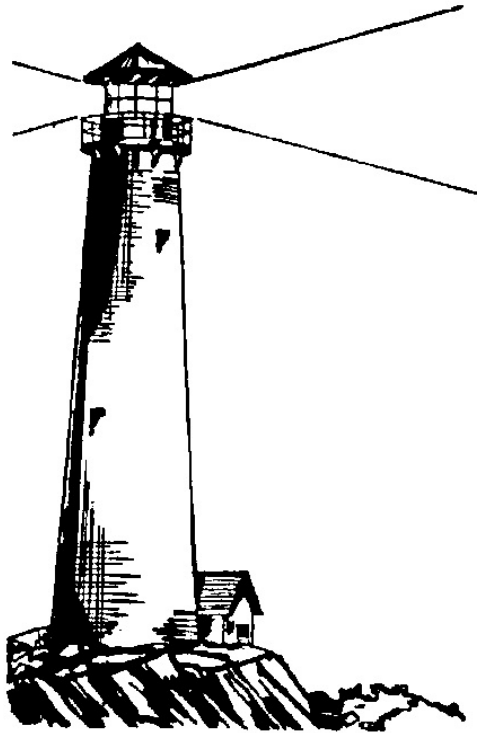


CHURCH OF GOD

SUNDAY SCHOOL QUARTERLY



**STUDIES OF THE
EARLY CHURCH**

STUDIES OF THE EARLY CHURCH

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NOTE TO THE TEACHERS

This booklet is intended to be a *help* in preparing Sunday school lessons. The title, subject, and topics are only the menu. It is *your responsibility* to prepare the meal.

The proper ingredients are the salty inspirations of the Holy Spirit, seasoned with His grace. Bake the ingredients at a hot temperature in the oven of prayer. The time-tested recipe for preparing a nutritious meal is found in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

LESSON 1

JESUS RETURNS TO HEAVEN

Scripture Text: Acts 1:1-14

The Book of Acts contains the most complete account of the early church that we have. God has preserved it for us that we might have it for a guide and example. Jesus placed it in our hands, is watching how we use it, and will require an accounting at the end. It is serious business. The Book of Acts is to us as a medical book is to a doctor or a blueprint is to a carpenter and is more important than either. We look in it for our pattern, not excluding the rest of the New Testament, of course.

Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 are the key to the Book of Acts. All the good accomplishments of the church told there, and continuing on through the centuries since, are the fulfillment of the promise in this verse. It is one long, heroic tale of great lives and victorious deaths, of souls saved and spiritual battles won. God still calls for those willing to be used of Him as witnesses. The need is great. Precious souls must be rescued before it is too late. It is hoped that these studies will help to make us better workers for the Lord.

MEMORY VERSE: But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

—Acts 1:8

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—John 20:1-18 Jesus arose from the dead.

Tue.—John 14:15-26; John 15:26-27 The promise of the Spirit.

Wed.—John 16:1-15 Must be guided by the Holy Spirit.

Thu.—Mark 13:28-37 God keeps the time of the plan secret.

Fri.—Luke 24:44-53; Mark 16:19-20 Jesus' Ascension.

Devotional Reading: Acts 1:9-11 Jesus will come as He left.

Last-Minute Instructions

The same writer, Luke, wrote the Book of Luke and the Book of Acts as letters to his friend, Theophilus. Read the first four verses and the last five verses of Luke, and see how Acts follows Luke without a break.

Acts 1:1-3 Jesus **shewed himself alive after his passion**—after His

suffering—**by many infallible proofs**. There was no question but that Jesus had risen from the dead. Many times, He was seen and heard by the Apostles. Now it was forty days since He arose.

Why Wait?

Acts 1:4-5 Being assembled with the Apostles near Bethany, Jesus gave them a command and a promise. They were to **not depart from Jerusalem**, but they were to **wait**. He would send **the promise of the Father** (John 14:16; 15:26). Jesus explained, **But ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence**. Yet they were more interested in earthly, fleshly matters. Their thoughts were of the flesh rather than the Spirit. The world needed the Gospel. Why not start immediately to carry it to them? Because they lacked their greatest need to successfully carry the Gospel. God would not be glorified until they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. They needed His power, love, wisdom, and insight. They were spiritually blind, ignorant, and weak. We are the same without the Holy Spirit baptism. We need not wait, as they, for His coming to the world. We need only dedicate ourselves fully to God, and the Spirit will come in.

Baptism is a submerging, a complete putting under, and a covering with. Saints are baptized in Christ (Romans 6:3). They are baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). Just as a bottle filled with water is submerged in water, they are filled with Christ and the Holy Spirit. The water is in the bottle, and the bottle is in the water. Water baptism is only a symbol of the real spiritual baptism that makes people saints. No one is properly equipped to work in the Gospel until he has this filling.

No Earthly Kingdom

Acts 1:6-9 Palestine was under the rule of a foreign power—Rome. In the minds of **the apostles** was the thought that Jesus had come to free Israel from this domination. They thought the time had arrived. **Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?** Jesus closed the door on this question. God the Father holds the **times and seasons** of His future plans **in his own power**. He does not tell the dates to men, but through His Spirit, He reveals His kingdom.

Then Jesus drew their minds back to what really mattered. **But ye shall receive power**. They needed the power of understanding, of wisdom, of love, of faith, of influence, and over sin. These and more would be given. They were to receive the Source of power. The **Holy Ghost** was to **come upon**

them. **And ye shall be witnesses unto me**—Christ. Their witness was to begin at home—**Jerusalem**. Then, it would spread to **all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth**. This is still the work of the church today. **While they beheld, he was taken up**. It was visible, not secretly. Jesus could not return to Heaven by way of death, for, having risen, He could not die again (Romans 6:9). **A cloud received him**—hid Him.

Despite many plain Scriptures warning of the impossibility of finding or setting dates for God's future plans (Mark 13:32), still some persist in trying. Some even try to outline the plans, pointing out men and nations and events and times. Then they find, after time has elapsed, they were mistaken.

Waiting for the Promise

Acts 1:10-14 They looked steadfastly—in amazement and wonder. **Two men stood by them in white**. Their sudden appearance, dress, and message mark them as angels. They asked, **Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?** The disciples did not know where Jesus had gone, what He would do, or if He was coming back. He had told them (John 14:2-4), but they were "slow of heart" (Luke 24:25). The angels told where He had gone, that He would come back, and how. It was a message from God, for only God could know.

Assured, they returned to Jerusalem. It was **a sabbath day's journey**, approximately two thousand paces—a short distance. They were obeying Jesus' command (Acts 10:4). **They went up into an upper room, where abode** all the Apostles except Judas Iscariot (Matthew 27:5). **These all continued with one accord**—with unity and in agreement—**in prayer and supplication**. **The women**, those who followed Christ, **and Mary the mother of Jesus**, and his brethren, were all drawing near to God while waiting for His promise to be fulfilled. With no command but to wait, they passed the time in prayer. Why? Because they wanted to. These were people whose sins were gone. Their hearts hungered for more of God. When we are in the same condition, God will fill and use us. If we keep this promise before us, we will have a sufficient motive for soul winning. We know not when He is coming, but we do know the time is short.

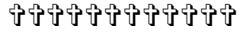
Witnesses for Christ

The church witnesses of Jesus to the entire world. They are not spectators, pleasure seekers, entertainers, salesmen, or actors, but witnesses. Every activity of the church should be carried on to contribute to the effectiveness of this witnessing. Real witnessing is the most heroic work there is. Fired

with the passion to rescue souls for Him, witnesses have endured neglect, hardship, heat, cold, imprisonment, torture, and death. They were glad to do it for the sake of bringing glory to the Savior's name.

JUST A THOUGHT

**No other activity welds fellowship
like working together.**



LESSON 2

CHOOSING AN APOSTLE

Scripture Text: Acts 1:15-26

For several days after Jesus' Ascension, His Apostles and relatives and other disciples met daily in continuous prayer. They were waiting in Jerusalem as Jesus commanded for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Judas' sin caused him to lose his apostleship. It cost him his salvation. This was predicted many years before. The predictions of prophecy are always fulfilled. The remaining Apostles felt it was time for Judas to be replaced. The final choice of an Apostle should have been left to God, but the Apostles chose Matthias, whom we never hear of again. God later chose Paul, of whom we hear much. He wrote a large portion of the New Testament. If we do not learn anything else from this lesson, we will learn the importance of dependence upon God to make decisions.

MEMORY VERSE: Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.
—Psalm 127:1

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—Matthew 27:1-10 Judas' sin leads to his death.

