

Bible Lessons



**"Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord,
we are CHANGED" II Cor. 3:18**

ADULTS — YOUNG PEOPLE

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Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

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Theme for Fourth Quarter, 1988

We will continue our study of the Acts, or doings, of the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the progress of the early morning Church. Beginning in chapter 12 with Peter's arrest and deliverance from prison, we will cover the activities of the apostles and believers through the uproar at Ephesus in chapter 19. In one of our recent studies we dealt with the sermon Paul preached at Antioch in Pisidia which is recorded in chapter 13, which will be omitted in this series of lessons. But we will study the effect of that sermon upon the people of that city. We want to especially notice the leadings of the Holy Spirit in the spread of the gospel and the functions of the Church. We will also see some of the conflicts that arose in the work of the Lord, and how these were handled and what caused them. The book of the Acts of the apostles is a picture of the early morning Church in action, a means of inspiring and challenging us in this day to be faithful and strong to work for Jesus as the Lord would have us to.

—Leslie C. Busbee

October 2, 1988

PETER IS DELIVERED FROM PRISON

Acts 12:1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.

2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)

4 And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.

7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

12 And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark: where many were gathered together praying.

13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.

14 And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.

15 And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.

16 But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.

17 But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

Memory Verse: For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. I Peter 3:12.

Central Thought: After killing James with the sword, Herod purposed to kill Peter also, but was kept from his evil purpose because of the prayers of the saints and the power of God who delivered Peter from the prison.

Word Definitions: *Easter:* The Greek word is "passover."
"First and second ward": The Greek word for "ward" means a guard, which means that there were two more guard posts.

"Quaternions of soldiers": Sixteen soldiers. *Damsel:* Young girl. *"It is his angel":* It was a sincere belief in Israel and among the early morning believers that to every child of God there was a guardian angel assigned for protection, and it was also believed that this guardian angel would assume a likeness of the person he was sent to guard.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our last lesson there was a prophecy of a great worldwide dearth or famine. Barnabas and Saul were chosen to take relief and help from the Church in Antioch to the brethren in Judea. It was about this time that Herod, the king, decided to strike at some of the leaders of the Church. This Herod, according to Adam Clarke, was the grandson of Herod the Great, the one who had the innocent babies killed at Bethlehem when Jesus was an infant. He was also a nephew to Herod Antipas who had John the Baptist beheaded. His name was Herod Agrippa. Jesus had said that the sons of Zebedee, namely, James and John, would drink His cup and be baptized with His baptism. Here we see James drinking of His Saviour's cup and being partaker of His baptism. He is to be distinguished from James, the son of Alphaeus, who was the elder of the Jerusalem congregation. Herod was very evidently striking at the leaders of the newly formed Church, no doubt believing that to get rid of the leaders would cause it to crumble. As with all opposers of the truth, he was to find his cause defeated. He knew nothing of the power of prayer. The earnest perseverance of the saints interceding for Peter's release is a great lesson for us today. God still hears and answers the prayers of the saints. Herod had the keepers killed after Peter's disappearance, and he, himself suffered death at the stroke of the angel of God later because of his pride.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Who of the Church did Herod strike at?
2. After killing James, why did he decide to kill Peter, also?
3. What was going on while Peter was kept in prison?
4. What caused the Church to pray without ceasing for Peter's release?
5. How can you tell that Peter was not fearful or worried concerning what he was to meet and suffer on the morrow?
6. How can we know that Peter was very soundly sleeping that night?

7. What did Peter think was happening?
8. Where did Peter go after he came to himself, and why?
9. What was the reaction of the saints who were praying when the answer to their prayers took shape?
10. Why did Peter depart and go to another place?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

