

"II Theophilus"
(An Introduction to the Book of Acts)

Acts-Facts

Who wrote it?.....Luke, a Greek physician--companion of Paul
When was it written?.....Between 65-70 A.D.
What language?.....Koine Greek - the "international" language
Oldest manuscript?.....Third-century papyrus roll of the Gospels
and Acts
How long is it?.....28 chapters; 1007 verses
What is its range?.....the ascension of Jesus to the
imprisonment of Paul (A.D. 30-70)
What is its purpose?....."To explain, along with Luke's Gospel,
the orderly and sovereignly directed
progress of the KINGDOM message,
from Jews to Gentiles, and from
Jerusalem to Rome." - S. Toussaint

Key to Interpretation

It is very important to see that the Books of Acts is describing a time of great TRANSITION in God's program for the world. A.D. 30-70, a brief period of four decades, was a time of great change in God's plan of redemption. The Kingdom of God has begun, and the final chapter in history has opened. The apostles were not super-Christians, incapable of failure or confusion. But they were called to live in a time when the whole program of God would undergo EXPANSION. Acts must be recognized as a *transitional* book. To miss this is to miss the very point of the book.

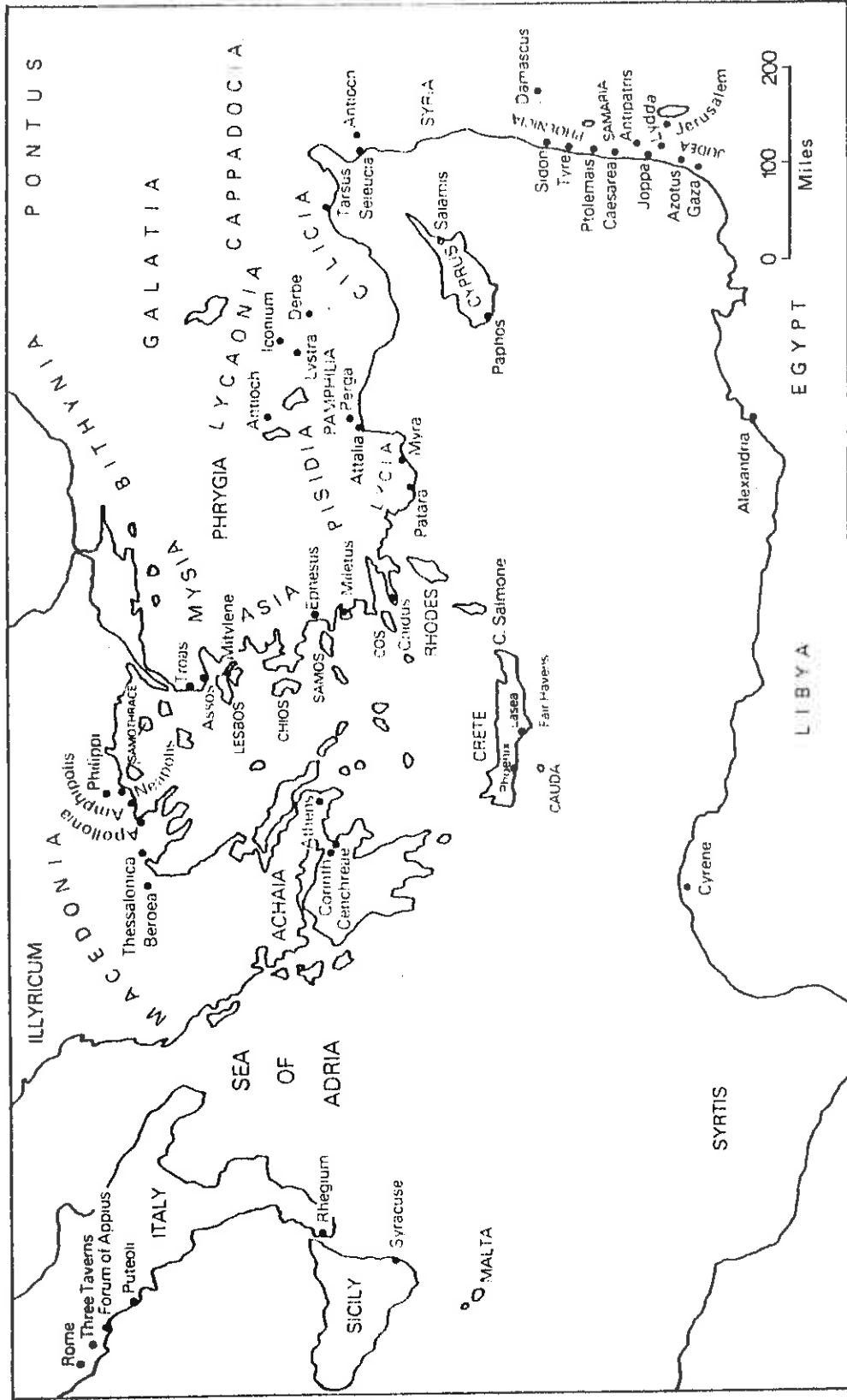
Applicational Problem

Our task is to draw out from Luke's text what things ("acts") we are intended to DUPLICATE, and which we are intended to appreciate and honor--but not to expect in our lifetimes. It is crucial to accept that God is sovereign--He can do anything on the planet--among Christians or non-Christians that He chooses. Matthew 24, I Thess.4, II Thess.2 and Revelation tell us that "signs and wonders" will again commence during the Tribulation. That will again be a time of world-wide *transition* in God's plan. But for now, which things that we read about in Acts are intended to be prescriptive as well as merely descriptive?

Benefits of Studying Acts

1. Recovery of spiritual fervor.
2. Understanding of the power of the Gospel to change people.
3. Encouragement that the Lord is the one who saves people.
4. Insight into how the "primitive" church was run, and the problems she encountered.
5. A love for God's Spirit, prompting more love for Jesus.
6. Motivation to participate in the *continuing* acts of the Spirit.
7. Knowledge of how the Gospels "fit" with the epistles.

The Near East in the first century AD



PENTECOST, PREACHING and PARTNERSHIP

Intro. This is one of the most exciting chapters in the New Testament, and it is fun to fantasize about being back with the earliest Christians in the first weeks after Jesus' ascension... even though they surely had their SPACE problems! We can draw much encouragement from reading about what the LORD was doing in their personal lives, and through the lives of their leaders. We can also see that the Lord touched many people at that time, and that this was His plan. Primitive Christianity was not just a social movement. It wasn't just a *psychologically-induced* anesthetic to the poverty and Roman oppression of the times. It was not a quasi-Jewish cult. It was the fresh and sovereign movement of God's Holy Spirit upon the hearts and minds of many people upon whom rested God's call (2:39).

Summary Three things happen in this chapter.

- I The empowerment of the apostles by the Holy Spirit. (2:1-13)
- II The occasion of Peter's first evangelistic sermon. (2:13-40)
- III The profound partnership felt by the community of new believers. (2:41-47)

Question? WHY did Luke record these events? Here are several reasons:

- * To provide a reliable historical account for his friend, Theophilus, of something very, very important
- * To testify in print that a new era in God's program for men had recently dawned--in fact, the beginnings of the Kingdom!
- * To affirm the pattern of Christian-community as a model of Spirit-filled behavior
- * To demonstrate the consistency of these events with the O.T.

"Glossalalia" In vs.4 Luke tells us that the group, were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues [glossalalia] as the Spirit was giving them utterance. This is also mentioned by Luke in 10:46 and 19:6, as well as by Paul in I Cor.12 & 14. But on here in Acts 2 is it actually described. "Glossalalia" was the supernatural ability to speak rationally in a known language, but UNKNOWN to the speaker. The purpose of this empowerment by Jesus' Spirit was to VALIDATE the message the apostles were bearing. The effect was to bless the hearers with a deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). The point was to provide a "SIGN that the nations would now begin to be gathered together in Christ, prefiguring the great day when the redeemed company will be drawn from every nation, tribe, people and language (Rev.7:9)...at Babel earth proudly tried to ascend to heaven, whereas in Jerusalem heaven humbly descended to earth (J.R.W. Stott).

The Effect of Pentecost The events of that day prompted an extraordinary and EXEMPLARY response. The church evidenced four priorities:

- * It was a learning church
- * It was a worshipping church
- * It was a loving church
- * It was an evangelistic church

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 3

Read Acts 3.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. (3:1) Why would Peter and John go to the Temple to pray?

2. Do you think Peter and John were friends? If so, why?

3. (3:6) Money often seems to have the ability to confuse people about what is important. Acts 8:18 is an interesting example of this. In 3:6, how does money come into the picture?

4. (3:11-26) What is the GOAL (the *why-he's-doing-it*) of Peter's second sermon?

5. (3:26) Peter describes his audience's "ways" as "wicked." That was bold since he was talking to Jews, who, as Jehovah-followers surrounded by Greek and Roman pagans considered themselves quite righteous. Do view yourself as "wicked?" Explain.

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 2

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. (2:1-13) What do you think the real significance of the Day of Pentecost was?

2. (2:1-12) How many aspects of this event should we consider as normal experience for Christians today?

3. (2:13) Can you find an application for our lives from *this* verse?

4. (2:14-36) Do you think it is notable that there are so many Old Testament references in this section? If so, WHY?

5. (2:23) From this verse, what do you think "foreknowledge" is?

6. (2:38) Think about this verse. What do you think the connection really was (in Peter's mind), between a. repentance, b. water baptism c. spirit baptism ?

7. (2:37-47) Luke says the people were "pierced to the heart" (or, "smitten in conscience") in vs.37. Do think that was the cause of the level of commitment to each other we read about in vss. 42-47?

8. (2:42-47) Which aspects of this description should we consider as normal experience for Christians today?

PRAYER, POWER and PREACHING

Intro. In Chapter 3, Luke uses the same kind of structure as he used in ch.2 to report what was going on:

1. a miraculous event, from a spectator's viewpoint;
2. a speech by Peter, which interprets the event in such a way as to glorify Christ.
3. an appeal to the crowd to REPENT (turn) in order that they might receive the promised blessings.

