial integration of schools and other institutions in America. As barriers fell there were many community debates concerning what steps to take and how to implement changes. Occasionally the debate deteriorated into a heated arguments, or even a shouting matches. Dr. Stevens told his class about one such meeting in a Kentucky town where he has served as pastor before coming to Mississippi College. As the meeting progressed it seemed that more heat than light was being

thrown on the subject. A Jewish business man was insisting that they speed up the process when someone demanded of him, "Would you want your daughter to marry a black man?" Quickly he snapped back, "No, or any other Gentile!"

Unfortunately, such attitudes have not been put to rest. Racial bigotry has been responsible for many problems in society. There is tension between races throughout the world. In Jesus, and only in Jesus, is there an answer to this problem. Man's solutions have helped people to a certain degree, but often at the expense of others. For example, reverse discrimination may provide a job for a minority person, but two problems may be created by such action. A better qualified person may be denied a job on the basis of reverse discrimination and end up resenting the individual, or the group from which the individual comes who is given the job he feels he is entitled to and for which he may be better qualified. The second problem is the attitude it creates in the individual who gets a job on the basis of such discrimination. What does that do for his sense of worth and his self-confidence? Man's solutions may provide some economic benefits for a period of time, but may drive the wedge that separates groups deeper and create more serious problems.

Christians have the answer in Jesus Christ as Paul says in Gal. 3:28: "There can be *neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female*; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus" (ASV, Italics mine).

2:16 - JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH. Is Paul addressing this statement (2:16-21) to Peter, or to all those present, both Jews and Gentiles? Or, is he simply teaching the Galatians in light of the controversy? The Bible is very clear about this basic doctrine. Justification is not accomplished in full or in part by the works of the Law. Justification is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Eh. 2:8). To Martin Luther, this was the Magna Carta" of Christian liberty. Paul elaborates on this in Romans 1:17; 5:1; 11:6 and in other epistles.

The church in every generation has faced the challenge of teaching the doctrine of Justification by Faith to the saved as well as to the unsaved. After hearing the gospel explained, people often say, "You mean there's nothing I can do to deserve it? That's too easy." It seems natural for people to object to the idea that God's unmerited favor can be given so freely to unworthy sinners. Many find it difficult to trust a God who offers salvation as a free gift.

G. Campbell Morgan told of a coal miner who came to him and said, "I would give anything to believe that God would forgive my sins, but I cannot believe that He will forgive them if I just ask Him. It is too cheap." Morgan said, "My dear friend, have you been working today?" "Yes, I was down in the mine." "How did you get out of the pit? Did you pay?" "Of course not. I just got into to cage and was pulled to the top." "Were you not afraid to entrust yourself to that cage? Was it not too cheap?" Morgan asked. "Oh no," said the miner, "it was cheap for me, but it cost the company a lot of money to sink the shaft." Suddenly the truth struck him. What had not cost him anything -- salvation -- had not come cheap to God. This miner had never thought of the great price God paid to send His Son so He could rescue fallen humanity. Now he realized that all anyone had to do was to "get into the cage" by faith [Bible Ill.: #12203].

Justification means to declare, or pronounce righteous. It is one of several metaphors Paul uses to help explain salvation in Christ. Redemption is a metaphor of the slave block; propitiation, a metaphor of the sacrificial system; and Justification, a metaphor of the court, or judicial system. It does not mean to be righteous, nor does it point to a process by which one is saved. It means simply to be declared righteous (on the basis of the completed work of Jesus Christ on the Cross).

There are many glorious testimonies from individuals who struggled in frustration in search of justification through works. The necessity of the new birth is vividly portrayed in the life of George Whitefield. At 16 he became deeply convicted of his sin. He tried everything to become acceptable to God. He wrote, "I fasted for 36 hours twice a week. I prayed formal prayers several times a day and almost starved myself to death during Lent, but only felt more miserable. Then by God's grace I met Charles Wesley, who put a book in my hand that showed me from the Scriptures that I must be 'born again' or be eternally lost." Finally, Whitefield understood that he had to trust in Jesus Christ. He believed and was both forgiven and changed [Bible Ill.: #2154].