How wonderful is the working of the Lord with His faithful saints! Here was Peter, thrown into prison after his beloved brother in the Lord, James, had been beheaded so cruelly. But he was not afraid, for he was resigned for the will of his Master to be done, no matter what. To live would be to labor on for his Saviour's cause, and to die would mean to be present with Him in paradise. Poor king Herod knew nor cared for none of these things. Such has been the case with all the persecutors of the children of God down through the succeeding ages! Their carnal minds cannot transpire the dominating flesh and veil of corruption. But the saved in Christ live and are ready for the present world and all of its griefs and sorrows, and are also ready for the next world, the everlasting home in heaven. Peter had it settled in his heart that he was ready to live or to die. His heart was full of comfort, and he was able to lie down and sleep so soundly, chained between those two soldiers. He was so sound asleep that the angel had to smite him on the side to get him awake. He also had to raise him up and tell him to get his sandals on. When Peter obeyed, the chains fell off from his hands. Our God is truly wonderful! Those chains dropped off as if nothing was holding them. Peter thought he was dreaming. Sometimes the Lord lets us suffer, and to our human sight it may seem that He has forsaken us. He allowed Herod to kill James, but He saw fit, in answer to the unceasing prayers of the saints, to deliver and spare Peter's life. It is surely a wonderful experience to have a special season of prayer with the saints and reap the wonderful answers to prayer in the salvation of souls, healing of bodies, and the upbuilding of His work. Let us be faithful to prevail in prayer to God with hearts in one for all the needs of today.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Peter was a hunted man. Herod, the king, was susceptible to the applause of the Jews, and when he found out how well the Jews approved the death of James, he decided to slay Peter and gain more commendation.

It means something to be willing to be hunted for God. There are many methods which the enemy uses to imprison people's minds. Situations develop when the public opposes the Christian profession, and if we are not careful we will find our souls imprisoned by fear, bitterness, hatred, resentment, etc.

The only way to stay free and clear in our souls is to follow the example of Peter, Jesus, and other holy men of God. They were resigned to the will of God and possessed a forgiving attitude. There is great victory in this. You can feel light and free in your spirit while being hunted and persecuted.

Once a pious saint was goaded and forced to endure the persistent malice of an enemy. Finally the saint publicly vowed to do away with his enemy. It came to the ears of the enemy, who waited sardonically to see what the good and harmless old man would do. Actually the saint sought out every opportunity to do his enemy good. This was at first a source of merriment and some slight annoyance; but when at last the saint rendered costly and sacrificial service to his adversary, risking his life to save the man's wife from drowning, the deadlock between the two was broken and a new relationship established. "All right," said the man. "You have done what you said you would do, and I admit it. You have killed me; or at least you have killed the man that I was. Now what can I do for you?" The saint escaped the bonds with which his enemy had attempted to imprison him and in the process conquered his enemy, too. —Wayne Murphey

October 9, 1988

SAUL AND BARNABAS SENT FORTH BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 13:1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

5 And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus;

7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,

10 And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

13 Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

Memory Verse: For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Romans 8:14.

Central Thought: Being sent forth by the Holy Spirit and commended by the holy brethren, we are able to go forth in the work of the Lord and triumph over the opposing powers of the devil, and be a blessing to souls.

Word Definitions: *"Brought up with Herod the tetrarch":* The Greek text says foster brother to Herod, which was Herod Antipas. This man, Manaen, and Herod had been raised up together in the same household, and Clarke says that some Jewish writers said that Manaen had the gift of prophecy and had told Herod when he was but a child that he would be king. *"John to their minister":* John Mark was their assistant. This is probably the same Mark who wrote the Gospel in his name. *"Saul, (who is called Paul,)":* Saul was the Hebrew

name and Paul was the Greek name. *Deputy*: One in place of the highest official, like a deputy-sheriff.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our lesson today shows a very vital function of the early morning Church, a feature which is still vital today and indispensable as being the main thing that sets the true Church of God apart from the nominal church world. This is Holy Spirit leadership and control. Here at Antioch, which was situated up close to the far northeastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea, were a great number of the disciples of the Lord. They worshipped regularly and faithfully together. They spent much time, not tied to secular and worldly employment, but in seeking the Lord and ministering to Him in prayer and fasting. There came a day when the Holy Spirit made the brethren as a whole aware that He was calling Barnabas and Saul for a special assignment. This was a wonderful event to take place in the work of the gospel. These two brethren had just returned from faithfully fulfilling a ministry to Jerusalem. Attending them was Barnabas' sister's son, John Mark. As they left Antioch that day, they were fully conscious that they were on a mission for the Lord, directed by the precious Holy Spirit. What great joy burned in their hearts! For some reason John Mark departed from them after the encounter on Paphos with the false prophet, and he returned to his home in Jerusalem.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of people were meeting with the Church in Antioch?
2. What were they doing there?
3. What happened while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting?
4. What did the Holy Spirit say?
5. What did John accompany them for?
6. What kind of man was this Sergius Paulus, and what did he desire from Barnabas and Saul?
7. What did Elymas, the sorcerer seek to do?
8. What was the judgment of God upon him?
9. What effect did this have upon the deputy?
10. What did John do after this, and what might have been his reason?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