The Occasion of the Miracle 3 PM, one day not long after Pentecost. Peter and John are going to the Temple to pray. *Why would they do that?* Do you think Peter and John were friends?

The Miracle Itself An encounter with a congenitally crippled man who asks for "alms". Predictably, Luke has an obvious medical interest, in that he gives some detail of the beggar's problem. Peter and John are unable to give financial assistance. So often, money gets tied up in religious happenings. Here, it is using one of the more popular entrances to the Temple area for the purpose of gain--no doubt a opportunistic play upon the people's religiosity at the time of their "church-going." Peter and John are broke however, and cannot meet the man's expectations.

Note: Peter and John had surely seen this fellow previously. But their probably familiarity with him did not hinder them from deciding to use the chance to publicize the power and name of Jesus.

Note also: In so publicizing the name of Jesus, it is on the event of great good. We need to be a blessing to people and then tell them about Christ--not just "love 'em and leave 'em."

Note too: the quality of this apostolic healing (vs.16c). There was NO QUESTION as to its genuineness. The remaining information that needed to be shared was its source.

Peter Seizes the Opportunity Perhaps Peter and John were just as in awe at this miracle performed through them as was the crowd. When we see God working clearly through us, doesn't it cause us to WORSHIP? Peter then seizes the chance to share about Christ. Notice the central focus of the speech to the crowd: *YOUR NEED OF CHRIST*. Evangelistic speeches (preaching) should focus on Christ and the hearer's NEED of Him.

Peter Appeals to the Crowd Peter appeals not only to their intellects. He appeals also to their wills. He knew that saving-faith involves intellect, emotion AND the decision to turn to Christ.

Note: Peter's keen sense of God's sovereign government of the times and epochs (vss. 13a, 21, 24). This is because Peter was a "dispensationalist", one who recognizes certain stages or economies in how God has been unfolding the plan of redemption.

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 4

Read Acts 4.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. (4:2) Why would the resurrection of Jesus be such a volatile issue? Is it today?

2. (4:4) Did Peter's & John's arrest diminish the credibility of their message? Why or why not?

3. (4:12) Why do people struggle with this truth today?

4. (4:13) What qualities do Peter & John MODEL for us that Luke mentions in this verse?

5. (4:19,20) Is "civil disobedience" by a Christian ever justified? If so, when?

6. (4:28) There's that word again! What does it mean?

(Here's some other references that might help: Ephesians 1:5,11; Romans 8:29,30; 9:11; 11:5,7,28; Matt.24:31; I Tim.5:21; I Pet.5:13; I Thess.1:4; II Peter 1:10.)

7. (4:32-37) Describe these verses in your own words... What is happening here, and is it "prescriptive" or only "descriptive" insofar as we are concerned?

HARD TIMES "GLUE" US TOGETHER

Intro. The "day in the sun" didn't last long for the apostles of the Son! It is only weeks after the events of Easter--and the "Jesus" movement in Jerusalem has really caught hold. At center stage are some simple fishermen and other assorted scoundrels (Matthew), who strangely point not to *themselves* but to Jesus as the exalted and risen one. Now, right in full public view, these same unassuming *sent ones* ("apostles") heal a severely handicapped man and ascribe the power to do so as having come from Jesus. Many people are impressed and responding. The "establishment" is greatly bugged by this!

The Arrest & Hearing (4:1-12) Have you ever had a "run-in" with the police? What kind of "defense" went through your mind? Here, Peter and John are arrested, and then Peter (late of *denial* fame) experiences a complete change in confidence. Dependent on God's Spirit and FILLED with Him, he turns the tables and arraigns THEM before the bar of God!

? Why was--and why *is* the resurrection of Jesus such a volatile issue?

The Threat and Release (4:13-22) This is a classic passage that Christians often use to justify "righteous civil disobedience," and correctly so. There are definitely times when our loyalty to God's laws conflicts with man's laws--they are, perhaps, not often; but they do occur. Each believer must make it a prayerful matter of his own conscience as to *when* his calling to obedience to Christ compels him to humbly break man's laws. Questions to ask yourself:

1. Does my compliance with a certain manmade law ask me to break a Scriptural commandment?
2. Is there a biblical *principle* that would be violated by my compliance with a man-made law?
3. Is the testimony of Christ compromised by my breaking a law?

The Bonding of the Saints (4:23-37) The immediate result of this event was a bonding together of the saints. It wasn't something the church leadership legislated. It just happened. Period. Such concern and compassion for Christians has also been repeated on occasion through the centuries. Persecution often causes believers to open themselves up to greater dependence on each other.

? What, in this chapter, should we strive to duplicate in the church today?

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 5

Read Acts 5.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. (5:1-11) How do you respond to this incident?

2. (5:12-15) What were FIVE results of the demonstration of signs and miracles?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

3. (5:16) What is the quality, or, character of the healings that occurred?

4. (5:17-32) What similarities and what differences can you draw out from this section, and the events of 4:1-22?

Similarities:

Differences:

5. (5:33-42) Where's Gamaliel coming from? How do you evaluate him?

6. (5:40) What do you see that's significant in this verse?

THE SEVEN, AND THEIR LEADER

Intro. The groups of Jesus' followers are sometimes thought of by their number: the 12, the 3, the 120, the 500. In Acts 6 is another special group of disciples: the seven. We should note a) the CIRCUMSTANCES surrounding their selection, and b) the CHARACTER that they displayed, especially represented by one of their number, Stephen.

The Circumstances of the "Seven"

So far, Satan had failed to overcome the church by either persecution (chs. 4 & 5) or by corruption (5:3). Now he tries a more clever tactic: *distraction* away from the most important things. Please note several observations in ch. 6 about what is going on:

1. *Hebraioi* (Palestinian Jews) widows receiving preferential food service over the *Hellenestai* (Grecian Jews) widows.
2. All seven men selected to help out had Greek names (although this, in itself, doesn't prove anything).
3. Social administration was not *beneath* the apostles, but it was not their *calling*.
4. The apostles' job description here was simple:
 - a. prayer
 - b. the ministry (service) of the Word
5. The problem was a *goggysmos* (Gk.), a "complaint expressed in murmuring or grumbling". It tempered the excitement over the growth the church was experiencing.
6. The "seven" were *ordained* by the laying on of hands (vs.6).
7. The "seven" are not called *diakonois* (Gr.: "deacons"), although it is likely they were the prototypes for the later office.
8. Apostles and elders were never elected. The "seven" were. (vs.3)
9. After Stephen began his ministry, he met with a TYPICAL *resistance* to one clearly under the lead of God's Spirit:
 - a. theological argument
 - b. slander
 - c. violence

The Character of the "Seven" These men were required to be a) full of the Spirit, and b) full of wisdom (vs.3). Why should it matter whether a Christian is full of either, just to wait on tables?

Stephen was the outstanding "minister" here. He is described by five characteristics:

- a. full of faith (vs. 5)
- b. full of the Holy Spirit (vs. 5)
- c. full of grace (*sweetness*) (vs. 8)
- d. full of power (*strength*) (vs. 8)
- e. wisdom (vs. 10)

Dartmouth Bible Church
N. Dartmouth, MA

Thursday Evening Fellowship
Lesson 7 10/25/90

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR

Intro. Of the 23 sermons & speeches Luke recorded for his friend Theophilus in Acts (and for us through the Spirit), STEPHEN'S SPEECH in Acts 7 is by far the longest. Stephen picked out four major epochs of Israel's history:

I	Abraham and the patriarchal age	(7:2-8)
II	Joseph and the Egyptian exile	(7:9-19)
III	Moses, the exodus & the wanderings	(7:20-44)
IV	David, Solomon & the monarchy	(7:45-50)

Stephen's "Survey of the Old Testament" Stephen was driving at several points about the history of God's people. First, it was HE who initiated a saving, loving relationship with His people. Second, the people consistently seemed to turn off His spokesmen, even though their credentials were always impeccable! Third, the LAW and the TEMPLE were not ends in themselves--they pointed to what (or rather WHO) was coming--the Messiah. Fourth, Jesus (the Righteous One) was that Messiah, whom they betrayed and murdered. It was saying that they, the very elite of Israel, had essentially learned nothing from all their own history for they were making the same tragic errors made over and over again all through the Old Testament--"Don't tell us the truth; tell us what we want to hear."

Stott's View of this Chapter The commentator John R.W. Stott (an Episcopal clergyman) has an interesting view of why Luke gives us this extended "transcript" of Stephen's message. Stephen's message, Stott says, is not just a dramatic buildup to getting himself martyred. That Stephen died for the testimony of Christ was not at all insignificant, and he was the first to do so. But he was not the last. Many, many would die for Christ, and continue to do so down to this very day.

Rather, the significance of Stephen's message PROMOTED the spread of the Gospel. First, it underscored the providential presence of God WITH His people wherever they were. He was not imprisoned within the Temple* or within any other confines. He went with them through Haran, Egypt, the wilderness, Babylon and anywhere else they scattered. He would go with them now too, even as the new Church came under persecution. Indeed, Stephen's death would greatly IMPRESS young Saul of Tarsus, who witnessed the event and heartily agreed to it (8:1). Even though the Church was shocked and stunned by the martyrdom of Stephen at the time, we can see "how God's providence used Stephen's testimony, in word and deed, through life and death, to promote the church's mission " (Stott).

*In fact, even in Jesus' day, the Jews debated whether Yhwh inhabited that Temple in the same way He had the first Temple of Solomon (by what is called the "Shekinah glory.")

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 8

Read Acts 8.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. What kinds of persecution might we experience in the future?

2. (8:2) Who might these men who buried Stephen have been?

3. (8:3) What kind of an impact on your family would *your* imprisonment have? What kind of an impact on the families of those incarcerated in 8:3?

4. (8:4,5) Despite tribulation, what did the disciples do?

5. (8:8) Why rejoicing?

6. (8:20) Why such a hostile response from Peter? Surely a little profit-margin for the apostles couldn't hurt?

Why must churches be careful in the matter of money?