THREE THEORIES OF JUSTIFICATION

There really are but three theories of Justification. Some groups, or individuals, may not want to be placed in either of these categories, either because they do not want to be categorized, or because they honestly believe they do not belong in either category. But aside from some cultic belief, or New Age claim that you just need to discover that you are God, or that you are the Christ you seek, everyone does fit into one of these categories.

1. JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS

Paul wrote to the Galatians, "Knowing that a man is **not justified by the works of the law** but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for **by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified**" (Gal. 2:16 NKJV).

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, **not of works, lest anyone should boast.** (Eph 2:8-9 NKJV)

2. JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE PLUS WORKS

Man is not saved by any combination of grace plus works. Nor, can he be saved by grace and then maintain his salvation by works. Paul was shocked that the Galatians thought they could be saved by grace plus circumcision. He was equally shocked by the implication that one could be saved by grace and then come back and add works later. How could they not see the folly of such a preposterous teaching? He wrote, "Are you so foolish? **Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?** (Gal 3:3 NKJV)

Paul was inspired to reveal to us through the Epistle to the Romans that grace and works are mutually exclusive approaches to God and His salvation. Either, in any measure, cancels out the other. No one is saved by "grace through" plus anything else, be it baptism, good works, or set of rules, regulations, and revelations. Jesus Christ is totally, completely adequate, as John MacArthur stresses in two of his books - *Charismatic Chaos* and *Our Sufficiency in Christ*. See Romans 11:6 (NKJV):

"And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work."

3. *JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE*

1. (Gal 2:16 NKJV) - Knowing that a man is **not justified by the works** of the law but **by faith in Jesus Christ**, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.
2. (Gal 2:21 NKJV) - I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.
3. (Eph 2:8 NKJV) - **For by grace you have been saved through faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.
4. (Rom 5:1 NKJV) - Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
5. (Rom 8:1-4 NKJV) There is therefore now *no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit*. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

There are three theories of justification and every denomination subscribes to one of these theories. There are people who believe one is saved by good works. Once when I was in seminary I talked with the pastor of a church in a county-seat town. The pastor seemed capable and committed to his church. He was loved and respected by the members. Initially, I was impressed with the minister, but as we talked I discovered that he placed a lot of emphasis on activities, but little on sound doctrines. For example, when I asked about sermon preparation he answered, "Well, you see, a lot of preachers have to study, but I don't. You see, I have intellect." He made three attempts to say that he preached extemporaneously, but I finally had to pronounce the word for him. Finally, I asked

him what he told people they had to be saved. He responded enthusiastically, "I tell them they have to go to church and do right." In other words, justification by works.

A Jewish rabbi spoke to a group at a Baptist college. A student asked him, "What do you see as the main difference between Jews and Christians?" Without any hesitation, He replied, "You Christians believe that all you have to do is believe on someone else (Jesus) in order to have salvation. We Jews believe we have to work for what we get." He couldn't have stated it better.

Many believe in justification by grace plus works. These fall into two categories. First, there some who teach that in order to be saved you must believe in Jesus and be baptized, or believe and do good works, or live up to Biblical standards (or abstain from certain things). Second, there are many who teach that one receives salvation by grace and grace alone. However, after he is saved by grace, he must live up to certain things, or abstain from certain things. Failure to do so will result in the loss of salvation. That is justification by grace plus works; the former group adds works in order to obtain salvation, and the latter in order to maintain one's salvation.

To hold that after a person is saved he must either do certain things, or abstain from certain things in order to keep his salvation is to transfer the saving power of God from Justification to Sanctification. The Christian works (serves, ministers) because he has been saved by grace through faith - unto good works. He works because he is saved, not in order to maintain his salvation. A distinction must be made between the root of salvation (Justification) and the fruit of salvation (Sanctification). To subscribe to this view is like nailing a sign to the Cross that says, NECESSARY BUT INADEQUATE (Essential, but Insufficient).

Fortunately, there are those who hold the third view - salvation by grace and grace alone. As seen above, this is the Scriptural position. Many other passages teach that salvation is by grace and grace alone (pure grace). This theory is Scriptural, but there is more. If you accept the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, you can accept the doctrine of security of believers. If you accept what the Bible has to say about security of believers you will have greater assurance of salvation and if you have assurance of salvation, you will find greater joy in your salvation.