Tue.—John 13:21-30 Jesus dismisses His betrayer.

Wed.—Psalm 41:9-13; Zechariah 11:12-13 Prophecies.

Thu.—Matthew 28:1-10 Message of Resurrection.

Fri.—Acts 9:10-19 The final choice of an Apostle left to God.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 5 We should let God lead us.

Judas' Act Foretold

Acts 1:15-17 Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples. There were **about an hundred and twenty**. Peter was a natural spokesman. In his three years and more with Jesus, he was always quick to speak. He brought up the subject of **Judas, which was a guide to them that took Jesus**. Judas' act was foretold **by the mouth of David** more than one thousand years before and by Zechariah five hundred years earlier (Psalm 41:9; Zechariah 11:12-13). Peter rightly named the Holy Spirit as the Author of the prophecies (2 Peter 1:21). God's Word is true, and its prophecies will not fail to

be fulfilled. **He was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.** Judas was one of the twelve Apostles, chosen by Jesus. He was given high honor, a most important work, and the great opportunity to know and experience the deep things of God. But he did not hold them in proper perspective. He certainly sold out cheaply.

Judas' Reward

Acts 1:18-20 After betraying Christ to His slayers, Judas **purchased a field**—or it was done by others—**with the reward of iniquity**—the thirty pieces of silver. Remorseful, he hung himself. There was no more opportunity to change his decision. All hope was gone. The field was used to bury strangers in. It was called **the field of blood** because "blood money" paid for it. (Read Matthew 27:3-10.) All Jerusalem knew of this. Bad news travels fast.

It is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate . . . his bishopric let another take. Judas' place as an Apostle was to be taken by another. Judas was a disciple, a believer, and follower of Jesus (Luke 6:13). Jesus made him an Apostle, gave him power over disease and devils, and sent him out to preach (Mark 3:14-15). This leaves no question that Judas was a saved man. Verse 25 tells us, "Judas by transgression [by disobedience, which is sin] fell." From what did he fall? From grace. From his saved state. Jesus said he was lost (John 17:12). When he went "to his own place," he went to the place he had chosen—to hell. This teaches all that a person once saved can be lost.

Seldom, if ever, does one fall suddenly from righteousness into sin. First, there is a *listening* to temptation, then a *considering* of it, then *yielding*: a thought, a word, an act, and then much bolder acts. God is long-suffering and of tender mercy. It is possible that Judas had many a look and words from Jesus designed to lead him away from his downward path. Covetousness, envy, and resentment grew until he was a thief and, finally, the betrayer of Jesus. Beware of the first wrong thought. Judas fell gradually. He was not forced to sin. The foretelling of his sin a thousand years before did not mean he could not avoid it. It only meant God knew he **WOULD** sin. He was free to choose, and the result of his choice was his tragic end.

Matthias Was Not God's Choice

Acts 1:21-22 Then Peter proposed a selection of one to fill Judas' place. He felt that the Scriptures made it their obligation—**must one be ordained.**

Here we find five examples that make us more effective servants of our Lord. (1) **Companied with** Jesus. One must have a personal relationship with Jesus. One should know firsthand the doings and teachings of Jesus. This makes more effective our (2) **witness . . . of his resurrection**. (3) They were in **one accord** of spirit. (4) They continued **in prayer** (verse 14). (5) Dependence upon God to make decisions.

Acts 1:23-26 How was the Apostle chosen? **They appointed two**, and then **they prayed**. They were to pray and wait, not appoint and pray. They asked God to **shew whether of these two thou hast chosen**. They received no answer because their prayer was not according to God's will. Only God ordains for His work. Man only recognizes and accepts those God has ordained. Peter and the others did only what man can do without leading from God; they chose two. This is confusion, but God never confuses. He never appoints two persons for the same place. God had not chosen either of the two men to fill Judas' place.

The lot fell upon Matthias. In modern expression, they flipped a coin. All accepted Matthias as God's choice, **and he was numbered with the eleven apostles**. There is no further mention of Matthias. We do not read of the church using the method of casting lots after the Holy Spirit came. When God was ready to fill the vacancy left by Judas' sin, He called the Apostle Paul in a definite manner that all could recognize. We have read much about Paul throughout the New Testament.

The leading purpose of an Apostle's life is to witness of Christ's Resurrection. Peter spoke of this witness. As we study Acts, notice the prominence given to the teaching of Christ's Resurrection. It is the crowning point of His life on earth. It is the focal point of our hopes, for as He arose, we will rise to enter unending life. That is, we will if here in this life we are made alive in Him.

JUST A THOUGHT

**Too many people make decisions using only their common sense,
and THEN they ask God to bless those decisions.**



LESSON 3

THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

Scripture Text: Acts 2:1-18

After a number of days of prayer by the disciples, the Day of Pentecost arrived. Jesus had said the Holy Spirit would be sent "not many days hence" (Acts 1:5). The disciples were redeemed from sin. They believed in Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit. They yielded fully to Him. Great change was about to take place concerning the relationship between God and His people. The Day of Pentecost was a type. Christ's coming, His death, burial, and resurrection fulfilled the type, and the *day* would no longer have significance.

The annual Day of Pentecost was held fifty days after the Passover (Leviticus 23:15-16). It was a feast "of the firstfruits," a freewill offering to God (Numbers 28:26; Deuteronomy 16:10). The people were to bring two loaves made of first wheat, a wave offering to God (Leviticus 23:16-17). Christ brought the fulfillment—baptism of the Holy Spirit fifty days after the Crucifixion. The fruit of the Spirit, spoken of in Galatians 5:22-23, is produced when our lives are offered fully to God for His use and enjoyment (Romans 12:1; John 15:8). The fruit of the Spirit nourishes lives of saints who are kings and priests (2 Peter 1:5-8; 1 Peter 2:5, 9).

MEMORY VERSE: But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.
—Acts 2:16

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—Leviticus 23:1-8 The Passover.

Tue.—Leviticus 23:9-14 The Feast of First Fruits.

Wed.—Leviticus 23:15-25 Pentecost and the Feast of Trumpets.

Thu.—Leviticus 23:26-32 The Day of Atonement.

Fri.—Leviticus 23:33-44 The Feast of Tabernacles.

Devotional Reading: Joel 2:27-32 Pentecost fulfills a type.

Pentecost, a Type

Acts 2:1-3 When the day of Pentecost was fully come—God had set this day for sending the Holy Spirit. **They were all with one accord**—in unity, praying for the same thing, loving one another, all looking for Jesus' promise. **In one place**—God is a God of unity. His kingdom is one unified whole. The

unity of the church is its strength. When one spirit binds the church together in love, the church is strong. Then God works through the church, and great things are accomplished. **Suddenly there came a sound from heaven**—from where the Holy Spirit was coming—**as of a rushing mighty wind**. Then, **there appeared**—it could be seen—**cloven tongues**—split—**like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them**. At this outstanding occasion, He overflowed the usual bounds of the spirit realm into the physical. God showed Himself through sound and sight. The **sound of wind** indicates His unseen power. **Tongues of fire** indicate His life, light, and warmth—His visual power.

As the Passover was a type of Christ's death, so Pentecost was a type of the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit in a person causes one to produce the fruit of the Spirit (John 15:2-8). See Galatians 5:22-23. His coming fulfilled the type, and the *day* ceased to have significance.

They Spoke With Other Languages

Acts 2:4-11 They were all filled with the Holy Ghost. These people were ready. They were already saved from sin. The Holy Spirit only enters saved people. They **began to speak with other tongues**—other languages they had not learned. **The Spirit gave them utterance**. This was a miraculous gift. **Devout men out of every nation** gathered in Jerusalem to worship at Pentecost. Fifteen nations are named. They gathered, and each **man heard in his own language**. The disciples told of God's **wonderful works**.

Anything God does is right. We need fear nothing He does if we are His. We can and should fully yield and abandon ourselves to God's will, whatever that may be. These principles, put fully into action, will settle the tongues question. Speaking in tongues (other languages) is a gift of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:10). All do not receive the same gifts. When God gives a gift to one, it is to be used to God's glory. God is not responsible for many of the things people say He does.

All Amazed

Acts 2:12-13 They were all amazed . . . What meaneth this? This work of the Holy Spirit was no small thing. "The *multitude* came together" (Acts 2:6). It was the biggest thing in town that day. It is still the biggest thing when God favors a people with His presence. Two kinds of people were there—some ready to believe and some closing their ears and minds in unbelief. **Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine**. They could not deny God's miraculous work, so they ridiculed it. Many do this today.