What a wonderful blessing and experience to be inspired and moved by the Holy Spirit, and to be directed by him in every way, especially in matters concerning the work of the gospel. We must be diligent to seek the Lord for this inspiration, anointing, and guidance. It is of utmost importance that every servant and handmaid of the Lord be filled and led by the Holy Spirit. Man-rule is to have no place in the Church of God. In the church world today we see a woeful amount of human machinery operating in the forms of boards and moderators and bishops. The Holy Spirit is crowded out and not given His rightful place. Oh, it is a blessed privilege to be inspired and led by the Holy Spirit Himself in our work for Jesus! What a blessing it is to the hungry souls that we seek to minister to! How precious to let the Lord have His place in ordering and controlling our services! A pulpit committee is never needed when the Holy Spirit has control of the service of God. There is no need for programs or moderators to oversee the function of the service. The Holy Spirit yearns to lead us in His work. This is not our work. It is God's work and He wants to have the preeminence. There are obstacles to face and problems to be solved and overcome. We can be successful only if the Holy Spirit is leading and having His way. We need to be of good courage to be able to take the bitter with the sweet. Yes, souls who are hungry will be blessed and fed. What a blessing that will be! But there will be the devil who will seek to withstand the servants of the Lord. Saul met this false prophet in our lesson head-on, being filled with the Holy Spirit. Let us take courage to be diligent to seek the anointing and guidance and blessing of the Holy Spirit as a daily function in our hearts and lives! —Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The ministers who labor in God's kingdom are entirely dependent upon the Holy Spirit. First of all, it is the Holy Spirit who appoints and commissions the ministers. Isaiah said in the 48th chapter, 16th verse, "Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me." It is also recorded in Acts 20:28, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

Next we find in the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit directs the ministers where to preach. "Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot." Acts 8:29. The experience Peter had when he went to Cornelius' house attests to this. He received a very direct and explicit message from the Spirit to go. The Holy Spirit also impresses upon the servant of God where not to preach. At one point in Paul's ministry the Holy Spirit forbade him to preach the Word in Asia. (Acts 16:6).

Another important work the Holy Spirit performs is in enlightening the ministers on what to preach. "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual." 1 Cor. 2:13. When the ministry operates under this holy unction, the members of the Church can be confident that they are hearing from heaven. This assuredness can be verified by the fact that the Holy Spirit will dwell with all those who believe. As the preacher brings forth a message under the anointing of God, it will ring true in the hearts of all God's children.

—Wayne Murphey

FOLLOWING CHRIST

I used to go to Chetopa, Kansas, and do house-to-house visitation. One day I went down in the part of town where were some run-down houses. I was driving up a street and as I passed a house the Lord told me to stop there. I thought that I didn't know anyone there, but the Lord told me to stop anyway. I made a U-turn at the corner and went back. I went up to the house and asked the man on the porch if his wife was at home. He said that she was in the house sick in bed and invited me to go on in. I went in and sat down by her bed to talk to her. I asked her if she were saved, and she began to cry. I talked to her about her soul's salvation and had prayer with her. She was very glad I came. In a few days I heard that she had died. I was glad I had obeyed the Lord.

Another time, one afternoon I told my husband that I felt we should go visit our neighbor who was very ill. We left our work and went to his home. He had been ill for some time. When we arrived his wife said he was in a coma, but that we could go in and see him. We knelt by his bed and asked God to bring him to his senses so he could get saved. God did that and we talked to him about his soul. He wanted to get saved.

We prayed for him and he praised the Lord for saving his soul. In a few days he was gone into eternity. We thanked God that we had obeyed Him when He spoke to us. It pays to be led by the Spirit and follow His leadings.

—Sis. Margaret Eck (Written by M. Miles after hearing the incidents told in a message.)

October 16, 1988

THE EFFECT OF PAUL'S MESSAGE AT ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA

Acts 13:14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.

15 And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

16 Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.

42 And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.

43 Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

44 And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.

45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

46 Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

47 For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

49 And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.

50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.

51 But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.

52 And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.

Memory Verse: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. Isaiah 55:11.

Central Thought: We are responsible beings when we hear the gospel of the Good News of the grace of Jesus Christ. If we will give heed and obey we will reap the benefits of the grace of God unto eternal life, but if we turn away and refuse we will be condemned.