7. (8:25-40) What can we learn about baptism from this passage?

it was immediate

it was (evidently) 8:38 - "ordered" - in the presence of his entourage

it was in a good-sized piece of water

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 7

Read Acts 7.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. What are the only TWO EVENTS described in ch. 7?
a. _____ b. _____
2. What do you think is the significance of Luke's description of Stephen's appearance in 6:15?

3. Why do you think Stephen gave his survey of Israel's whole history to the Sanhedrin?

4. Did Jesus abolish the Temple? YES NO
5. Can your Christianity stand criticism? YES NO
6. (7:54b) HUH? _____
7. If it was not Stephen's *personal* adherence to Jesus that cost him his life, what was it?

8. (7:55,56) Why do you think Stephen was given this final vision?

9. Is there grace in martyrdom? Consider two factors in your answer:
a. Revelation 6:9-11
b. Moslems' belief that martyrdom--even *arranged* martyrdom--is an automatic ticket to heaven.

THE RESULTS OF PERSECUTION

Intro. Have you ever noticed that spiritual growth seems to occur more readily in times of *trial* than in times of prosperity? No one wants troubles, but it does seem that our faith is stretched and our reliance on God is challenged more so when we are going through difficulty. Such has always been the experience of Christians, even since the beginning--as we can see right in the beginning of ch. 8. Saul of Tarsus, a trained theologian with a vendetta against these new Nazarene-followers, was making it his personal mission to stamp out this new threatening movement. But he could not match the power of the Gospel.

The 2nd of the "Seven" After Stephen, Philip is mentioned by Luke as one of the seven chosen to serve. His character and close walk with God are as evident as Stephen's, for in this chapter we see the fruit of his ministry of evangelism. The apostles, back in Jerusalem, sent Peter and John to bolster the revival, and to be the means by which Samaria would receive God's Spirit. Very possibly Luke received the information in Ch. 8 from Philip himself. Most of Philip's preaching was to Gentiles along the Mediterranean seaboard. In this sense he was the forerunner of Paul. Philip preached in every port-city from Ashdod to Caesarea on the Sea (8:40). Apparently, he settled there since about 20 yrs. later Paul (on his last journey to Jerusalem) was a guest in Philip's home in this city (21:8,9). Philip had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy (female preachers?). His house was still being pointed out to travelers in the time of Jerome (the late 4th c.). Philip was heroic for his being one of the first to admit non-Jewish believers into the fellowship of the church. Prior to this, Samaritans were excluded, and they couldn't even convert to Judaism. It was Philip, not the apostles, who took the 1st step to overcoming Jewish prejudice, and expanding the church interracially in accordance with the Lord's command. Stott comments,

It is hard for us to imagine the boldness of the step Philip took in preaching the Gospel to the Samaritans...the hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans had lasted a thousand years.

The Encounter With the "Maharishi" What would it be like if Billy Graham was preaching and the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi was in the crowd, and was really affected by Graham's evangelistic message? That is sort of the scenario between Philip's preaching and miracle-working and Simon the Magician. Simon was no ordinary side-show huckster. He was a celebrity with a tremendous following and public esteem, and his nick-name was "God's mega-power" (8:10). He enjoyed a pagan popularity something akin to that of the Maharishi during the 1960's.

The question of most interest pertains to the exact nature of Simon's "believing" and how it demonstrates the peril of false-faith in people. Simon "believed" and therefore submitted to the ordinance of baptism. But he clearly had missed out on saving-faith and the Apostle Peter detected this right away. Peter's direct prescription to Simon (vs.22) called for 1) repentance and 2) earnest prayer for forgiveness of his evil motivation.

The Encounter With "Margaret Thatcher's Counsel" The rest of the chapter gives us Luke's record of Philip's next evangelistic opportunity, thrust upon him by the Holy Spirit--therefore attesting to his effectiveness as a

genuine evangelist. This is the means by which the Gospel is introduced into N.E. Africa, and church history tells us that ancient Ethiopia was an early hotbed of Christianity. The passage is wonderfully *significant* for it's display of:

- * the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit
- * the relevance of the Old Testament
- * the importance of believer's baptism
- * the power of the Gospel to open eyes
- * the opportunity of evangelism to internationals

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 9

Read Acts 9.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. In ch. 9, three subjects are dealt with: Saul's conversion (1-19), Beginning of Saul's ministry (20-30), Continuation of Peter's ministry (31-43). Draw out from each SUBJECT *one detail* which strikes you...

1-19

20-30

31-43

2. Look up Acts 26:14, where Paul gives his own testimony. Compare it with 9:4-6. What's different? What do the added words in 26:14 mean?

3. (vss.15 & 16) How are Jesus' words to Ananias describing BOTH Paul's *unique* calling, and the Christian-calling in general?

4. (vs. 31) Meditate on this verse... How is it applicable to us?

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N. Dartmouth, MA

Tuesday Evening Fellowship
Lesson 9 (Acts 9) 11/8/90

AN IMPORTANT CONVERSION

Intro. In the greatest sense, no one conversion is more significant than any other--each human who, through saving faith becomes a child of God represents a wonderful miracle! But from a human standpoint, some "conversions" end up bearing great fruit for the Kingdom! The conversion experience which transformed "The Enforcer", Saul of Tarsus, into Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ, is one of very great significance. The drama of his testimony is something he himself would use many times to witness for the power of the resurrected Jesus. In saving this man, and calling him for international ministry, the ranks of the Church would be swollen, its doctrine stabilized, and its message taken all the way to Rome. Paul's conversion drew great notice in his own thirty years of ministry, and has been providentially used of God ever since!

Saul of Tarsus VS. the Sovereign Grace of God

One thing that stands out in Paul's conversion experience, is WHO INITIATED IT. Saul did not "decide for Christ", as we might say. On the contrary, he was persecuting Christ. Rather, it was Christ who decided for him and intervened in his life. The Reformer Calvin notes, "...the cruel wolf was not only turned into a sheep, but also assumed the character of a shepherd." But God's sovereign grace was neither sudden (no advance preparation), nor compulsive (no response from Saul needed). In the first place, Saul was under conviction (26:14), and the Holy Spirit was working to draw him even BEFORE the conversion. Second, God's grace did not overwhelm, or spiritually "rape" him, but rather it ENABLED him to respond, as he wonderfully did.

NOTE: We read of no joy in Saul's first few days as a member of the "Way." Cf. 9:9. In fact, now he gets nothing (it seems) but trouble! (loss of sight, trauma, skeptical reaction from other Christians, persecution from Damascene Jews).

But Paul immediately sets out to minister. He is obviously excited! Conversion has a way of doing that, doesn't it? Verses 28 & 29 probably encapsulate the happiest time in Paul's life--even with danger around, he's having a ball, without all the great concerns which will soon invade his life. QUESTION: What can we apply from verse 31 to us?

Peter's Not Idle, Either! Luke then gives us two other medical-events (as he loves to do!) Aeneas is healed of paralysis and Tabitha is raised from the dead. Two *sterling* features demand notice: the totality of healing when Christ does it, and the indisputability of the event's genuineness. These features are what indict so much so-called "faith-healing" in America today. This is not to say that God cannot or that He never heals dramatically today. But it calls us to beware of spiritual fraud, and to resist it.

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 10

Read Acts 10.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. Are you prejudiced at all? What ethnic/social group do you like to be around the least?

2. (10:4) Examine the angel's words... What do they mean?

3. (10:15) How might this verse apply to your feelings towards new Christians?

4. (10:16) Why do you suppose Peter saw a "rewind" three times?

What is something YOU needed to have God impress on you repeatedly?

5. (10:34) What application for your life can you draw from this verse?

Dartmouth Bible Church
N. Dartmouth, MA

Thursday Night Bible Study
Acts 10 11/15/90

A MAJOR "PARADIGM SHIFT"

Intro. In a recent Sunday School class, Dean Schmidlin was talking about the idea of "paradigm shifting." A "paradigm" is a POINT OF VIEW, or, a certain PERSPECTIVE that one has on an issue. But those specific points of view are often being challenged in our lives. Dean was demonstrating that part of growing in the Christian life--and therefore part of the process of waiting on God--is in how we deal with challenges to our current perspective on things. Often times it takes a SHOCK to rock us out of a point of view, if that point of view is carnal...

Acts 10 is about a major "paradigm shift" in the life of the Apostle Peter.

What was his point of view (concerning social relationships) before Acts 10?

What event rocked his thinking about that point of view?

What was his point of view after the event?

What was the result of Peter's "paradigm shift?"

Other Lessons from this chapter

1. God deals with *individuals*.
2. God deals with individuals *impartially*.
3. God responds to prayer, sometimes even before the person is saved.
4. God can be very persistent in making a point to one of His servants.
5. Family-evangelism is a great way to spread the Gospel.
6. Baptism occurred *after* these Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit (which we take to be the equivalent of conversion), but it occurred SOON thereafter.
7. Tongues were given as a means of validating God's acceptance of Gentile converts.

Chart on "tongues" from the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Vol II:

SPEAKING IN TONGUES IN ACTS

PASSAGE	TONGUES-SPEAKERS	AUDIENCE	RELATED TO SALVATION	PURPOSE
2:1-4	The 12 Apostles and others	Unsaved Jews	After salvation	To validate (for Jews) the fulfillment of Joel 2
10:44-47	Gentiles (Cornelius and his household)	Saved Jews (Peter and others) who doubted God's plan	The same time as salvation	To validate (for Jews) God's acceptance of Gentiles
19:1-7	About 12 Old Testament believers	Jews who needed confirmation of the message	The same time as salvation	To validate (for Jews) Paul's message

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N. Dartmouth, MA

Thursday Evening Bible Study
Acts 11 (Part 1) 11/29/90

'THEIR CRITICISM CEASED, THEIR WORSHIP BEGAN'

Intro. Luke has been detailing the two great Christian conversions of the early church; great, in the sense that each conversion (Saul and Cornelius) sent a powerful message about what "the Way" was really all about. In Luke's mind (and behind that, the Holy Spirit), Saul's and Cornelius' conversions represent the power of the Gospel:

GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE IN SAVING PEOPLE...