What Changed Peter?

Acts 2:14-18 Peter . . . lifted up his voice. Strong, sure, and unafraid, Peter faced the crowd. **This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.** Joel prophesied in Judah around 800 B.C. Peter quoted Joel 2:28-29. **In the last days**—in the last dispensation, the time from Christ's First Coming to His Second Coming—**I will pour out of my Spirit.** God had now begun to fulfill this promise. Upon whom will He pour the Spirit? **Upon all flesh**—every person who will receive Him. It will have an excellent effect. **Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy**—preach, give God's message to the people. **Young men shall see visions.** Stephen saw into Heaven (Acts 7:55); Cornelius saw an angel (Acts 10:3); Peter saw a sheet full of creatures (Acts 10:9-16); and Paul's night visions were possibly dreams (Acts 16:9; 23:11; 27:23-24).

Fifty days earlier, Peter denied Jesus. He had used his sword. Before that, he had rebuked Jesus for speaking of His death. None of the disciples understood Jesus' words concerning how He would die and rise again. When Jesus was taken, they all forsook Him and fled. When He died, they mourned and wept. They did not believe He had risen. They locked their doors for fear of the Jews. They went fishing instead of spreading the Gospel. They held the worldly hope that Jesus came to free Israel from Roman rule. Now, on this day, Peter stood fearless before thousands and proclaimed Jesus as Lord to those who had crucified Him. He now understood the meaning of Jesus' death and Resurrection and could confidently tell others how to be saved. He was strong in the Lord. What had changed him? He was filled with the Holy Ghost.

Jesus' death and resurrection gave life to the church. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit gave the working power, the final requirement for a fully equipped church. With His coming on Pentecost (A.D. 33), the church was completely established and would grow.

JUST A THOUGHT

**We cannot be both popular
with the world and pleasing to God.**



LESSON 4

MEMBERS ARE ADDED TO THE CHURCH

Scripture Text: Acts 2:22-47

After being filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached to the crowd without preparing a sermon. He declared Jesus to be approved of God, to be both Lord and Christ. He and the other disciples were witnesses to Jesus' Resurrection. Peter laid the guilt of Jesus' death upon them. He told them this same Jesus was the One who had sent the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that they had seen and heard.

God's power caused respectful fear. They were convicted, and Peter told them to repent. Many were saved, and the Lord added the members to the church daily as they were saved. He let it be known that the promise is for all people.

MEMORY VERSE: And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. —Acts 2:47b

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—John 16:7-15 The office of the Spirit.

Tue.—1 Corinthians 12:1-11 The diversities of gifts.

Wed.—Isaiah 44:1-8 Spiritual refreshing.

Thu.—John 15:20-27 The Spirit of truth.

Fri.—Ephesians 6:10-18 Strength in the Lord.

Devotional Reading: Joel 2:28-32 Promised receiving of the Spirit.

Guilt Without Anger

Acts 2:22-23 **Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus . . . a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs.** Without fear, Peter exalted Jesus. The miracles Jesus had done before them were evidence He came from God. **Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.** Jesus' death was in God's plan (Luke 24:25-27). Jesus gave Himself to be killed (John 10:17-18). However, this does not remove guilt from those who killed Him. **Ye . . . by wicked hands have crucified and slain.** Why did this not anger the crowd? They respected and feared God. The Holy Spirit caused conviction. Conviction overcame anger, and many repented. The Holy Spirit through Peter's words was

working upon their hearts. Conviction is the Spirit's work (John 16:8). If the church desires to see more heavy conviction, we must see more respectful fear shown to the presence of God's Spirit.

Life Conquered Death

Acts 2:24-35 God hath raised up Jesus to life. It was not possible that he should be holden of death. God is the source of life. Jesus is life (John 14:6). He conquered death (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). David foretold Jesus' Resurrection (Psalm 16:9-11). Peter here referred to David's record of Christ's victory over death. **God exalted** Jesus. God gave Jesus **the promise of the Holy Ghost** for men, and then Jesus **shed forth this, which ye now see and hear**—the Holy Spirit.

Three Thousand Members Added

Acts 2:36-42 Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. He is **both Lord**—Master to obey—**and Christ**—Savior who can save. God the Father gave Him this place. Peter accused the crowd of killing Jesus. **They were pricked in their heart**—convicted of sin. Why? They knew they were guilty. It did not anger them because the Holy Spirit brought conviction. The Holy Spirit was working upon their hearts through Peter's words. **What shall we do?** How can we get rid of this guilt and be a follower of Jesus? Peter told them clearly. **Repent**—be sorry for and turn from your sins. **Be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.** Water baptism is a symbol of the spiritual baptism into Christ (Romans 6:3), the washing by the blood of Christ. Only the blood of Christ takes away sin. Because our sins are washed away, we are baptized in water as a symbol of it. **Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost**—the same as the disciples had just received. **For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all.** No one is shut out who meets the conditions. Great harm has been done to countless souls by the devil's lies that God's blessings are not for them. He tries to close the door God has opened to them. God does not withdraw a gift once given. The message here emphasizes that ALL may freely be filled with the Holy Spirit if they repent, forsake sin, and consecrate completely to God.

They that gladly received his word—believed in Jesus and put belief into action—**were baptized** in water. This was a testimony to all others of their being saved from sin and taking their stand for Christ and His teachings. **There were added**—God added them. **About three thousand** were

added to the membership of the Church of God. One cannot join the Church of God. Being born again is the only way into God's church. **They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine**—Jesus' teachings (Matthew 28:20). They had **fellowship**—with the Apostles. **And breaking of bread**—talking and thinking about the things of Jesus. They wanted to know more. **In prayers**—they communed with God.

Fear Came

Acts 2:43-47 And fear came upon every soul—the presence of God commanded honor and respect. We need more of this in our worship. There is a great lack of respectful fear in the church in these days. **Wonders and signs were done by the apostles**—miracles were done as when Jesus was with them in body. **All that believed . . . had all things common**—they shared everything, divided as each needed.

Fear came on the church because they felt the strength of God's working within them. Fear gripped the unsaved at the mighty power they saw working in the saints and in the miracles. Wherever saints follow God's plan, the world will have a fear and respect, even though at times it is mixed with hatred. **Continuing daily . . . in the temple**—this shows a strong desire to worship. With **one accord**—in harmony, one spirit binding them in love. **Breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness.** Salvation brings joy and gladness where once there was sadness. **Singleness of heart**—pure, undivided devotion, a new level in living for God. **Praising God**—praise springing from the joy and love that this new experience had put in their hearts. **And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.** The Lord did this by saving them from sin and giving them spiritual life.

JUST A THOUGHT

**When God started His church,
He set a standard for it to follow always.**



LESSON 5

HEALING POWER DEMONSTRATED

Scripture Text: Acts 3:1-20

Our last lesson gave a glimpse of the beauty of the newly established church. They met daily in the temple. The Holy Spirit gave desire and effectiveness in prayer and faith to bring about a miraculous healing. He brought humility that caused them to forget self. He gave them courage and understanding of God's message so they could tell the people plainly about Jesus. This was the fulfillment of the prophecy. Peter and John spoke in the temple, whose leaders fiercely opposed Jesus.

MEMORY VERSE: Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.
—Acts 3:6

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—Psalm 103:1-14 God, the great Healer.

Tue.—Luke 13:10-17 A woman healed on the Sabbath.

Wed.—John 9:1-11 Healing of the blind man.

Thu.—Mark 1:29-34 Many were healed.

Fri.—James 5:13-18 Prayer of faith.

Devotional Reading: Romans 8:18-23 Affliction in view of glory.

Healing Power

Acts 3:1-3 Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer—to unite in prayer with other saints (Acts 2:46). It was the **ninth hour**—three p.m. **A . . . man lame from his mother's womb**—from birth, he had never walked—**was carried . . . daily . . . to ask alms**—to beg, his only means of livelihood—**at the gate of the temple . . . called Beautiful**—a richly decorated gate. The man, **seeing Peter and John . . . asked alms**—money given to relieve the poor and needy, a gift of charity.