Word Definitions: "*Religious proselytes*": Those who come from another region or belief, converts. "*Unworthy of everlasting life*": Not deserving, not suitable. "*Ordained to eternal life*": Prepared, arranged, or disposed through faith and obedience. "*Shook off the dust of their feet against them*": A very significant rite which testified of the Lord's judgment and displeasure against those people who refused to prepare their hearts to receive His wonderful grace.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In a previous lesson we studied the contents of Paul's message to the people in Antioch of Pisidia. He rehearsed a brief history of Israel from the time of their exodus from Egypt up to Christ. Paul declared emphatically that Jesus Christ was the Saviour and only in Him can mankind hope to find justification and renewing of life and favor with God. It is to be noticed that he addressed himself to those who fear God along with those who were men of Israel. But it was the Gentiles who besought Paul, when he was finished, that the message might be preached again on the next sabbath. There were Jews and Gentiles who tarried with the brethren after the congregation had scattered. The gospel of Christ was appealing to their hearts, furnishing them the fulfillment of

the hope that they craved. The cold and empty religion of the Jews failed to fill their needs. Paul and Barnabas knew that their message was true and fresh from heaven, and all of the opposition did not daunt their spirits in the least. By refusing the offered means for salvation the Jews were deeming themselves unfit for the eternal inheritance that Christ came to give. Those who heard it and glorified the Word of the Lord by accepting it and walking in its glorious light made themselves to be ordained to eternal life. Not dismayed in the least, the disciples went their way rejoicing victoriously in Christ to seek out more who were hungry for righteousness.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. How did the Lord open a door of utterance to the brethren at Antioch?
2. Who did Paul address his message to?
3. Who wanted to hear the message again and what did this show?
4. What did Paul and Barnabas persuade the believers to do?
5. Who came to hear the Word of God on the next sabbath day?
6. Why were the Jews filled with envy when they saw the multitudes interested in what the brethren had to say?
7. Why did they turn to the Gentiles with the message of salvation?
8. How did it make the Gentiles feel when they heard that the grace of Christ was being offered to them?
9. Who did the Jews stir up against the truth?
10. What did Paul and Barnabas do in response to the people rejecting them and the gospel?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

How wonderful to hear the message of salvation and accept it with a loving and obedient heart! We are the Gentiles, and Christ came to be a light to the Gentiles. We should be glad and rejoice that salvation has been offered to us. We should glorify the Word of the Lord and highly esteem its precious message of love and salvation from our wonderful God. God wants people to rejoice and be glad that He is calling them from darkness unto light. To fail to appreciate and esteem properly the Word of the gospel spells rejection and loss eternal. We can be among those who are ordained to eternal life by receiving the Word of the Saviour and following

its standards and teachings faithfully. There have always been those blinded souls who reject the Word of the Lord to their own destruction. There are always those who are ready to hinder others from being children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. It is an influence and pressure that we must go against. Those who reject God and His offer of help and salvation place themselves under His eternal curse. They will never share the blessedness of eternal glory and life with Jesus in that blessed world to come. They will be rejected in that last great day just as they refused the counsel of the Lord for their salvation. Man is a free moral agent, and he has the power of choice. Some people reject the Lord when they have such a golden opportunity and door to enter. Others are hindered, but are filled with longing and desire, which causes them to jump at the chance and the least opportunity.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Our lesson shows the attitudes of two classes of people. The self-righteous Jews and the devout and honourable women who were of one class felt that they did not need Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that "our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Isa. 64:6. The self-righteous person folds his arms and says, "What do they have that we do not already possess? We pay our debts, we treat our neighbors right, we are law abiding citizens, and attend church regularly." But Jesus told Nicodemus, who was a strict keeper of the law of Moses, "Ye must be born again." John 3. Morality will not take one to heaven. The rich young ruler who had kept the law from his youth came to Jesus. He was a good young man but he was not willing to obey Jesus and take up his cross and follow Him. He went away sorrowful.

The apostle Paul, in writing of himself to the Philippians said, "not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Phil. 3:9. Many today need to realize their lost condition.

Now the Gentiles were making manifest their desire to be deemed worthy of eternal life. They were different from the Jews who had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life by their actions. The Jews had an exclusive spirit and they were filled with envy when they saw the Gentiles gathering in to hear the apostles. They did not want the Gentiles to be equal with them.