J. Wilbur Chapman often illustrated God's grace with the testimony given by a certain man in one of his meetings:

"I got off at the Pennsylvania depot as a tramp, and for a year I begged on the streets for a living. One day I touched a man on the shoulder and said, "Hey, mister, can you give me a dime?" As soon as I saw his face I was shocked to see that it was my own father. I said, "Father, Father, do you know me?" Throwing his arms around me and with tears in his eyes, he said, "Oh my son, at last I've found you! I've found you. You want a dime? Everything I have is yours." Think of it. I was a tramp. I stood begging my own father for ten cents, when for 18 years he had been looking for me to give me all that he had."

What a wonderful illustration of the way God longs to treat us, if we will only let Him [Bible Illustrator, Parsons Tech., 9-22-88, #1445].

Justification by grace, through faith, is a critical doctrine and it is imperative that Christians seek to understand what the Bible has to say on the subject. When Martin Luther discovered the truth about Justification through faith, he launched the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Luther wrote, "When the article of justification has fallen, everything has fallen." He added, "This is the chief article from which all other doctrines have flowed." He insisted that "It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour" [Boice: 416]. John Calvin, who followed Luther, also made a great contribution to the Reformation. Calvin said that Justification by faith is "the main hinge on which religion turns" [Boice: 416].

James Montgomery Boice, in his one volume work of theology, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, emphasizes the point that "it is God who justifies and not we ourselves" [Boice: 417]. He appeals to Paul's letter to the Romans to support his claim: "All who believe . . . are justified by his (God's) grace as a gift" (Rom. 3:22-24). Also, "A man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (Rom. 3:28). He quotes Jon Murray (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 118):

"Justification is not our apology nor is it the effect in us of a process of self-excusation. It is not even our confession nor the good feeling that may be induced in us by confession. Justification is not any religious exercise in which we engage however noble and good that religious exercise may be. If we are to understand justification and appropriate its grace we must turn our thought to the action of God in justifying the ungodly" [Boice: 417].

Boice continues with a discussion of "the salvation triangle," propitiation, redemption, and justification, three metaphors used to help us understand the death of Christ. He uses them to connect Christ, the Father, and Christians:

"We are the recipients of two acts: redemption and justification. We contribute nothing to our salvation. Christ is the initiator of two acts: propitiation and redemption, for it is he who achieves salvation for us. God the Father is the recipient of one act: propitiation, Jesus satisfying God's wrath. On the basis of this the Father initiates the last act: justification, in which he reaches out in grace to reckon the ungodly to be right with himself."

No one is saved by good works but every person who is saved is saved unto good works (Eph. 2:9-10). Boice says "Here is where Roman Catholic theology and Protestant theology part company most radically. Although many Roman Catholics would heartily join with Protestants in affirming that justification is certainly by the grace of God through faith, they would say that works enter into justification in the sense that God justifies us in part by producing good works in us, so that we are justified by faith plus those works" [Boice: 424]. According to the Scripture we are justified by

faith alone. Boice illustrates the difference with two formulas. Catholic theology says:

Faith + Works = Justification

Protestants reply:

Faith = Justification + Works

Boice makes a valid point: “I disagree with Catholic theology at this point. But what are we to say of a theology, such as that dominant in today's evangelicalism, that does not have any place for good works? What are we to say of a teaching that extols justification apart from sanctification, forgiveness without a corresponding change in life? What would Jesus himself think of such theology” [Boice: 426].

2:17 - MINISTER OF SIN. This is an illogical inference. What he is saying is, “We are sinners already in spite of being Jews. Christ simply revealed to us our sin” [ATR -S'Master]. In essence, he says, “It just doesn't make sense to go back to that from which you have escaped.” But that is exactly what the Judaizers were demanding that they do.

2:18 - IF I BUILD. Here Paul shows how Peter had hopelessly contradicted himself. “When he lived like a Gentile, he tore down the ceremonial law. When he lived like a Jew, he tore down salvation by grace” [ATR, S'Master]. By building up that which had been destroyed, he says, “I make myself a transgressor.” This was an preposterous contradiction. His purpose is to show that he, Paul, was not subservient to Peter. His apostleship was not inferior to Peter's as the Judaizers had claimed. They could not discredit his message with that charge.