Look on Us

Acts 3:4-12 Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John—Peter's undivided attention to the man commanded the man's undivided attention

toward him. To receive something from God, we must take our eyes off everything and everyone around us. **Look on us. And he gave heed**, but hoped for nothing more than money. **Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee.** It was *us*. Now it is *I*. John could not give what he did not have. Peter gave because he had been given the gift of healing by the Holy Spirit. John had not. All men do not receive the same gifts. (Read 1 Corinthians 12:7-10.) **In the name of Jesus Christ . . . rise up and walk.** With the command came the power. The man's faith took hold. Peter **took him by the right hand, and lifted**—as a baby learning to walk, he needed encouragement to walk. **Immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength**—a miracle such as Jesus had done. Jesus had promised this (John 14:12). **He leaping up stood**—for the first time in his life, a great miracle. But that is not all—he **walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.** In joy and gratitude, he poured out praises to God. He **held Peter and John**—threw his arms around them. **The people saw . . . and they knew . . . and they were filled with wonder and amazement.** They **ran together unto them.** When **Peter saw it, he answered . . . why look ye . . . on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?** Peter and John wanted no praise or glory because none belonged to them. The power and holiness were all of God.

One of the weak points of human nature is in meeting success. We are prone to take glory that belongs to God. Taking the glory ruins the usefulness. Pride and conceit have ruined many a life that could have been used by God. We have nothing but what we have received. The Holy Spirit gives us love for God and forgetfulness of self, and pride and conceit are eliminated.

Proof of a Living Christ

Acts 3:13-20 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob . . . of our fathers. The God Peter spoke of was the true God, the One of whom the people knew and believed. Peter wanted it clear because he linked with Him **his Son Jesus.** These people had rejected Jesus. Peter exalted Him equally with His Father. Peter declared, **ye denied the Holy One and the Just . . . and killed the Prince of life.** Then he presented an unanswerable fact: **whom God hath raised from the dead.** To nail it down, he added, **whereof we are witnesses.** To doubly prove Christ's rising, Peter added another unanswerable fact—**his name hath made this man strong.** They themselves were witnesses—**whom ye see and know . . . in the presence of you all.** There stood the man in **perfect soundness** before them. The proof of the miracle

was in their own eyes and ears and minds. It proved Christ was living at that moment. Peter told how the power of Christ had been obtained for the man—**through faith in his name**. Faith reached and grasped Christ, bringing life from Him to the man. **The faith which is by him**—we cannot have this faith by ourselves. It is given by God. Peter preached to them that the things the prophets had spoken were fulfilled through Christ. **Repent ye**—man's part, to turn from sin—**and be converted**—God's part, to blot out the sins. When people open their hearts to God, God's Spirit will work and bring **times of refreshing . . . from the presence of the Lord**. Here they are once again shown the way out of their sins: **Repent**.

There were many things Peter might have talked about, but he spoke what was foremost in his heart and mind: Jesus is risen! He is living! He did it for all! Almost any occasion can be turned into a witness for Jesus Christ if He lives within us.

There was no need to tell these people God had worked. They had seen all they needed to bring belief. The fact was more convincing than words. If we show people transformed lives and God's miraculous works, many will believe.

JUST A THOUGHT

**A good habit serves the man;
a bad habit makes the man serve it.**



LESSON 6

PETER AND JOHN THREATENED

Scripture Text: Acts 4:1-22

Last week, we studied about the miraculous healing of a lame man and Peter's sermon to the crowd who witnessed it. Today we study the results this had on the religious leaders.

The church did not begin as a weak effort. Three thousand were won on Pentecost and **five thousand** now (**Acts 4:4**). All Jerusalem knew of this miracle of healing. The people glorified God for it. Public opinion so favored the church that the rulers dared not punish Peter and John. Being a Christian does not show weakness. Nowhere is seen a stronger, more courageous and heroic purpose than in the lives of real Christians. It is in our hands to keep the high quality of the church. It can only be done through boldness in the Holy Spirit.

MEMORY VERSE: For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. —Acts 4:20

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—Daniel 3:13-18 Boldness by faith.

Tue.—Romans 1:7-16 Not ashamed of the Gospel.

Wed.—James 1:12-18 The blessings of trials.

Thu.—Revelation 7:13-17 The reward of faithfulness.

Fri.—Romans 10:6-11 The triumph of faith.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 16 Joy in God's presence.

A Night in Jail

Acts 4:1-4 And as they—Peter and John—spoke unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple—superintendent of the priests and Levites guarding the temple at night—and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved—angry—that they . . . preached through Jesus the resurrection. Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection (Acts 23:8). The priests and leaders hated Jesus to the point of having Him crucified and trying to conceal His rising from the dead (Matthew 27:1, 62-64; 28:11-15). **And they laid hands on—arrested—them, and put them in hold—locked them up—unto the next day.** Were they discouraged by this? **Many of them . . .**

believed . . . about five thousand. It would take more than a night in jail to dim the joy of more than five thousand newborn souls. The greater sustaining power was the Holy Spirit within.

An Impressive Group

Acts 4:5-10 Rulers, and elders, and scribes, And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and . . . kindred of the high priest—this was an impressive group. Annas and Caiaphas were high priests who had a part in the trial of Jesus (John 18:12-24). John and Alexander were related to them. They brought Peter and John for questioning. **By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?** Their first question opened the door wide. The name was the sore spot among the leaders. But it was the strong point of the Apostles, the heart of their message. **Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost**—not a new filling but a continuation of what he already had, and the Spirit took control. Peter said, **Ye rulers . . . Be it known . . . that by the name of Jesus Christ . . .**—he accused them—**whom ye crucified, whom God raised.** This was an indisputable fact. **By him doth this man stand here before you whole**—another fact they could not dispute.

Jesus promised power in witnessing unto Christ. That promise was fulfilled here. The power is in the Holy Spirit. When He fills one, God's power is present. Christianity is a living thing. It is not just a system of theories. Some Person is over it all. Sensing this, the rulers asked the question that touched the heart of the matter: **By what name, have ye done this?** Christianity is the power of a Person, and that Person is Christ. All the beliefs and practices of Christianity are but the branches, which follow back to their root. They lead to Jesus Christ, the Source.

Acts 4:11-12 This is the stone (see Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42-46). These men were building a nation, building its religious life, yet they **set at nought** Jesus. Now He is **become the head of the corner**—the cornerstone, the foundation and support of all (Ephesians 2:19-22). Peter pointed to Jesus as the **ONLY** salvation. This was true then; it is true now. **There is none other name . . . whereby we must be saved.**

A Tough Problem

Acts 4:13-18 When they—the council—**saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men**—they had no worldly authority, no college degree to give them any power or authority—**they marvelled.** They realized **that they had been with Jesus.**

And beholding the man which was healed . . . they could say nothing against it. The council commanded Peter and John **to go aside.** They were faced with a tough problem and needed to talk it over. **What shall we do?** They could not deny **a notable miracle hath been done.** This is great praise coming from an enemy. **But that it spread no further among the people, let us . . . threaten.** Even when convinced of the truth, man's stubborn will refuses to give up the unbelief he holds in his heart. They **commanded** Peter and John **not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.** Was this the end of the Gospel? They thought it was. They underestimated the power of the Gospel of Christ. They thought evangelization was finished when it had only begun.

No one can be saved from sin and death but by Jesus Christ. Not by our efforts, good works, or good upbringing, not by Mary, the saints, church joining, baptism, or last rites are we saved. Every person who reaches Heaven will be there because he trusts in Jesus Christ. Peter answered the rulers in a definite manner. He drove the point home to those who questioned in whose name they taught. They must personally accept Jesus or remain lost.

The Reply of Peter and John

Acts 4:19-22 Peter and John answered . . . Whether it be right to obey you or God, judge ye. These were the men who forsook Jesus and fled when He was taken by the mob. But now they were filled with the Spirit. Their message was not dead theory but living truth—the powerful force which has conquered every agent of wrong to come against it. **For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.** It was not hard for them to speak of Jesus. It would have been hard not to. **All men glorified God for that which was done.** The council dared not to **punish them** because of strong public opinion in favor of the miracle that **was done.**

We can expect opposition and persecution if we do something for God. But it makes us strong and more effective in Gospel work. We should obey God rather than men. We need to fear nothing as long as God is with us.

JUST A THOUGHT

**The more words there are,
the less they weigh.**



LESSON 7

PETER AND JOHN RESPOND

Scripture Text: Acts 4:23-37

Our last lesson told how the Jewish rulers threatened Peter and John and commanded them not to teach or speak in the name of Jesus. Keep in mind that Acts 1:8 is fulfilled in these lessons.

In today's lesson, we get a firsthand look at the response of these people of God to the threats of the religious leaders of that day. We can learn the following points from their example. They desired God's glory first. They went to their own people and prayed together as their first recourse. They had no self-pity or self-interest. They kept their essential purpose of spreading the Gospel in view. The saints were in unity. They desired unity with the will of the Father. The Holy Spirit controlled all. We can add to the number by following the way of the early church. Thank God for those who are speaking the Word of God with boldness!