	-----> Saul of Tarsus	Cornelius of Caesarea <---
...despite RACE:	Jew	non-Jew
...despite CULTURE:	scholar	soldier
...despite RELIGION:	bigot	seeker

11:2 Newness often causes some in an assembly to "take issue." This is natural and it is healthy if there is room in a church for discussion about issues of CHANGE. People should feel the freedom to air their opinions with "leadership" and should be given the time to work through their objections. Predictably, certain Jewish believers struggled at first with the idea of Gentile membership. But Peter's testimony won them over (vs.18), for "God had been working at both ends, in Cornelius and in Peter" (Dr. John Stott) or, as F.F.Bruce wrote, "their criticism ceasedm their worship began."

11:15 This occasion was the Gentile Pentecost, and its interesting to note the similarity in how the Holy Spirit came upon these new converts. The phenomena they experienced matched that of the disciples. NOTE: the baptism of the Holy Spirit COINCIDED with conversion in Cornelius. This passage is awkward for our brethren who teach a two-stage Christian initiation into the faith (conversion, and then--sometime later--the baptism of the Holy Spirit). With Cornelius, at least, the two things happened at the same time.

11:17 Water-baptism could not be refused to these Gentile converts because no one could forbid God to do what He had already DONE: Spirit-baptised them! JOHN 3:8---"*The wind blows where it wishes, and you do not hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.*"

11:18 What specifically do you think caused them to "quiet down and glorify God?" Their resignation to God's sovereign work in salvation humbled them, and did what MUST happen in believers when they really see the power of the Gospel at work: worship Him!

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 12

Read Acts 12.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. (12:1) What do you think lies behind Luke's expression, "belonged to the church...?"

2. (12:4) Why a maximum security arrangement for Peter? _____

3. (12:3-17) What could the little community of Jesus, in its powerlessness, do against the armed might of Rome?

4. (12:19) In His providence, the "miracles" God sends do not always result in prosperity for everybody...how so, here?

5. (12:20-23) Nevertheless, is God a God of justice? How do YOU explain to someone, how a "good God" could allow atrocities to occur?

6. (12:24) One of the "biggest little verses" in Acts! How many simple OBSERVATIONS (not interpretations or applications) can you list on this verse?

Missions Quiz!

D avid and R uth S eth ministering with C _____
C _____ S _____ in a _____ n _____ h _____, whose two children are
E _____ and M _____.

K en and P in W hithead ministering with O _____ M _____
in C _____, S _____, whose son is C _____.

T _____ and M _____ M _____ ministering with T _____ E _____ A _____
M _____ in Z _____, Y _____, whose four children are S _____,
M _____, M _____, N _____.

Dartmouth Bible Church
N. Dartmouth, MA

Thursday Evening Bible Study
Acts 11 (Part 2) 12/6/90

Intro. Difficulty oftens brings growth, in God's providential scheme. After Stephen's death, a number of disciples of Jesus fled the persecution that followed. But they took their faith in Jesus with them, and could not help but tell their new neighbors about Him. Many of the new neighbors also trusted in Christ. NOTE: It is interesting that the island of Cyprus was one of the earliest mission fields for the first Christians.

11:19

QUESTION: In light of Jesus' words, recorded by His disciple, Matthew (10:33), is it a sin to flee persecution? Many of those Christians who stood their ground, suffered for the faith, and watched loved ones die for the testimony of Jesus, could not forgive their brethren who had fled--and even called upon their church-elders to prohibit readmittance to church membership after the persecution subsided... QUESTION: What IS "persecution?"

11:20

NOTE: It is also interesting how quick certain disciples began to offer the "good-news" (the Gospel) to non-Jews. Peter's vision, and encounter with Cornelius isn't even a chapter old (by Luke-reckoning) when Cypriot and Cyrenien converts are sharing the news of Jesus *irrespective* of the usual cultural sensitivities!

11:21

How does the church seem to grow? It seems that *as they were going*, they shared about Christ with whomever they could, and the growth itself was brought about by "the hand of the Lord." Notice too, the connection *again* between repentance and belief, as Luke implied in verse 18. QUESTION: Is "profession" *without* repentance real?

11:22,23

Why did the mother-church (Jerusalem) select *Barnabas* to travel to them? What did he do? What does this say *for us* about HOW to "follow-up" new converts?

NOTE: Although a real encourager, Barnabas did not sanction compromise. His encouragement was for *perseverance and whole-heartedness*. Those qualities are sometimes not easy to engage, but Barnabas called for their practice nonetheless. It is another indication of what it means to be "Spirit-filled."

11:26

Luke's designations:

"brethren"	1:16, 9:30
"those being saved"	2:47
"disciples"	6:1
"people of the Way"	9:2
"saints"	9:13
"believers"	10:45
"Christ-followers"	11:26b

11:29

It is hard to imagine that Luke *isn't*, in fact, TEACHING what he describes in this verse. Giving is not to be done foolishly, or OUT OF proportion with which a person has means. But it is to be done *responsively, sacrificially* and in the charge of the elders (verse 30).

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 11

Read Acts 11.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. (11:4) What principle about *communication* can we learn from this vs.?

2. (11:18) Why (do you think) they responded positively? _____

3. From this chapter, how does the Gospel seem to spread? _____

4. (11:21) What's the difference between just believing, and actually turning to the Lord? Are they two different things?

5. (11:27-30) What can we learn for OUR LIVES from this incident?

PERSECUTION, PETER and PROPOGATION

Intro. As 12:24 became increasingly obvious, so 12:1 kept pace! Whenever revival occurs, opposition steps up its pace. Surely as Paul would later write, ultimately their "struggle was not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph.6:12) Predictably, the opposition went after the known leaders of "the Way," John, James and Peter.

It is now a year after Calvary (because it is again Passover)... Nothing is said of John; James has forfeited his life, and Peter is next on the docket. The "Followers of the Nazarene" was not just a tiny, insignificant sect (or *cult*)--it had grown and was becoming increasingly noticeable (and irritating) to the established religious hierarchy. In summary, "the chapter opens with James dead, Peter in prison and Herod triumphing; it closes with Herod dead, Peter free, and the word of God triumphing--such is the power of God to overthrow hostile *human* plans and to establish His own in their place" (commentary by John R. W. Stott).

Observations on the Text

1. Summary of Luke's conversion-accounts so far:

1. 3,000 on the Day of Pentecost
2. the Samaritans
3. the Ethiopian eunuch
4. Saul of Tarsus
5. the Gentile centurion, Cornelius
6. the mixed crowd in Antioch

2. the Herods.....Herod the Great.....Jesus' birth
Herod Anitpas.....Jesus' death

|...uncle to Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12)

3. 12:1 In the earliest days of the church, there was a sense of "belonging" felt. That the primitive church's notion of "membership" wasn't as sophisticated as ours is true, but there is evidence that at least one "list" was kept: See I Timothy 5:9.

4. 12:3-17 As Stott puts it, "Prayer...the only power which the powerless possess." Peter had been imprisoned twice before in Acts 4 & 5. The saints were probably wearying of this, and in their praying in ch. 12, Luke describes it as *ektenos* which he applied in his Gospel to describe Jesus' intense agony in Gethsemane--it was a *fervent* and *unremitting* prayer.

5. 12:15c Along with Matthew 18:10, this verse is sometimes used as evidence that we, as believers, actually employ "guardian angels", even though we are unaware of it. It was a popular Jewish belief, and Luke takes no position on it.
6. 12:19 It is a tragic and sad commentary, that in his anger Herod orders the death of the guards, even though this was normal Roman routine--the jailers were held responsible for their inmates. Cf. Daniel 6:24, the dreadful power of dictatorship!
7. 12:24,25 Luke adds these simple closing notes: amidst the drama and rapid-fire events in Jerusalem, other great things are going on behind the scenes. Herod raged, but nonetheless the word of God spread and the apostolic mission picked up steam!

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 13

Read Acts 13.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. (13:1-3) How do we perceive God's will for our lives? _____

2. (13:8) Can you think of anyone who would be *like* this man today?

3. (13:7,8,12,42,43,44,48,49,52) Study Luke's COMMENTARY on the events he himself is recording...
4. (13:43c) What do you think it means to "continue in the grace of God?"

5. (13:48) What meaneth this verse to you? _____

6. (13:52) What IS joy, what does it look like, and how important is it?

NORTH By NORTHWEST

Intro. In this chapter, Luke's record really reflects a turning point. The Gospel is truly going *international* now, and even more powerfully, Paul begins his true apostleship--called to the Gentiles. How radical this must have seemed, even to spiritual Christians! Accustomed only to viewing the household of faith as being Jews, now redemption was being "snapped up" by pagans wherever it was preached! Paul would spend the rest of his days engaged in the SPREAD and DEFENSE of the message of free-grace. Many details in ch. 13 are interesting, not the least of which is Paul's sermon in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch.

Luke's Own Commentary An interesting study in itself is looking at the comments Luke himself makes on what is transpiring. In this ch. alone, consider 13:7,8,12,42,43,44,48,49,52. It is these comments which argue (in part) for the *inspiration* of this book.

- 13:1-3 This event was pivotal. The leaders in Antioch needed to know exactly what they were doing, and in the face of such a monumental decision, they sought the Lord in earnest. How does this apply to us?
- :9 This is the point when Saul begins to be known as Paul, his Roman name. It fits with the decision he makes in 13:44ff. ALSO in this ch., "Barnabas and Saul" becomes "Paul and Barnabas."
- :15 This verse *illustrates* the Jewish common order-of-service in the synagogue meeting on the Sabbath. Jesus used these "open times" to speak about His ministry too. Here, Paul gives a message-exhortation chiefly about the one, big substantiating evidence for Jesus' claims: His resurrection.
- :42,43 The reaction to Paul's message is positive! It is not until vs.44 that things get dangerous.
- :48 The pagans ALSO received the Gospel with joy. In fact, it was God's sovereign plan *all along* that the elect should be gathered from wherever they are. NOTICE what comes first in this verse: 1st) appointment to eternal life; 2nd) belief. This points to something theologians call the *ordo salutis*, "order of salvation." What exactly happens when a person is spiritually converted? In what order do the various changes occur?
- :52 One cannot read Acts and escape the regular observations by Luke of the JOY that was experienced. We derive from this that a. true revival is accompanied by joy; b. joy should be looked for as an indication of conversion.