People often make charges against a preacher of the Gospel in order to discredit, or soften his message. If he preaches against adultery they wonder if he has noticed his daughter's dress lately. If he preaches against homosexuality, maybe someone in his family leans a little in that direction. If he preaches against alcohol, they speculate on whether or not he would take a drink if no one would ever find out about it. And if he has the courage to preach on divisive attitudes within the “fellowship,” he's been there too long.

Paul could not be discredited, would not be intimidated, and should not have been distracted by the charges by the Judaizers. As God protected and defended Paul from these vicious attacks, he will protect his servant today. The preacher should be prepared to compromise on the color of the carpet or the pew cushions, but he should not compromise Scriptural truth. He must be faithful and courageous and trust the Lord to take care of him and his family. The Lord's commitment to Israel as recorded in Isaiah 41:9b-10 should encourage him to be strong in the Lord.

“... Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away. 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.”

2:19 - THROUGH THE LAW...DEAD TO LAW. His purpose is not to condemn, or denounce the Law, but to put it in its proper place. In Romans 7:4, 6 he sheds more light on this:

Wherefore, my brethren, ye also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ; that ye should be joined to another, even to him who was raised from the dead, that we might bring forth fruit unto God. But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we were held; so that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter (ASV).

Blackwood wrote, "The principles of faith require one to go beyond law unto grace" (B'wood). He listed three steps:

- (1). Before law - sinful and ignorant of the fact.
- (2). Under law - sinful, aware of the fact, and unable to correct it.
- (3). Beyond law - free, because of justification by Jesus Christ [B'wood...].

Paul had come through the law to Christ. He was now he was free in Christ Jesus. As he wrote to the Roman church, "Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord " (Rom 5:20-21).

2:20 - CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST. This verse is full of meaning and rich in application. Some of the great themes of the Pauline epistles are found in this one verse. The believer was saved by grace through faith. He lives each day by faith, and not by the works of the law.

I LIVE. This points to the spiritual life, not biological life. He has life in Christ right now. In Christ you can have your cake and eat it, too! You are fully alive in Him now, but that does not take anything away from the life we will share with Him for all eternity. The point is, you do not have to wait until you get to heaven to enjoy eternal life.

2:21 - DO NOT FRUSTRATE. Paul moves on quickly to silence any critic who might accuse him of voiding the grace of God in the previous verse. He says, "I do not nullify grace." If salvation is by works Christ died in vain. If righteousness can be received in any way other than through faith in Jesus Christ, then the virgin birth, the perfect life, the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension mean nothing.

IF RIGHTEOUSNESS COME BY THE LAW. The Law has never saved anyone - it has never made anyone righteous. In the doctrinal section of Romans, Paul stresses the point that God demands righteousness of every person who stands before Him. No individual can produce righteousness in any measure, because we are all sinners and all of us "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), and all are under the sentence of death (Rom. 6:23). But "God commendeth His love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

God demands righteousness, but man cannot produce it. His highest attempt is described as "filthy rags." So, if we are to have any righteousness at all, we must receive it from God. But how? When a sinner repents and accepts Jesus Christ faith, the righteousness of God is imputed unto him. This is explained in Romans 4:3-6 (ASV):

For what saith the scripture? And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness. Even as David also pronounceth blessing upon the man, unto whom God reckoneth righteousness apart from works.

THEN CHRIST IS DEAD IN VAIN. The idea that God would do anything in vain is preposterous. If the Cross had not been necessary God would not have sent His Son to die such a horrible death. If any person could be saved apart from the grace of God, every person could be saved without it, and Christ truly would have died in vain.

This verse, answers the often repeated question: How can God condemn the heathen who have never heard the Gospel? There are many people who believe that if a person does the best he knows to do a loving God could never condemn them. In the first place, no one has ever done the best he could do, except Jesus Himself. This applies to the religious person as well as the moralist. To be saved by Law one would have to keep all the Law, and no one has ever done that but Jesus.

NOTE: To continue the study in the Book of Acts in

THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK,

Please see volume V in this series.