The Gentiles were glad that they, too, could be saved and that Jesus had come to give them eternal life. Those who accepted Jesus as their Saviour and believed were ordained to eternal life. Because the Jews rejected salvation, Paul and Barnabas told them that they would turn to the Gentiles. The Gentiles glorified the Word of the Lord and were glad. Only the humble and those willing to obey all of God's Word will make it into heaven. —M. Miles (written in 1970)

October 23, 1988

THE GOSPEL RECEIVED BY SOME, REJECTED AND HATED BY OTHERS

Acts 14:8 And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked:

9 The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,

10 Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.

11 And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.

12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

13 Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.

14 Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,

15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:

16 Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.

17 Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

18 And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

19 And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.

20 Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,

22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

Memory Verse: For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? II Corinthians 2:15, 16.

Central Thought: In preaching the gospel we must live above the tide of human opinion, for some will praise you up to heaven while some will sentence you to destruction.

Word Definitions: *Garlands:* A garland is defined as a wreath for show.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our lesson today Paul and Barnabas had just fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, from the persecutions that had been threatened upon them in Iconium. A great multitude of the Jews and also of the Greeks had believed at Iconium, and disregarding the ill-affected minds of the people stirred up by the Jews, they had continued for a long time there speaking boldly in the Lord. The Lord had given testimony unto the Word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided, and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. When they got wind of an assault that was planned by the people and their rulers upon them, the brethren felt it best to leave. This was all in the region of Asia Minor, a section of land that was divided up into a number of separate states. Historians pretty well agree that each one of these

states spoke a different language, all different from the Greek. Surely the brethren had to have the gift of tongues to be able to communicate with all of these different kinds of people. As with most of these ancient people, the people of Lystra and the region round about were deeply religious and very sensitive in their hearts to divine manifestations. When they beheld the cripple who had never walked, healed, they were filled with wonderment. They immediately wanted to call these men gods and were ready to do sacrifice unto them. But we see that after all this acclaim, the Jews from Antioch and Iconium came on the scene and persuaded the people who had wanted to worship Paul to take him outside the city and stone him. This they did, but the all-ruling hand of God brought Paul back to life and set him going for the gospel again.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What did Paul perceive in the cripple who heard him speak?
2. How did the people react to the sight of the healing of the cripple?
3. What did the apostles say about themselves to the people?
4. What did they want the people to turn from?
5. Who did they want the people to turn to?
6. What kind of God did they picture the true God to be?
7. What did they say that God had sent from heaven?
8. What did the Jews persuade the people to do to Paul?
9. What did the brethren do after they had preached in Derbe?
10. What did they exhort the disciples in these cities to?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

It was an exciting time and a dangerous time for Paul and Barnabas as they preached the Word of the Lord in Lystra. God gave a witness of His loving power in healing the impotent man who had never walked before in his life. Oh, how the people were touched and moved with wonder and joy! They were actually persuaded that the gods Jupiter and Mercury (who were, according to their myths, the messengers of the gods) had come down in human flesh. They were ready to make sacrifice unto these men of the true and living God. Of course, this highly displeased Paul and Barnabas, and they desperately sought to stop them from their purpose. They just barely were able to stop them, the people were so affected. But

we see these same people turn on Paul and Barnabas after the Jews from Antioch and Iconium had arrived and ill-affected their minds against the brethren. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, supposing him to be dead. Oh, how easily some people are to be moved from their faith! We are all creatures of influence and are easily influenced in our convictions. In this point we need to be strengthened. The influence of the gospel causes us to turn from sin to serve the living God. We see God's goodness and His wonders and mercy. The story of Jesus and His love moves us to bow down before Him and to respect His saints and those who have brought the truth to us. But then cometh Satan. He has a way of turning people's minds to other ideas. He will have the "right" person come along who will say the "right" thing that will weigh so heavily upon our minds and will cause us to go down if we are not fully on our guard. This has happened to many unsuspecting souls. Oh, let us be strong in our convictions for God and not be moved by any adverse influence we might encounter.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

This experience that Paul and Barnabas had shows how easily people can be influenced to change their minds. If Paul and Barnabas had highly valued the praise of man, they would have been emotionally devastated by what transpired next. Because they refused the honor, they weren't "set up" for disappointment. First the people wanted to make a sacrifice to them. After the Jews arrived on the scene they decided they would rather make a sacrifice of them. The mob was probably in a sullen mood and quite hostile because they believed their heroes had deceived them and were nothing more than magicians and imposters.

In the world today we find people who are fickle. They are changeable and susceptible to the spirit of a crowd. When Jesus was brought before Pilate, Pilate's personal conclusion was that he found no fault in Jesus. When the mob cried out that Christ should be crucified, Pilate yielded to their demands. (Luke 23:20-25). Some people have no better basis for their actions than "the crowd does it."