MEMORY VERSE: And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.

—Acts 4:29

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—Romans 15:1-11 Mutual helpfulness.

Tue.—1 John 3:1-12 Obedience in action.

Wed.—Galatians 6:1-10 Forbearance and helpfulness.

Thu.—2 Corinthians 9:1-11 Cheerful service.

Fri.—Isaiah 41:8-20 The Divine Helper.

Devotional Reading: 1 John 4:7-21 The source of love.

Agreement in Prayer

Acts 4:23-28 And being let go, they went to their own company—the church, to those who could agree with them in prayer—**and reported all.** The saints received the news with a desire to do more. **They lifted up their voice to God**—they prayed as one voice, in unity. They praised and honored God. They asked for His help. They acknowledged God as the Creator of all. They reminded God that this opposition was foretold in Psalm 2:1-3, so there was no cause for surprise. The rulers' action was primarily against Jesus.

Hence, no self-pity was proper. The Crucifixion was recalled. Jesus' example was their way of meeting persecution.

Their Prayer

Acts 4:29-30 Grant unto thy servants . . . that with all boldness they may speak thy word—that God would continue to stretch forth His—**hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done.** How? **By the name of thy holy child Jesus.** The disciples asked for boldness to do that which had angered the priests and elders—that it be done in the name of Jesus. These essentials must be kept up in spite of all the opposition. There must be a blending of our wills with God's will in order to have prayer answered.

A Quick Answer

Acts 4:31 When they had prayed, the place was shaken. They did not have to wait long. God sent a miracle to show His presence. They prayed in the will of God. God wanted them to have their desire. The building shook. **They were all filled with the Holy Ghost**—He lived in them, and He made Himself felt. He controlled. They felt that leaping of the heart that saints know, an upsurge of fullness of the Spirit. **They spake the word of God with boldness**—as they had prayed to do, as God wanted.

It is noteworthy that these brethren prayed, not for protection, but for help to go on spreading God's Word. They did not lose sight of their purpose, their number-one business. Some today have turned from the spread of the Gospel. Some reasons are: lack of encouragement, opposition, slighted feelings, the attraction of entertainment or lesser pursuits, a lack of vision, and (most of all) a lack of the power of the Holy Spirit. We **MUST** not lose sight of the one vital work of the church.

A Deepening of God's Love

Acts 4:32-35 Those that believed—the church—**were of one heart and of one soul.** Their unity went deeper than outward agreement only, or likeness of opinion. Their hearts and souls were one. One Spirit in all made all one. **They had all things common**—they shared equally. Their unity included their possessions. We are not commanded to hold possessions in common. It was optional (Acts 5:4). The practice was never generally followed through the New Testament. It would require an all-saved group. There must be a common Spirit before common goods can succeed. This was before God

had appointed pastors for His people. In our day, God has given true pastors to lead the saints in helping those among them who have need. (See Romans 12:13.) **With great power**—the power Jesus said the Holy Spirit would bring—**gave the apostles witness of the resurrection**—as they had prayed to do. **Great grace**—the unmerited favor of God, the life of God—**was upon them all. Possessors of lands or houses sold them** and laid the money **at the apostles' feet**. They trusted each other. **Distribution was made** by the Apostles according to the need.

A Gift From the Heart

Acts 4:36-37 **Joses . . . surnamed Barnabas . . . (The son of consolation)**. To be given this name in a group, all of whom were filled with the love of God, was indeed a high compliment. Barnabas was a Levite. Levites were of the tribe of Levi and helpers of the priests in the temple worship. They were members of the Sanhedrin, or court of the Jews. Barnabas came from Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean Sea. He sold his land and placed the money in a fund to be distributed by the Apostles.

JUST A THOUGHT

**Civilization without Christianization
is a curse to any people.**



LESSON 8

HYPOCRITES AMONG THE CHURCH

Scripture Text: Acts 5:1-16

After the great answer to prayer following the threats to the Apostles, the unity in the church was so great that it extended to the holding of possessions in common. Barnabas sold land and added the money to the common fund. Perhaps the approval won by his act excited the envy in the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira.

How did Peter know this was not *all* the money and that Ananias and Sapphira were lying? Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gave him discernment, a gift of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:10). Keep in mind, these hypocrites were not *in* the church but were *among* the church.

MEMORY VERSE: And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. —Acts 5:11

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—Isaiah 52:7-15 God's servants deal prudently.

Tue.—Job 8:8-22 Hypocrites' hope shall perish.

Wed.—Job 20:4-19 Hypocrites' joy is momentary.

Thu.—Isaiah 33:7-16 Hypocrites live under fear.

Fri.—Job 27:7-23 Hypocrites are lost.

Devotional Reading: Matthew 23:1-33 Woes put on hypocrites.

Lied Unto God

Acts 5:1-4 Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession of land and kept back part of the price. Ananias laid some of the money **at the apostles' feet**, claiming it was all. His wife was **privy to it**—she was in on the plan, privately knowing. She later admitted to knowledge of a secret transaction. Peter said, **Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?** Peter touched the vital point. He traced their sin from its source—Satan—to its target—the Holy Spirit. The land—**was it not thine own?** The money—**was it not in thine own power?** They were not forced or pressured to give it. It was voluntary. Not forced without, but Satan within caused them to sin. Lying is sin. They had **not lied unto men, but unto God.** It was God's work and God's church. God's Spirit dwelt there. Ananias

and Sapphira were pretending to give all the money to Him. He was the One sinned against, not man. How did Peter know? God gave him discernment—insight, the power of seeing differences between things.

Was it a sin to keep part of the money? No, they rightfully could have kept it all. Their sin was the lie. It came from selfishness, living for self, living after the flesh (Romans 8). They wanted glory for themselves rather than for God. There was pride, which is not of God (1 John 2:16). Underneath the lie was deceit and hypocrisy. All that came from Satan, who filled their hearts. If sin is in our hearts, we do not know what we may do. The remedy is in the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. Perhaps Ananias and Sapphira were blinded, to some extent, to the enormity of their sin. Satan is a deceiver. He does not let us see where sin will lead us. We must watch lest he deceives us. We need to realize that our daily acts are unto God.

Sin Is Dangerous

Acts 5:5-10 Ananias hearing . . . gave up the ghost—he died. God took a sudden hand. He wanted no mixing of hypocrites with saints in His church. He desires people to be sinners or saints. The power of God was present in the church, and God's plan was to keep it that way. Outside sources cannot diminish the power of the church, but sources from within can. **Great fear came on all.** Great Power was present, and that Power would not compromise with sin. **The young men arose, wound him up**—in grave clothes (a custom then; John 19:40). **And buried him** speedily. Then came Sapphira. She revealed the same deceit, the same sinful heart as Ananias. God sent the same judgment upon her. She died and was buried **by her husband.**

Great Fear Came

Acts 5:11-12 And great fear came upon all the church. This was fear of God, respect and awe, fearing to displease Him. **And upon as many as heard**—outsiders, or sinners, also feared. They lost their indifference. It is good for the church to fear the power of God. Then they will not mix worldly people and activities into the holy life of the church.

The trouble is not so much the hypocrites (who never are really in the church), but the attitude of the church toward them. These two hypocrites neither weakened the church nor lowered it in the esteem of the public. They were allowed no influence. No hypocrite today can harm a church that is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and using His gifts. It is when a hypocrite or other sinner is allowed to have influence in the church that harm is done. It is good

for the world to fear the power of God. Then they will not seek to assume the name of the church with no change of heart.

God is never too severe. Behind His every act is His love and mercy. His church must be kept clean. (See Ephesians 5:27.) Many a sin as great as this one has been committed with no dropping dead or visible punishment. But be sure that the spiritual punishment is always the same—spiritual death. In the beginning of the church, God was setting the standard, making His will known. He expects us to uphold His standard. The church that knowingly allows a sinner to assume the position of a saint is presenting a false picture of Christ, for the church is His body.

And by the hands of the apostles—as tools of God—**were many signs and wonders wrought**—healing and other miracles. **They were . . . in Solomon's porch.** They had no building, so they used a convenient meeting place. They continued **with one accord**—agreement, harmony. Disagreement and contention tend to close the avenues between God and man. Powerful agreement in prayer is the lifeline of man's help from God.