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 14

Read Acts 14.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. (14:1) Why is the response to the Gospel irrespective of whether a person is a Jew or a Gentile?

2. (14:2) Is "disbelief" a conscious decision? Why, or why not?

3. (14:3) The Vineyard movement (& other charismatic ministries) suggest that this verse should be the CREED of the church in all ages, that is, it should serve as the pattern for what every church should be seeing through their ministry. How do you respond to this?

More importantly, for what aspect of ministry are you relying on the Lord for these days?

4. (14:14 & 15) This is a dramatic scene. Is there a time and place to plead with non-Christians to repent?

5. (14:23) The apostolic method for the establishment of the elder-form of government is very significant. They were appointed, not elected by the people. How do you feel about this?

6. (14:27) How can WE perceive when God "opens a door" for ministry?

Intro. Is it not an incredible thing, that saving faith can be conceived in the heart through the hearing of the Gospel? Isn't it amazing and wonderful that anyone's--even ONE PERSON'S--eternal destiny can be redirected by a hearing of human words--the right human words--resulting in saving faith? This, of course, is what Paul later wrote to the Romans (10:17) when he said, *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.* We read an example of this very phenomena in Acts 14:1!

Point: It is humbling and yet inevitable that when we seek to share the Gospel with unbelievers, that saving faith can actually be "hatched" within them by the mere hearing of the good news. The Apostles moved back and forth between THIS miracle, and its "inverse"--hostile rejection--all through the Book of Acts. These dual effects of the proclamation of the Gospel are still with us today!

NOTES on the Text:

- 14:2,3 How do we respond when someone tries to discredit our faith? Do we rely on "signs and wonders"? We must rely on the Lord to use the skillful use of "apologetics" and pray for His Spirit to convince those of our listeners whom He chooses to.
- 14:9 Here is a case where this man's faith was connected to his healing. In verse 10 we read that his healing was complete. Do we believe that Christ can work both in and through the weaknesses we have?
- 14:14 So greatly was the pagan's admiration (and worship) *repugnant* to the apostles, that they actually tore their clothes in protest! Misunderstanding of our message (see vs.18) sometimes demands *radical*, even dramatic confrontation.
- 14:16, 17 Here is an example of what theologians call "God's common grace." He is good to everyone on the planet, and amazingly patient.
- 14:19 As Christians, we must get used to receiving a Dr. Jeckle/Mr. Hyde reaction from people. One day a hearer of your message may be open and act like your best friend--the next, he may treat you as a felon.
- 14:22 Ministry is made up of these components: strengthening each other, encouraging each other, comraderie in suffering.
- 14:23 "Elders" is plural. They were appointed by the apostles. They were not appointed carelessly but "with fasting" and prayer.
- 14:27 God is the source of salvation, even of the faith by which a person is saved. It is HE who opens doors for ministry.

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 15

Read Acts 15.

Write out your thoughts in these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. (15:1) What kinds of things do non-evangelical churches sometimes make as requirements for salvation?

What kinds of things do *evangelical* churches sometimes *imply* are required for salvation (other than faith)?

2. (15:9) Who is the source of saving faith? _____

3. (15:10) How does this verse address the matter of HOW WE HOLD EXPECTATIONS OF EACH OTHER?

4. (15:20,28) Do *these* things seem too much to ask?

5. (15:31) Can you think of anything (or several things) which have caused you to "rejoice because of encouragement?"

6. (15:39) If there was a conflict between two leaders of the church, how would YOU deal with it?

THE FIRST "INTER-CHURCH" COUNCIL

Intro. Through the early centuries of church history, the church-at-large was forced by necessity to call theological "councils" which were charged with dealing with various theological issues that had developed. Some of the major councils were: The Councils at Nicea (325 AD), at Constantinople (381 AD), at Chalcedon (451 AD). Major issues of who Christ was and who the Holy Spirit was, were defined at these councils, and we continue to benefit from their labors. The first council was held in about 50 AD in Jerusalem and that is the event which Luke records for us in Acts 15. Its purpose was to deal with the efforts of the "Judaizers" who were seeking to interpose certain ceremonies in between baptism and church-membership, and thus actually tampering with the Gospel. The difference between the Jerusalem Council and all the ones which succeeded it, is that it had apostolic leadership.

Lessons

Vss. 1,2,6,12,19,22 PROBLEM SOLVING IN THE CHURCH: Notice the sequence of how the church dealt with the dispute: Dissension (1), Debate (2), Consultation (6), Listening (12), Leadership among the leaders (19), Consensus in agreement (22).

Vs. 1 There are a whole host of things which non-evangelical churches sometimes make as requirements for salvation. Probably the two most frequent things are good works, faithful participation in the sacraments. But sometimes *evangelical* (Bible-believing) churches imply that simple trust in Christ is insufficient! Baptism, church membership, certain sanctification issues, willingness to serve, tithing, manifestation of "sign" gifts, etc. are all treated by some as fruits that a person has truly been saved.

Vs. 9 The source of saving faith has always been God Himself. It is BY FAITH (Peter said) that God effected the cleansing of the Gentiles.

Vs. 10 We ought always to be FAIR and to reflect the love of the Lord in how we hold our expectations of each other. It doesn't mean that we have NO expectations on each other (see vs.29), but that we hold our expectations to the "essentials." The essentials for a new convert might include similar things as in vs.20: abstinence from immorality, murder and idolatry.

? What are the essentials that a new Christian needs to know?

Vs. 20 A major point is in view here--Stott says it well: "James was saying that they (the Jewish believers) must recognize and embrace Gentile believers as brothers and sisters in Christ, and not burden them by asking them to add to their faith in Jesus either circumcision or the whole code of Jewish practices. At the same time, having established the principle that salvation is by grace alone, without works, it was necessary to appeal to those Gentile believers to respect the consciences of their Jewish fellow-believers by abstaining from a few practices which might offend them." (Commentary, p.248)

The lesson for us from the early church is DEVELOPING A WILLINGNESS TO sometimes forego my liberties for the sake of my brethren. It is a gesture of love and caring to sacrifice something out of my own personal lifestyle. And sometimes the Lord calls upon us to do just that!

Vs. 31 The letter caused the Gentiles to "rejoice because of its encouragement (or exhortation)." JOY can be found in many things, if we're looking for it. Not the least, is in HOW WE DEAL with one another. When we deal *fairly* with one another, it causes joy. Also, even just getting encouraging mail from each other can be a joy too!

Vs. 32b How could a *lengthy* message be an encouragement? Consider the speaker, consider the rareness of such an opportunity, and consider their own openness to the Lord.

Vs. 39 Personal disputes do not have to mean the end of a person's ministry, but it often *does* mean CHANGE. Paul later found usefulness in Mark (2 Timothy 4:11).

Summary: two paramount lessons--

1. Preserving the Gospel of grace
2. Preserving the fellowship by sensitive concession

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 16

Read Acts 16.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. (16:3) Was Paul's circumcising Timothy too much to ask of Timothy?

2. (16:6,7) How does the Holy Spirit guide us today?

3. (16:14-21) Lydia's name is recorded for all time; the *other* girl's name is not. What is it about Lydia that is attractive?

4. (16:22-34) What can we learn about CONVERSION (the process) from what Luke tells us about this jailer in Philippi?

A "CALLING", A BUSINESSWOMAN and a COP

Intro. In this chapter the apostolic ministry of the Gospel really gets going "international." It is a chapter of much evangelistic activity and yet it focuses on the experience of three individual people. Luke uses these three to *illustrate* the power the Gospel message effected. They are:

TIMOTHY, LYDIA and the Philippian JAILER

16:3 What kind of surgery would you be willing to undergo if the effectiveness of the Gospel was somehow at stake? Timothy was willing to submit to Paul's judgement in the matter, even though it profited him no more with God. It is a sterling example of his character.

16:4-7 There is a marked connection between the blessing of vs. 5 and the submission to the apostolic leadership in vs. 4. On the other hand, the leadership themselves had to be obedient to the Lord too, as is illustrated in vs. 7.

16:14 The Lord is the author of conversion in a person. Luke goes out of his way to say HOW He brought about Lydia's conversion to the Christian faith: "*the Lord opened her heart to respond...*"

16:16-30 Blessings in ministry often are accompanied (even on the same day sometimes) by trouble and frustration. In vs.18 Paul gets annoyed at this demon nipping at his heals... And the revival in Philippi cost he and Silas their freedom, at least temporarily.

16:25 Singing and praying are good *therapy* for suffering. They both run counter to what the suffering person *feels* like doing, but Paul and Silas turned to worship nonetheless, and God surely proved His presence was with them!

16:30 The "prototypical question" we want to see people arrive at!

16:31 It is significant that FAITH is the only requirement given by Paul and Silas for salvation. The "you and your household" is not a guarantee of "family salvation" based on the faith of one family-representative. It is simply an offer by P & S of the Gospel NOT ONLY to the jailer, but also to his family! And, praise the Lord, they responded!

16:40 Luke loves to mark his account of the growth of the early church with *signposts* of people being "encouraged." The early believers NEEDED encouragement, and so do we. The ministry of encouragement ought to be a high priority in every church.

What encourages you? Is it hearing the testimony of other believers as they work out their own lives? Is it Christian music? Is it Bible teaching? Is it the friendships you have been able to develop with other believers? You and I can LOOK FOR ways to build each other up, and so to "encourage" each other...

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 17

Read Acts 17.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. (17:3) What are the steps to take in trying to lead someone to Christ?

2. (17:6-9) What do you think of Jason? Use your concordance and see if you can find any other references to him in the New Testament...

3. (17:11) How are the Bereans an example to us today?

4. (17:22-34) How do you see THIS "sermon" as different from the others we have read about up to this point?