Not Peter's Power

Acts 5:13-16 **Of the rest**—the unsaved—**durst no man join himself to them.** Sinners were afraid to mingle with the church as a part of it. **The people magnified them.** They spoke well of the church. **Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women** were saved. They paid the price to become part of the church. **They brought forth the sick . . . that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.** If Peter could not lay hands on them, his shadow might touch them. **There came also a multitude . . . bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits.** People were brought who were demon possessed, and **they were healed every one.** It was neither Peter's power nor his shadow that healed. It was God's power. Peter's faith reached God and brought His power down.

JUST A THOUGHT

**We owe to both the church and the world
to keep the dividing line plain between them.**



LESSON 9

ANGELS UNLOCK PRISON DOORS

Scripture Text: Acts 5:17-42

In our lesson today, we read about the second imprisonment of Peter and John. Thrown into prison by the jealous high priest and his associates, Peter and John were set free by an angel who commanded them to stand in the temple and speak again the Word of God to the people. The government leaders said, "Do not preach of Jesus." God said, "Go and preach of Jesus." We are justified in disobeying the government and its officials only if they make demands upon us that are contrary to our moral conscience. We must obey God rather than man.

The Holy Spirit had given the Apostles power, making them strong before the council. They were not afraid. They spoke clearly for Christ and the Gospel because they believed the message and knew what they talked about.

MEMORY VERSE: Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. —Acts 5:29

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—1 John 2:1-17 Those who know God obey Him.

Tue.—Isaiah 40:1-11 God strengthens His people.

Wed.—Luke 9:46-56 Revenge is wrong.

Thu.—Hebrews 11:23-38 Faith sustaining in persecution.

Fri.—Matthew 5:38-48 Loving as God does.

Devotional Reading: Colossians 3:12-25 Forgiving as God does.

Go, Speak

Acts 5:17-21 The high priest—who did not believe Jesus was the Son of God—**and all they that were with him . . . Sadducees**—who did not believe in any resurrection—**were filled with indignation.** The rapid spread of the Gospel teaching made them angry. They imprisoned the Apostles. **The angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors**—man cannot stop God. **And said, Go, stand and speak in the temple**—in contradiction of the rulers—**the words of this life.** The Gospel is a message of eternal life. The Apostles obeyed the Lord. A good Christian is a good citizen, but he is a good citizen only as long as he remains a good Christian, and he is not a

good Christian if he transgresses his own conscience or allows the state to do so. The Master commanded to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but in the same command to render unto God the things that are God's (Mark 12:17). Let Christians obey Caesar, but let Caesar stay within his boundaries and not trespass the area that is God's. Let him be a servant; let him not try to be a master. We must remember that God stands above Caesar.

An Empty Prison

Acts 5:22-28 When the officers came—what a surprise! **The prison . . . shut . . . and the keepers standing without . . . no man within.** The angel had worked invisibly, quietly passing through locked doors—a miracle. **Came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men . . . are standing in the temple, and teaching.**

God knew the preaching of the Gospel of life in Christ is so important that He sent an angel from Heaven on a special mission with instructions for the Apostles. What an encouragement this must have been for them! They were to disobey legal orders—a risk of death—to preach in the temple, in the court, in the street, and everywhere. **The captain** himself went **with the officers**, fearing stoning, for the people favored the Apostles, seeing the miracles and the changed lives. **They set the Apostles before the council: and the high priest asked . . . Did not we straitly command you? Yet ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine**—an unintended compliment to the Gospel's strength and their zeal. **And intend to bring this man's blood upon us.** It was already there (Matthew 27:20-25).

A Choice to Make

Acts 5:29-32 Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. They set the council's authority below God's. **The God of our fathers raised up Jesus**—the Resurrection—**whom ye slew**—they accused them. **Him hath God exalted . . . to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance . . . and forgiveness.** They went straight to the vital point, naming Jesus as the Savior and telling how to be saved. **We are his witnesses**—they acknowledged their position. **So is also the Holy Ghost**—His witness was visible in miracles and in lives. The Apostles glorified Jesus, which angered the rulers. **Whom**—the Spirit—**God hath given to them that obey him**—Jesus.

Here we see a group of Christians called upon to choose between God's

command and the commands of the world. They were not the first to be called upon to make such a choice, nor the last. In every generation, there are individuals and groups intent on stopping the spread of truth. Like the high priest and his gang, they assume this position because they want no true preacher or leader coming in to spoil their playhouse of self-esteem.

A Wise Suggestion

Acts 5:33-42 They were cut to the heart—their authority was challenged; their sin was revealed. Instead of yielding to conviction, they resisted. **Took counsel**—talked it over among themselves—to **slay them. Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee**—of the strict, narrow, self-righteous sect, who was zealous for the law and their traditions—**Gamaliel**—a man learned in the law, a teacher (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel said to **let them alone: for if this . . . be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.** This is a lesson to be learned in our day. To fight against God is a losing battle. The success or failure of this work was in itself; they could not change it. **They agreed.** They beat the Apostles and, once again, **commanded** them to **not speak in the name of Jesus.** Love for the Lord transformed the suffering into a privilege and honor for the Apostles. They rejoiced to be **counted worthy** of it. They kept on preaching Christ regardless of the council's orders. When God allows persecution, He provides strength, courage, and joy to sustain us.

Throughout history, men in the name of Jesus Christ have been defying the laws of government. In the early days of the church, the government demanded all Christian believers denounce Christ and accept idolatry. They refused, and many were killed. In the early days of the Protestant Reformation, thousands were given a choice between torture (and sometimes death) and the renunciation of the revealed truth and spiritual liberty they found in the Word of God. They resisted the tyranny of both church and state, and we are the benefactors of their gallant stand. We have the New Testament that the Apostles did not have. They wrote it!

JUST A THOUGHT

**Look into the trusting eyes of a child
and measure your responsibility.**



LESSON 10

MEETING NEEDS WITH HUMBLE SERVICE

Scripture Text: Acts 6:1-15

The Apostles were called to preach the Gospel, not to take care of the more minor functions in the church. In our lesson today, we have a beginning of church organization. These men were not chosen on the basis of their wealth or their influence in the community, but on the basis of their relationship with God and their ability to do the work. We are taught that even the Apostles could not live without prayer. What they had could not be retained without an increase, and this increase had to come from God through prayer and supplication and their continual dependence on Him.

Among the thousands being saved, there were the weak ones, the immature, and the unstable who would need care, patience, and teaching, along with those who had material needs. This church was made up of people like us. They had problems, as we do. They needed to solve them by the same method that is available to us.

MEMORY VERSE: And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. —Acts 6:8

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—Matthew 25:31-46 Help to the least of these.

Tue.—Luke 14:12-24 Christ's supper.

Wed.—James 2:1-13 True faith is impartial.

Thu.—Psalm 113 God cares for the poor.

Fri.—Job 5:8-16 God saves the poor.

Devotional Reading: Luke 6:17-26 Poor in condition to receive.

A Murmuring

Acts 6:1 When the number of the disciples was multiplied—many thousands by this time—**there arose a murmuring**. There was a half-suppressed complaint **because their widows were neglected**. Here was a little leaven, and it was beginning to work within the church. These widows needed help to obtain necessities. Many of the Jews who were in Jerusalem for the feast (Jews who had come from Greece and other places) took faith in Christ and were added to the church. They continued to stay there, and these complained

against the Hebrews, the native Jews. Not understanding or remembering that "there is neither Jew nor Greek . . . in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28) but that all alike are welcome to Christ, they retained some of the old jealousy they had toward one another before their conversion. The Apostles responded to the complaint.

Set Priorities in Order

Acts 6:2-7 The twelve called the multitude of the disciples—the whole church had a part in deciding. **It is not reason**—not good judgment—**that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables**—neglecting spiritual needs to supply physical needs. Their first call was to preach the Gospel, not to take care of minor duties of the church. Choose **seven men of honest report**. Choose people in whom you can confide, who will be impartial in their distribution of the provisions, and who are **full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom**. ALL are to be Spirit-filled. These men were not chosen on the basis of their wealth or their influence in the community, but on their relationship with God and their ability to do the work. The qualifications demanded of them were threefold: honest, full of the Holy Ghost, and full of wisdom. These seven would administer help to the needy of the church, while the Apostles gave themselves **continually**—unhindered, exclusively—**to prayer, and to the ministry of the word**. Even the Apostles could not live without prayer. They had to depend continually on God. The **multitude**—the whole church—**was pleased**. They were Greeks, a wise choice, as the complaint was from the Greeks. **They set**—the men—**before the apostles: and when they had prayed**—asking God's blessing—**they laid their hands on them**. There was recognition by all of the authority given them for this responsibility. The result was a strengthened church. **The word of God increased**. The Word spread and had power. **The disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly**. Many were saved.