5. Who are our missionaries (6)?

What are their children's names (7)?

What are their mission board's names (3)?

Where do they minister?

THESSALONICA, BEREIA, ATHENS

Intro. Ministering to new churches, and witnessing for Christ in city after city--that's the story in Acts 17. From one standpoint, this is the "high-water mark" of Paul's travels--he is the itinerant evangelist at its best here. In Ch. 18 Paul will grow more focused in where he resides, but still in Ch. 17 he is moving freely through Macedonia and Greece. His sermon on Mars Hill is classic!

17:2,3 In this verse, as well as in vss.17 and 18:4,19, Luke tells us that Paul *reasoned* with the Jews. The Greek word for "reasoned" is *dielexato* and it means a decisive selection of thoughts, and synthesis of them in his mind as to how to persuade his hearers...Also notice the other words Luke uses to tell us how Paul witnessed:

Reasoned
Explained
Gave evidence

NOTE: Never do we read about either Jesus or the apostles going after people and begging them to believe. They simply work faithfully with those who DO believe...

17:9 Figuring out Jason's (et al) motives is not easy. On the one hand they may have been "selling out" to the authorities; on the other hand, they may have simply loved Paul and Silas enough to put up the bail to see them go free. Since Luke adds no personal comment on the situation, we assume the latter.

17:11 Here is something Luke *does* comment on--the character of the Berean Jews. This verse is often carelessly thought to describe the Berean Christians, mature and grounded--and many-a-church has so been named after them. But it is the Berean JEWS which Luke calls "eager" to search the Scriptures--what we might call "open." Wonderfully, they take that quality *with them* into their new-found faith in Jesus.

17:21 Another Lukan commentary! Paul must take a different approach with the Athenian pagans...

17:22-31 This sermon is worth a whole study alone! Paul basically lays out four "points":

- I Relates to them
- II Flat statement about God
- III Logical approach to God's plan
- IV What God expects men to do

Again, the results are something Paul leaves to the Holy Spirit. We too need to do our best to persuade people--wherever we find ourselves--that Christianity is not short on substantial evidences. In so doing, whether we take the "reasoning" approach or the "flat statement" approach, we bathe it in prayer being alert as to who looks receptive, and then leave it with God...

17:34 Two names of new Athenian believers to go down in history...

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 18

Read Acts 18.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. (18:1-6) From what Luke tells us, how do you envision Paul's relationship to Priscilla and Aquila?

2. (18:8) How is Crispus similar to the Philippian jailer (ch. 16)?

3. (8:17) Look up I Cor.1:1. What kind of man was Sosthenes?

4. (8:24-28) What kind of man was Apollos? _____

5. (8:26) What role might Priscilla have had in discipling Apollos?

PAUL IN "LOS ANGELES"/APOLLOS IN "BOSTON"

Intro. I call Corinth "Los Angeles" and Ephesus "Boston" because these two great ancient cities remind me of our entertainment (not to mention immorality) and cultural (not to mention idolatry) capitals! The apostles certainly didn't detour around the harder mission fields! Instead, we read in ch. 18 about Paul and his noble companions "setting up shop" right in the middle of paganism's strongholds. They are not boring days for them, as they busy themselves with the establishment of Christ's church--and Luke gives us an introduction to several of the early church's leaders around whom the apostles established the work, names like Aquila, Priscilla, "T.J.", Crispus, Sosthenes, and Apollos.

18:2,3,18,19 We wish we knew more about this relationship sustained by Paul with A & P. In vs.18 and again in vs.26 they are mentioned distinctly as "Priscilla and Aquila." It is likely that Luke reverses their order because Priscilla was the more prominent in the ministry. It is also possible that the couple financed (as Stott suggests) Paul's 3rd journey.

18:5 At this point Paul goes "full time." He has surely been completely devoted up TO this point to his calling, but unwilling so far to completely rely on the financial support of others.

18:8 Crispus, the head Rabbi, follows in the footsteps of the "cop" back in Philippi--he leads the way as his whole family receives Christ. The grace of God knows no boundaries! It "invades" the life of Jew and Gentile alike; of common jailer and respected community leader alike!

18:17 Here we meet another synagogue-leader, *Sosthenes*, who later will co-author I Corinthians (really II Corinthians; see I Cor.5:9). He pays a price-in-pain and humiliation for his associations with the apostles.

18:18b WHY Paul took this vow is something of a mystery. It is probably in honor of Numbers 6:1ff, in order to conciliate the Christian Jews, even though he knew he was free from any obligation to keep the law of Moses.

18:21b This is just like what JAMES wrote about in James 3:15. It is a recognition of God's sovereignty in Paul's life, and should be so practiced in our hearts too.

18:23b Again, this mission is to *strengthen* the disciples. We also ought to DO THIS with each other, and also take advantage of opportunities as they present themselves. In 1991 we are greatly blessed with so many fine chances to hear good teaching and worship. We need to prosper "in the green leaf..."

18:24-28 Apollos is a gifted man, but as still untaught until P & A take him under their wing. They help him refine his doctrine so that it is pure, and this only stimulates his gaining even more power in his evangelism! Right doctrine never hinders, it only helps!

STUDY QUESTIONS on Acts 19

Read Acts 19.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. (19:1-7) From the things experienced by these 12 men, which, if any parts of these verses might we expect to see occur today?

2. (19:8,9) How can we "reason" with people today concerning the claims of Christ?

3. (19:12) Do you think this should be normative for the church today--why or why not?

4. (19:17b) What do you think it *means* and what *happens* when "the name of Jesus is magnified"?

5. (19:23) How should Christianity be "noticeable" in our community?

6. (19:36) What is truth? _____

Dartmouth Bible Church
N. Dartmouth, MA

Thursday evening Bible Study
Acts 19 January 31, 1991

Leader: John Aanensen

REASON #2 for studying God's Word:

"to understand what God has DONE..." (Reason #1 was to understand WHO God is...)

Notes from Pastor Neil on Acts 19:

1. Lots is made out of the experience of these 12 men, but I think their situation is really easy to understand if we just take Luke's description as it is--they simply had not yet heard of Jesus Christ or the coming of God's Spirit at Pentecost. They were OPEN...they followed John...they wanted to know...but up to this point, they simply hadn't YET heard. Now they do, and their reaction is (wonderfully) predictable. They receive Jesus Christ and His Spirit into their hearts, are baptized immediately and also, to evidence the that another NEW GROUP is being incorporated into the Body of Christ, they speak in tongues. This isn't intended to be a universal sign for all believers. It is unique to them, in their situation.
2. Our faith is not irrational or groundless. We place our faith in the record of Scripture, in the events which it describes (particularly the death and resurrection of Jesus) and the hope which we know *because* we have trusted in Him. We do not often have to "prove Jesus Christ" from the OT as the apostles did--that was the field of their persistent "reasoning" with the Jews. But we DO have to defend our faith in many other ways.
3. Should extraordinary miracles be sought? I think not--for one thing, a lot of energy can be invested in seeking them, and then when they do not happen, a lot of disappointment must be dealt with. We should not be surprised IF God choses to grant one, and we can pray to a sovereign and gracious God to work HOWEVER He choses. But to EXPECT (or worse, to DEMAND) miracles of the Lord is to miss the point of what we're supposed to be concentrating on down here!
4. Verse 23 intrigues me. Christianity is becoming "socially acceptable" it seems, in this country. Big Christian media events are happening more and more, and the church is getting real sophisticated at how it goes about ministry. But in Acts, Christianity (the "Way") stirred things up. It "caused disturbance." We need to pray that the saltiness doesn't go out of our salt...
5. Pagan Ephesus dwarfed the infant Church in its attractiveness and sophistication. But the claims and transforming power of Christ were changing people "from the inside out." The town clerk's crowd-calming address (vss. 36-41) sought to quiet them down with the reassurance that DIANA's religion was self-evident. He suggested its "evidences" were beyond dispute. it gives rise to the interesting notion, "How does one KNOW if this or that is true?"

Good Reason #3 to study God's Word--to understand what God is doing NOW.

Four Applicational Questions to Ask - - - - -

1. Is there an example to follow?
2. Is there a sin to avoid?
3. Is there a command to obey?
4. Is there a promise to claim?

Along the Ministry Path with Paul

In this chapter, we see Paul and a select ministry-team travelling around the Aegean Sea, ministering the Gospel in various cities and areas--Macedonia, Greece, Troas, Miletus and finally again, Ephesus. At the end of CH. 20 we have one of Luke's longer sermon transcripts.

Notes:

20:4 Paul preferred to work with a team of evangelists/ministers. Although he knew his own unique calling as an apostle (and the special authority that went with it), it did not go to his head. He was quick to recognize the gifts in other Christian workers and to welcome their labor. Indeed, in times of loneliness, Paul hungered for their companionship. The early ministry of the Gospel was rarely easy, always challenging and often more than one man could handle alone.

20:7-12 This section is usually remembered for the resurrection that occurred. That is surely significant, but also of real interest is the glimpse we get of how the primitive Troasian Church worshipped. Notice a few observations:: 1. They met on the Lord's Day. 2. They celebrated the Lord's Supper ("breaking of bread"). 3. They listened to a sermon. 4. They took as long as needed to fulfill their worship--they were not rushed.

20:20,27 Paul reminds the Ephesian leaders that he has never held back from saying and teaching everything given to him by God. He did not just teach the happy things, but as often as that, brought word of severe things too--just like a faithful OT prophet.

20:17,28 The leaders of the Ephesian church were elders, also called "shepherds" and "overseers." The "elder" aspect was borrowed from Judaism and the "overseer" aspect was borrowed from Greek society, but both words describe the same office. Notice that in the NT there is always a *plurality* of elders.

20:30 The tone of Paul's message is not happy or fun. It is sobering--wolves are coming, and they will arise right here from within; probably people you love and respect. Wolves do not have to be complete strangers. But even with this final message, the Ephesian leaders deeply loved the apostle (20:37).