The disciples said they should not leave the Word of God to serve tables. Nominal religion today would have us believe that the work of the Gospel is in serving the temporal needs of the people. This appeals to the world because they can understand it. They live in the realm of the flesh and do not understand spiritual things. Some think charitable works are all there is to Christianity. But "is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" (Matthew 6:25). Saints know that man's deepest need is to be made alive in Christ. Spiritual needs must never be neglected in favor of giving material aid. It is to those who keep the Gospel first that material blessings are promised (Matthew 6:33).

Stephen Goes "All Out"

Acts 6:8-10 Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles. This took place a number of years after Pentecost. Miracles were still causing a stir **among the people**. **Then there arose certain of the synagogue**—those holding to the Jewish religion. **Libertines** were former slaves of the Romans, liberated and returned to Jerusalem. The other groups were from Jewish colonies around the area. These were **disputing with Stephen**, but his **wisdom and the spirit by which he spake** were stronger than their arguments. So they turned to falseness and persecution.

Persecution of one kind or another is inescapable for one who goes "all out" for God (2 Timothy 3:12). Stephen might have escaped by keeping still, by using his own wisdom, but he followed the Spirit and kept his soul clean.

Angel Face

Acts 6:11-15 Then they suborned men. They procured men to swear falsely that Stephen had blasphemed **against Moses, and against God**. This angered **the people, and the elders, and the scribes**. Forming a mob, they **brought him to the council**. There the **false witnesses** said Stephen had blasphemed **this holy place**—the temple—**and the law**. They accused Stephen of saying **Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us**. Stephen had not blasphemed. He had explained Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law, and the Law had given way for the Gospel. They twisted his words. **The council . . . saw his face as it had been the face of an angel**—the Holy Spirit was shining through Stephen. The Spirit witnessed to God by making Himself visible in Stephen's face. The unsaved council recognized God in him.

JUST A THOUGHT

**A closed Bible is worse
than a locked refrigerator.**

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LESSON 11

STEPHEN'S STIRRING SERMON

Scripture Texts: Acts 7:1-60; Matthew 10:39

Our last lesson left Stephen as he was falsely accused of blasphemy, and the council, waiting for his answer, "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15). Stephen knew and used the Bible, and his sermon traced the working of God's plan leading to Christ. It showed the disobedience and rebellion of Israel. Stephen was bold in the face of danger, and as he preached, God gave him a view of Heaven and Jesus. Stephen loved his enemies with the same love and forgiveness that were in Christ. Saul consented to the killing of Stephen.

MEMORY VERSE: He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. —Matthew 10:39

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—Mark 13:5-23 Receiving the words to speak.

Tue.—Revelation 2:8-11 Have no fear.

Wed.—Matthew 5:10-20 Persecution is a blessing.

Thu.—1 Peter 4:12-19 Partakers of Christ's sufferings.

Fri.—Romans 8:14-21 Glory revealed in us.

Devotional Reading: Matthew 10:16-25 Facing persecution.

Stephen's Sermon

Acts 7:1-50 Then said the high priest, **Are these things so?** Stephen began, **The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham.** Study the entire chapter. Stephen outlined the history of the Israelites with two points in mind: (1) that God's plan and promises led to Christ, quoting the promise, **A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up (verse 37)**; and (2) that Israel had always rebelled against God. His message was that Jesus is God's Son, and these people, rebelling, had killed Him.

Have Not Kept the Law

Acts 7:51-53 **Ye stiffnecked.** Stephen was speaking to men who were stubborn, rebellious. **And uncircumcised**—not cleansed, not pure—**in heart**

and ears—in their inner motives and outward actions. They would not hear God. He accused their fathers of persecuting and slaying those who **shewed before**—foretold, prophesied—of **the coming of the Just One**—Jesus. He accused them of betraying and murdering Jesus. Stephen boldly told them they had **not kept** God's Law.

Mad Men

Acts 7:54-56 They were cut to the heart—convicted and convinced of their guilt, yet unwilling to accept the truth of their condition. Instead of repenting, they were angered. **Gnashed on him with their teeth**—this was the irrational behavior of mad men, men who were full of the devil. Stephen, **being full of the Holy Ghost**—in His full control—**looked up . . . into heaven**—to God from whom came his help. He **saw the glory of God**—his help was there immediately—**Jesus standing on the right hand of God**. Stephen told what he saw.

In times of great trial, we may ask ourselves the question, "Does Jesus care?" Yes, He cares. Here is another proof that He knows and He cares.

They Stoned Stephen

Acts 7:57-60 Angered yet more, the people became a mob. **Then they cried out . . . and stopped their ears**—to hear no more—**and ran upon him with one accord**—all as one. **And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes**—their outer garments—**at a young man's feet**. The young man was from Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and may have been the one who disputed with Stephen (Acts 6:9). No doubt, he heard Stephen's sermon and saw his face. What effect this and the death that followed had upon him, we cannot say, but he did not forget them (Acts 22:20). These heroic events left their mark on his intelligent and sensitive nature.

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God. His trust was in God. **Saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit**. He knew his spirit was to live on with God. (Compare with Luke 23:46.) Stephen **cried . . . Lord, lay not this sin to their charge**—the same love and forgiveness that was in Christ (Luke 23:34). Then **he fell asleep**. He died; his spirit left his body and went to Heaven.

Many things in this lesson indicate Stephen belonged to God. Stephen was full of the Holy Ghost, and he looked into Heaven, where his heart and mind were centered. He was given a vision. He called upon God to receive his

spirit. He had love for his enemies, and the beauty of God was revealed in his face. Paul called him God's martyr (Acts 22:20). We can be certain that God took him to Heaven where he lives forevermore. His death was a peaceful rest. Anger, chaos, and violence were around him, but peace, trust, and even joy were in Stephen's heart amid the pain. The mob had power over Stephen's body, but they could not touch his soul.

A Statement of Profit and Loss

Matthew 10:39 He that findeth his life shall lose it. Had Stephen silenced the Gospel message to save his life, he would have been lost spiritually. **He that loseth his life for my sake**—gives it to Christ for Him to use—**shall find it**—will keep it safe. There was a time when Stephen had died to himself, giving his life and all to Christ. In so doing, he found true and eternal life, which nothing could take away from him.

The punishment God prescribed in the Law for blasphemy of God was stoning (Leviticus 24:16). There must be at least two witnesses before the accused could be put to death. The witnesses were to be the first to take a hand in the stoning (Deuteronomy 17:6-7), which was done outside the camp, or city (Numbers 15:35-36). These rules were observed, but the one concerning false witnesses was not (Deuteronomy 19:16-19).

Why did God let Stephen be killed? He never promised freedom from suffering. Hatred, persecution, and possibly death are part of the Christian life here, but the love of God through it all and complete deliverance in the end more than repay for all. (Read Romans 8:35-39.) Stephen died for Jesus. Many have followed. They are now enjoying the blessings of Heaven.

JUST A THOUGHT

**This life has great importance because in it
we choose where to live the next one.**



LESSON 12

THE CHURCH SCATTERED BY PERSECUTION

Scripture Text: Acts 8:1-25

When persecution became so serious that one of the Jerusalem church was killed, laymen went everywhere preaching the Word. It had a positive effect on the early church. The Apostles stayed in Jerusalem. The others were scattered. They preached the Word everywhere. Preaching was the business of the whole church. It was evangelism, telling the Gospel to everyone they met.

Miracles were still convincing the people. The Holy Spirit proved sorcery and witchcraft to be wrong—agents of Satan. Simon believed and was baptized without regeneration. Spiritual gifts cannot be purchased with money. The church must be kept pure and holy.

MEMORY VERSE: Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. —Acts 8:4

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—Isaiah 19:18-25 Foreigners converted.

Tue.—Ephesians 2:11-22 Gentiles become fellow citizens.

Wed.—John 10:7-18 One fold and one shepherd.

Thu.—Jonah 3 Preaching delivered Nineveh.

Fri.—Isaiah 9:1-7 Light to all people.

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 60:1-14 The dawn of Zion's glory.

A Great Persecution

Acts 8:1-3 There was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem. Beginning with Stephen's death, it spread. They were all scattered abroad—they fled for safety—throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. They stayed in Jerusalem. Saul . . . committed them to prison—Saul was a leader in the persecution.

The Gospel Is Preached in Samaria

Acts 8:4-8 They that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word—this was the most important duty to them. The church was not spending its time erecting buildings and gaining favor of the people.