NEVER A BORING MINUTE
(On the Way to Jerusalem)

Intro. One thing's for sure: from the way Luke reports it, Paul never had a boring minute--at least not after his ministry began! In this chapter we see the apostle to the Gentiles, bent and determined to return to Jerusalem. There are far easier strategies he could have chosen for his life, but "bearding the lion in its den" (Jerusalem & Rome) was his intent! Paul's boldness and his powerful confidence in the authority and correctness of the Gospel, are his virtues from here to the end of Acts.

Notes on Ch. 21

Vs. 4 Probably this was not a prophetic word that these disciples of Tyre were giving him--rather, they knew that trouble awaited him, even that arrest was forthcoming, and tried their best to get him to preserve his own freedom. But Paul was fully confident that he was right in the center of God's will. It is hard to "go against the tide" of the opinion of the brethren. But sometimes we must, relying on our own private conviction of God's will.

Vs. 5 Another touching scene (like the end of ch.20). Here, it is whole families that gather to bid him farewell, knowing what awaited him at his destination. It not only took courage for Paul, but also for the saints from Tyre who loved him!

Vs. 8 Caesarea was the most Roman city in Israel, and yet Deacon Philip, an evangelist by heart, settled there and had lived there for 20 years by the time of Paul's visit. Having four believing daughters must have been a great blessing to this man, too; especially children of such gifting! But their apparent silence (at least so far as Luke recorded) is surprising. It took a visiting-prophet (Agabus) to provide the next word, and a graphic demonstration at that.

Vs. 13 Paul was torn by the appeals of the saints. He loved them and being with them, but he loved his calling even more. He had to do what he had to do...

Vss. 17-25 There is an interesting thing about this meeting by Paul with the First Church of Jerusalem leaders that Luke does NOT record, but was probably instrumental in their being as receptive as they were to Paul's ministry-accounts. Paul was delivering the much-needed offering sent by the Gentile believers TO the Jewish believers. In addition to their spiritual fellowship, Paul was always demonstrating a *business* fellowship as well--literally, putting the money where the mouth is.

Vs. 26 In the same vein of flexibility and Christian liberty, Paul was willing to go along with the Jewish program to enhance his standing with the community. It was not *compromise* for him; it was a show of cooperation so that he might gain a better hearing. Christians should always use their spiritual-liberty to ENHANCE the ministry, not to damage it.

Vss. 27-40 But even with all preparations made, still we cannot guarantee we will have a favorable response to our attempt to minister. So be it.

Dartmouth Bible Church
N. Dartmouth, MA

Thursday Evening Bible Study
Acts 22 Feb. 21, 1991

PAUL'S TESTIMONY

Intro. When Paul gave his testimony in Jerusalem, he was no stranger there. Though it had been years since his conversion, his reputation must have still been intact. But the CHANGE that happened to him had become more famous. As we consider this chapter, let's think about how to communicate to people how the power of Christ has affected us.

Notes

22:2 Paul chose to give his testimony in *Aramaic*, the common language of Judea (and the language that Jesus spoke). Doing so, got their attention quickly. His desire to IDENTIFY with his hearers is exemplary.

22:3 Consider Acts 5:33 ff. Gamaliel was well-respected among Paul's hearers. he did not hesitate to USE his credentials in order to try to enhance the credibility of what he wanted to tell them.

22:10 Paul had received a vision about what God's will for him was... Probably we shouldn't expect a vision, but still we need to know WHAT God wants us to do with our lives, and still we need to have a personal conviction about His direction.

22:16 Paul was not implying that his conversion was simultaneous with his water-baptism. His water-baptism was a SOON-REFLECTION of having been "baptized by the Spirit" which is what happens the minute a person trusts Christ and is born-again.

22:20 Paul relates his past with no pride. It was shameful, and yet it demonstrated his former zeal for the ways of Pharisaical Judaism.

22:22 How quickly people in power USE that power to decide who deserves to live and those who do not... Verse 21 must have triggered their deepest prejudice!

22:27 Again, Paul did not hesitate to use any proper means available to him to further the path of his ministry. TO ROME, echoed in his head. He was not about to allow himself to be side-tracked in Judea. His calling was not primarily there--it was to the Gentiles.

HOW WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR TESTIMONY?

Important elements:

Keep it short

Keep it to the point

Keep it YOU

Keep it conversational

Look for a chance to share the promises of Scripture

Do not dwell too much on how you WERE

DO emphasize how you have experienced a changed-life

DEFENDING JESUS

Intro. There is something fundamentally *absurd* with the notion of defending Jesus Christ--since He is not only the world's Creator and Sustainer, but also its Lord and Savior. Nevertheless, Christians all the way back to Paul have been called upon to "give a defense for the hope that lies within" us. To unbelieving hearts, Jesus is not merely invisible: He is either non-existent or viewed as basically irrelevant. Paul finds himself in this chapter brought up on charges before the ruling council of Israel. For him, Jesus is not just a subject of theological debate; He is the Risen Lord.

Notes

Vss. 1-3 Probably the reason the high priest grew so quickly agitated at Paul's stand, was Paul's claim to be both a Christian and still a good Jew. An excellent explanation for Paul's response to Ananias was his own poor eyesight, a known problem for him...

Vs. 6 Not only does Paul divide the camp of his persecutors, but he singles out the very CORE of Christian faith--"the hope and resurrection of the dead."

Vs. 11 The Bible teaches that when a believer suffers directly for the cause of Christ, this is *precious* to the Lord. Paul receives a special visitation from Christ that night. It must have reassured him tremendously. Today too, when believers suffer extraordinarily for Christ, there is often granted an extraordinary *sensitivity* to Christ's presence...

Vss. 12-22 Human plans cannot succeed if God opposes them. Here, God uses a family member of Paul--his nephew! God also uses the ROMANS four times in these chapters to rescue Paul from lynching or a murderous plot. It is so ironic that it is also *they* who would later execute Paul.

Questions

1. How do you respond to criticism for your faith? Can you derive any encouragement from Luke's record about Paul?
2. Wouldn't it just be easier to go out of our way to *avoid* doing anything which might bring down criticism on me (for my faith)?
3. Why would the Roman commander dispatch over 400 troops for Paul's safe travel to Antipatris?
4. What should the Christian do when he/she feels *trapped* between enemies?

"The source of Paul's courage was his serene confidence in the truth. He was well aware that the Romans had no case against him. He was convinced that the Jews had no case either, because his faith was the faith of his fathers, and the Gospel was the fulfillment of the law..."

-- John R. W. Stott

STUDY QUESTIONS ON ACTS 24

Read Acts 24.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. Is there an example for me to follow in this chapter? _____

2. Is there a sin to avoid in this chapter? _____

3. Is there a command for me to obey in this chapter? _____

4. Is there a promise for me to claim in this chapter? _____

5. What was Felix like?

6. (24:5) What is it about "the Way" that causes dissension?

ON TRIAL FOR THE TRUTH

Intro. Paul found himself in the same predicament that Jesus had...up for trial by Jews and Romans alike--on charges for which he wasn't guilty. But suffering in the cause of the Lord is indeed part of what God uses in making His children more holy. It isn't necessarily fun, but it is inevitable--"And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). The problem for us to wrestle with though, is that basically most of us are cowards... If we think our faith might get us into trouble, as often as not (more?), we will keep silent about our faith. Or, we water "the faith" down so that it has nothing "strong" in it and it will offend no one. The doctrine of Paul, however, did several things to those around him: it moved some to acceptance of Jesus; it enraged some; it intrigued some; it scared some... To each he was ready to speak about Christ, even if it got him into big trouble...

Notes

24:2,3,10 Both Tertullus, the prosecutor, and Paul, the apostle, use a legal device called a *captatio benevolentiae*, the attempt to capture the judge's good will. Paul's, however, is more honest and less conniving.

24:5 Tertullus calls Paul "a real pest." Real Christianity sometimes gets folks mad because it throws light on the darkness of their lifestyles. Their reaction may well be both intense and irrational. We should not be surprised when this happens.

24:11 Paul does not hesitate to defend himself. He is in Jerusalem "to worship", not to incite riots and insurrection, nor to propogate heresy. His faith is no threat to Roman peace or to Jewish heritage.

24:15 Again, the central truth of Christianity is found in the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. Writer Max Lucado puts it this way:

What do you do with that "Friday" in history? What do you do with its claims? If it really happened...if God really did commandeer His own crucifixion...if He did turn His back on His own son...if He did storm Satan's gate, then those six hours that Friday were packed with tragic triumph. If that was God on that cross, then the hill called Skull, is a granite studded with stakes to which you can anchor.

24:16 A little "Pauline" saying we rarely attribute to him: "I do my best..." Paul never claimed perfection. Neither should we. But he also never gave up. Neither should we.

24:22 Felix is interesting. He represents many folks today...they know something about Christianity, but they are frightened by those things which they don't like. The soil produces a quick "shoot," but it is all too quickly choked out...

PREPARATIONS FOR RETRIAL

Intro. Lest we look at this chapter as just Luke's "court-record" of what happened leading up to Paul's second trial, we should try to imagine what occupied the mind of Paul in those two years (24:27). As Paul would later write to the Philippian church, he did not regard himself "as having laid hold of it yet" (Phil.3:13)--he was still susceptible to all the normal human emotions and thought processes. It was a time of waiting for Paul. There was little he could do to change his circumstances--and wait on the Lord, he must.

Lessons

1. Paul was becoming a *curiosity* with the Romans (if not with the Jews). His apparent lack of any civil crime intrigued some of his Roman captors as to why the Jews should be so incensed... *Meekness* in the face of criticism is Jesus' way. Not that Paul never struggled with anger or feeling violated--we have seen that he would quickly use any legal or intellectual device to further his goals. And nobody likes being "popped in the chops." But in those two years he was still maturing--like fine wine, perhaps. He was still depending on the sovereign Savior to accomplish His will for Paul's life, whichever turns in the road that might take. It was teaching Paul patience and meekness.
2. If Paul was at all normal (and we believe he was), it would surely have been a time of FEAR for him. Endless weeks--or so it felt--of dirty, primitive imprisonment would work on his mental balance. 24:23 tells us that he had access to his friends. It was a concession the Lord providentially arranged--Paul would have called it a "grace" given him. Probably his fears were met with that fellowship! Isolation tends to aggravate fear. Good and meaningful fellowship tends to strengthen us in the face of our fears.
3. Last Fall, we had a Sunday School elective--"When It Hurts Too Much To Wait." WAITING ON GOD is what this chapter is all about. Sometimes causing us to wait on Him is the best way the Lord can mature us and season us for further service. *Compulsiveness*--the passion to act NOW and to see accomplishments happen immediately--is at odds with the way the Spirit often works. Sometimes compulsiveness is motivated by fear; other times just by being energetic and young. In either case it must be controlled. There are definitely times to MOVE OUT. There are many other times when we must wait on the Lord and pray.
4. 25:19 encapsulates our MESSAGE. It is simple: we "assert that Jesus is alive." That is the whole purpose of Christianity. It is what empowers us with HOPE. It is what gives our message life and fascination. It is what draws people, otherwise paralyzed with the fear of death and dying. Back in 1:3, Luke said it well: to these [the apostles whom He had chosen] He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many CONVINCING PROOFS, appearing to them over a period of forty days...

5. 25:10 Giving no offence - ~~compromising~~ the "offence" of the Gospel

I Cor. 10:32

II Cor. 6:3

STUDY QUESTIONS on ACTS 26

Read Acts 26.

Write out your thoughts on these questions before next Thursday evening.

1. 26:3b What is there about Paul's appeal "*I beg you to listen to me patiently*" is applicable for us?

2. 26:4 How is a good reputation useful in our witness?

3. 26:4 Is it inevitable that ALL KIDS will inevitably go through a time of carnal rebellion? Why do we (some) tend to believe this?

4. 26:6,7 Why does Paul speak so much about HOPE?

5. 26:8 Paul appeals with a great sense of REASON. An appeal like this tends to incriminate the hearer as being prejudiced. Why do people today object to evangelical Christianity?

6. 26:16 Once again the "great commission" given to us by Jesus is not complicated (although church life can seem complicated). Although we may be bereft of a Damascus road type of vision, we are to do just as Paul was to do--to witness ("testify") to the things which we have seen... What have WE seen?

7. 26:17,18 It was Jesus' commission too, to Paul to "open the eyes of the Gentiles." PAUL was to do the opening--the Lord had chosen the right man for that job. What is the part of argumentation in evangelism?

PAUL'S DEFENSE

Intro. Most of us will not face a trial as Paul did before King Agrippa. But most of us also have many chances to "testify" to the Gospel. In this chapter we can learn from Luke's record of this trial some good techniques and principles for sharing the Gospel. It is good for us to know HOW to respond to someone's inquiry and not to be tongue-tied or intimidated by their challenge.

NOTES ON ACTS 26

Vs. 3 Paul was not above ASKING for a fair hearing. Whether they granted his request was beyond his control, but he did ASK for them to "hear him out."

Vss. 4,5 Even though Paul was always aware of his own sinfulness, as far as human comparisons were concerned he was a "strict observer of Law." No fault could be found in his adherence to Phariseism, and indeed he had a reputation in Jerusalem itself for this.

APPLICATION: It is not wrong for us to admire and affirm those among us who DO have a clean and upright reputation. Sometimes believers feel obligated to criticize or "cut down to size" even the purest-minded and most innocent within the Body, out of some misguided paranoia of putting people on pedestals. We should not hesitate to praise God and enjoy those believers who have attained a measure of genuine holiness. We have far too few heroes, as it is!

Vss. 6-8 Once again, it is for proclaiming the age-old HOPE of the resurrection (and all the doctrines attached) for which Paul is being put on trial. Paul appeals to REASON--"Is it reasonable to persecute someone who is simply teaching the very orthodoxy of the Old Testament?" (See verse 22). In this WE can take great comfort, in this age of seemingly countless cults and strange variations on "the old, old story." We do not teach "innovation"...

"We teach no new thing, but we repeat and establish old things, which the apostles and all godly teachers have taught before us." -- Martin Luther's Commentary on Galatians

"We are renovators, not innovators." -- Lancelot Andrewes

Vs. 13, 14 Paul's Damascus Road experience was not a hallucination. It involved all who were with him. How the light could be brighter than the Middle East sun, is hard to imagine--unless we are talking about the glorified Jesus, that is!

Vs. 16 "Stand up and take a stand." Paul was APPOINTED by the Risen Jesus to be a minister--an "attendant", and a witness--a "testifier" of the absolute fact and power of Jesus' physical resurrection. This must have fairly flown in the faces of Agrippa, Festus, etc. because Paul was offering no compromise on his claims. As to his assertions, there would be no negotiation. The flat DOGMA of it all flabbergasted at least Festus (see verse 24).

vs. 26 "This has not been done in a corner." There was nothing secret about Paul's teaching. It was out in the open--plain for anyone to accept or reject. The beauty of the Gospel message is in its plain simplicity.

Vs. 29 Indeed, Paul would LOVE to see ALL THESE PEOPLE embrace Christ! He did NOT, however, enjoy his bondage. He was no masochist, and would love to have been set free from his prisoner-status. He was bold for Christ, but he was not inhuman!

IN CONTRAST WITH JONAH, WE HAVE PAUL...

Intro. When Jonah boarded the ship at Tarshish, he was headed away from fulfilling God's call to him (to preach repentance to the "Gentiles" in Ninevah). As Paul sets out to "be delivered to Rome," and his ship sets sail (presumably) from Caesarea, he is determined to fulfill God's call on his life--to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles--in the very capital of Gentile civilization: Rome. Luke records the events of the voyage as an eyewitness to them. He was on board the entire journey, and his account is unique, for "there is no such detailed record of the working of an ancient ship in the whole of classical literature" (Thomas Walker, quoted in John R. W. Stott, *the Message of Acts*). Luke didn't record a great many of Paul's words in this chapter, but those he gave us show Paul's confidence and calm in the Lord's providential care of them during the storm. He knew they would make it (vs. 24); an unusual assurance of "travel mercies" was given to him.

Notes on the Text

Vs. 3 All through Scripture we see certain pagan individuals in whom there seems to be much sympathy with the cause of the Church. Earlier in Acts (ch. 10) we read about *Cornelius*. Another such Roman centurion is Julius who treats Paul with some consideration. Later he saves Paul's and the others' lives from his own men--vs. 43.

Vs. 10 We aren't given the details of HOW Paul perceived trouble ahead for the voyage. It might have been a word from the Lord, or something in the breeze, but he did state that he knew there was a crisis coming. While we must be careful with it, we too may "perceive" the fortune of an endeavor in advance. It will likely not be with the depth that Paul saw, but the Holy Spirit is still active in the lives of the saints. Listening to Him needs to be attended to!

Vs. 21 They still had food on board--why did they go without it?

Vs. 23 Paul describes himself as "owned" by God. That is a picture not often thought about by Christians, but often by Paul. He often called himself a slave of Christ's. We too are owned by Him as we have been bought with a price. Our lives are not our own. We belong to the God who made us, redeemed us at a terrible price, and who will see US safely through to heaven.

Vs. 25 Sometimes the faith of OTHERS can see us all through the storm. And that is how God designed it! Reality sets in--we don't all have courage, all of the time. We need to lean on the faith of others, and on the strengths of others. How have you leaned on the faith of someone else recently?

Vs. 34b NOT A HAIR! What confidence!

Vs. 44 This is the "bottom-line" of this chapter! Paul could agree with the slogan we sometimes hear today: "God said it; I believe it; that settles it."

FROM MALTA, TO ROME, TO THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

Intro. As we come to the final chapter of the Book of Acts, it is only the beginning of the Church! The abrupt ending of the book is testimony that in Luke's own mind, his narrative account was no piece of classical literature alone--it was the unfinished account of the spread of the good news of Jesus from Jerusalem (c. 30 A.D.) all the way to Rome itself (c. 62 A.D.) Very possibly, Paul was released after his 2 year house arrest. And then, two years later, re-arrested and executed in about 64 A.D. under Nero's reign.

Notes on the Text

Vss. 2,7 Even though Luke knew the difference between a lost person and a saved person, he easily acknowledged good deeds when he saw them--especially when he was the beneficiary! The relative "goodness" of some people does not take away from their lostness, but it is to be appreciated and affirmed anyway. Christians should be characterized by *humility* and a readiness to acknowledge someone else's kindness, whether or not the "someone" is a believer yet or not...

Vs. 8 Why did Paul heal Publius' Dad? Perhaps for several reasons--to witness to the power of the resurrected Jesus to the Maltese and to the Roman soldiers; to respond to the kindnesses they had been shown by the Maltese; a moment of great faith in the Lord's ability to heal--an act of private worship.

Vs. 14 Since Paul addressed the Jews as "brethren," (vs. 17) we don't know if THESE were Christian or Jewish. In any case, they accommodated Paul & Co. for a week. Again, Paul is not only able to give, but to RECEIVE as well (cf. Phil. 1:3-5). Gracious receiving is just as much an art as is gracious giving.

Vs. 15 Nothing girds us up like seeing a friendly face in a foreign land.

Vs. 20 Paul is still in bonds, and has been all along. It has become for him a very symbol of his calling.

Vs. 24 This is characteristic wherever and whenever the Gospel is preached. There will always be some who believe and some who scoff--who "will not believe." Unbelief is a matter of WILL more often than lack of information or evidence. It is a sin, and reveals the bondage of the human will.

Vs. 25 A clue as to how the inspiration of Scripture worked: the Spirit spoke *through* a prophet, to someone in particular, with a quality ("rightly spoken") unmistakably divine. See 2 Peter 1:20,21.

Vs. 26 Compare this with Isaiah 6:9--Why does Paul use Isaiah's prophecy with the Roman Jews?

Vss. 30,31 At the very end of the book of Acts, Paul is paying his own way, and still preaching THE KINGDOM. So important is it to him that the Gospel by his lips be matched with an adorning life-style that even as a prisoner, he is providing for himself.