They were not joining clubs and trying to improve their standard of living through fleshly means. Rather, it was bringing them life through Christ. That activity crowded out all else. It was not their job; it was their life.

Then Philip—one of the seven deacons (Acts 6:5)—**went down to the city of Samaria**. He did not go to hide, but he **preached Christ**. **The people with one accord gave heed**. What attracted and convinced them? **Hearing and seeing the miracles**. This proved a supernatural power was working through Philip. **Unclean spirits**—demons—**came out of many . . . many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed**. **And there was great joy in that city**—Samaria. No other joy equals the joy of salvation and the joy of seeing men and women set free from the binding power of Satan to begin a new life in Christ.

Simon's Mistake

Acts 8:9-19 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which . . . used sorcery. Sorcery is not an extinct evil. It is yet present and dangerous in our day. Its source is Satan. We see this spirit manifested more openly during the Halloween season. Sorcery and kindred practices are wrong. The people said, **This man is the great power of God**. He had deceived the people by the power of Satan. No doubt, his work was a main cause of the demon possession there. God, through the power of the Gospel, cast out the demons. Many believed Philip's preaching and **were baptized**, including Simon. Simon **wondered, beholding the miracles and signs**. This was his greatest interest, for he had done wonders as well. Simon had not separated from his old life. It takes more than just believing the preaching and being baptized for one to be separated from sin and the old life.

The apostles . . . sent unto them Peter and John. They **prayed for them to receive the Holy Ghost**—freely, not waiting or striving or pleading, just complete yielding. They were already **baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus**, but **he**—the Holy Spirit—**was fallen upon none**. They had not heard the full message of complete salvation. It was a period of transition from idol worship to true worship in Jesus Christ. **When Simon saw** the hands laid on and the Holy Ghost given, **he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power**—not the Spirit, but the power to give the Holy Spirit. Simon failed to see that salvation is a complete spiritual changeover, a death and a resurrection. He thought salvation was an improvement over what he had; they were doing better wonders than he had done. To be saved, Simon had to repent and leave his life of sin. He may have done this after Peter's rebuke. He asked Peter, "Pray ye to the Lord for me" (Acts 8:24).

A Clean Church

Acts 8:20-25 Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased. Simon tried to buy it **with money**. Some try to buy it with efforts, good works, or other things. God does not bargain with men and women. He transforms them. He gives Himself to those who open their hearts to receive Him. Peter told Simon to **repent . . . and pray to God** for forgiveness of this sin.

Simon seemed at first to be saved. The church accepted him. But God did not. When his condition was seen, it was not glossed over. Had it been, those excusing it would have been partakers of his guilt. Excusing it would have blinded Simon to his need. Telling him plainly kept the church clean and let Simon know how to get right with God. The Holy Spirit gives the saints power to discern the spirit controlling a person and wisdom of what to do and say. The church must not knowingly accept sinners as saints.

JUST A THOUGHT

Death is never an end, always a separation.

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LESSON 13

THE EUNUCH BELIEVES

Scripture Text: Acts 8:26-39

After the evangelistic work in Samaria, God had other work for Philip, this time with one person. God spoke to Philip, giving him definite directions to go to Gaza, the desert south of Jerusalem. **And he arose and went.** The place to which he was going was barren and unpromising.

When God wishes one to do something not specifically given in the Bible, He speaks to him personally, not audibly, but by understandable impressions. We need to live close to God and be filled with the Spirit so we can get the message clear. Then our duty is to carefully obey. Obeying brings rich blessings. God uses human tools and will use each one of us if we let Him.

MEMORY VERSE: And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

—Acts 8:31

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—Zephaniah 3:8-13 Gathering of all nations.

Tue.—Psalm 68:24-35 Peace to all nations.

Wed.—Isaiah 45:14-23 Conversion of Gentiles.

Thu.—1 Kings 17:8-16 God used a foreign widow.

Fri.—2 Kings 5:1-14 God cleansed a Syrian leper.

Devotional Reading: James 5:7-12 Patience brings results.

An Angel's Message

Acts 8:26-29 The angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, **Arise, and go . . . unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza.** Philip **arose and went.** God directed, and Philip obeyed. The place to which he was going was barren, a place of rocks and sand dunes, a place **which is desert.** Some of God's most glorious achievements have been accomplished in unlikely places. The lesson to be learned here is glorious opportunities to serve Christ are often found where we least expect to meet them. **A man of Ethiopia,** the treasurer of the Queen of Ethiopia, had been **to Jerusalem for to worship.** This man was **returning, and sitting in his chariot.** He was reading Isaiah, Chapter 53. **The Spirit said unto Philip, Go near and join**

thysself to this chariot. Again, God was leading. The eunuch—meaning any chamberlain or servant of a ruler—sincerely desired to know God's plan and will. He was reading the Old Testament to find it, and this led to his salvation. God's plan is to use people as channels through which the Gospel is to flow to all mankind. God works through human tools. To save the eunuch, God needed Philip. To save others, He needs you and me. We must follow His leading, or some will not be saved. Here was Philip's great opportunity, and he found it at a point in the desert. In God's church, there is no such thing as chance. Philip did not accidentally encounter the eunuch. It was all by divine appointment.

Philip's Response

Acts 8:30-34 Philip ran . . . and heard him read. Philip asked, **Understandest thou what thou readest?** The eunuch said, **How can I, except some man should guide me?** He needed a guide, one to explain the meaning. The eunuch invited Philip to sit with him. He had been reading Isaiah 53:7-8. **He was led as a sheep to the slaughter.** "For he was cut off out of the land of the living." Wondering, the eunuch asked, **I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet?** WHO it is makes ALL the difference. This One was the supreme sacrifice for man's sins, and to receive the benefit, men must know where to find Him.

Philip Preached Jesus

Acts 8:35 Then Philip . . . began at the same scripture—perfect timing, for God had directed. **And preached unto him Jesus.** This Scripture was a prophecy about Christ. Philip could tell the eunuch of whom it spoke, how it had been fulfilled, and how Jesus had died and rose again. He could tell how Jesus saves people and what to do to be saved. No doubt, as they rode along, he told of how he himself had been saved. He not only preached about Jesus, he preached Jesus Himself. The unsaved can preach *about* Jesus. Only the saved can preach Jesus. Because Philip had Jesus in his heart, he could present Him to the eunuch in a living way. The Holy Spirit gave him power to win a soul. He not only gave good counsel, but he brought good news.

The desert was a strange classroom and the chariot a strange place for teacher and learner to be pondering together the truths of God. Likewise, we may think the office, the classroom, the conversation at lunchtime, the journey by car or the chat with friends and neighbors across the fence line seem very insignificant in the Kingdom of God, but these can prove very important

in winning a soul to Christ. It is the guiding of the Holy Spirit that accomplishes the purpose. So much of the preaching and teaching today leave out Christ crucified, the only hope for a sinful world. Let our preaching and teaching begin where Philip's did—with Jesus. And let it lead, as Philip's did, to the realization that a decision is necessary.

The Verdict

Acts 8:36-39 As they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, . . . what doth hinder me to be baptized? He was ready to show he had stepped from his old life to the new by the outward act of baptism. **Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart**—not only believe mentally, but accept Jesus' way—**thou mayest**. Something was necessary before he was ready for baptism. Believing with all his heart must be before baptism. He must know baptism cannot remove sin; it cannot give life; it cannot make one a Christian. It is only a symbol of the change God works in the heart. He must have in the heart the reality of what baptism symbolizes. He had to know that repentance and belief in the heart bring forgiveness and rebirth. Then, one is a child of God and ready for baptism.

The eunuch **said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God**. (See John 8:24.) Believing, he was a candidate for baptism. He had met the requirement. The eunuch stopped the chariot. **They went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch**—a clear description—and he baptized him. Philip put the eunuch *under* the water and lifted him. Baptism is immersion. Note, the Bible does not say that they came by *chance* unto a **certain water**. This was by divine appointment. This was a pool of water in the desert and was arranged by God, as was everything else in the story. **When they were come up out of the water**—both of them had been in it—**the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip**. The Spirit miraculously moved him. God was through with Philip in this piece of work and needed him in another place. The eunuch **went on his way rejoicing**, rejoicing in Jesus, rejoicing in sins forgiven, and rejoicing in the new life within him. When we have the truth and the truth has us, then we are free and happy.

JUST A THOUGHT

**If what we call our religion does not make us happy,
there is something the matter
either with us or with what we believe.**



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