There are some who alter their thinking according to whom they are with. This is a sad condition for one to be in. Every individual should have a base upon which to build his conclusions, a base to use as his guide. That is the reason we should study God's Word and get it firmly fixed in our minds

and hearts. Then, through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a person can always be sound in his position because he knows from where he has drawn his conclusions.

—Wayne Murphey

The Imprint of the Bended Knee

“Daily we leave imprints—God help us to leave good ones!” When problems and burdens grew too heavy he had a place he liked to go alone to pray. This Kentucky farmer would go to the lower end of the field and there under a spreading tree, he would pour out his prayers for those whom he loved, those tough, brutal, cursing sons of his.

Down in the soft dust around the tree he would bend his knees in prayer. He had been there so often that the impression of his knees had worn a groove about the tree. His sons had discovered his place of prayer and it sent them into wicked jeers of laughter. To them it was altogether untouching to see, or spy on him, at prayer. So he found more peace and comfort in slipping away from the noisy house, away from the echo of their curses, under the tree with God’s wide-open sky above him. There he could give way to his grief, and there he could throw up his arms, as Moses of old lifted up his hands for help. There, alone with God, he could pray aloud and call out to Christ the names of his sinful but beloved sons, and plead with the Holy Spirit to speak to their hearts and somehow make some impression on them. He pleaded that in some way God would use him to shine before them so that a thirst for His Christ would develop and they would be saved before it was eternally too late. It was the strength he gained from Christ that enabled him to arise above their mean, hateful tricks.

One by one they left him, to go out on sinful paths of their own choosing. One by one he pleaded with them, and tried to win them, with testimony and prayers, and by each he was cursed and shamefully treated. Yet soft was his answer, and firm was his faith.

At last he was all alone, farming what he could without them, and going from time to time down under the old tree to pray, even yet, for the boys.

The years went by and his physical strength failed. It was harder now to get to the end of the field, but yet he went. It isn’t that he didn’t pray in the house; he did, but it was a place he had so often been, and he being a man of the soil,

loved to be out under the open sky and surrounded by the handiwork of God.

Then, too, there was where in so many years past, and now, that he prayed so many prayers for his boys. Now that the house was quiet, his prayers went on the same with undying hope that his God would somehow come to be their God, and his Saviour their cherished own—as he bent in the accustomed place under the old tree.

And so he lived alone, yet not alone, for Christ was always with him, his Master and his Keeper. But one morning the little old man didn't come down under the tree to pray. Oh, no; his souls went some place better—to Christ, the owner of it.

Only his body that once housed his soul remained, and closed were the eyes that would weep no more. Then his sons came home one by one from here, from there, to view his cold form in its casket. Where were the sneers, and the laughs, and the curses they had so often hurled upon him? They did not curse him now. They rose up and called him blessed. "He was a good man, he was a godly father," and so forth. These were their statements now.

So they buried his body but they could not lay away its influence.

They gathered around the farmhouse for the last time, and one of them suggested before leaving that they all take a walk around the farm for old time's sake, and explore it after all these years away. So they did. From time to time, as they walked around, they would say, "Remember this," or "Here's where this happened."

At length they came to the old tree. "Look," said one of them. "Look at the groove worn around the tree! Do—do you know what that is?"

"Yes," said another, "It's—it's—it's the imprint of his bended knees."

Another said, "Here he came to pray for us. This is something I'll see all the days of my life. Remember how we treated him?" Each of the boys had something to say, and one bent and put his hands down against the still-fresh, dusty knee imprints that spoke of his father's last visit there, and the lines of his hardened face seemed to soften, and tears flowed, tears he was not ashamed of.

I don't know all the details to tell you, but I do know that nearly all of these men accepted the Lord, and found in Him joy unspeakable, for truly Christ can save to the uttermost all

that come unto Him. The Holy Spirit talking to their hearts, and the memory of the imprint of the bended knees, convicted them, and those who yielded repented, asked and willingly received, by the blood of Christ, salvation.

I wish I could have said all of them were saved, but not all of them were, but it was a large family of boys and most of them got saved.

—Mrs. Lloyd H. Doutrich

October 30, 1988

AN IMPORTANT ISSUE SETTLED

Acts 15:5 But there arose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;

9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:

14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:

17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and

all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

Memory Verse: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God. Romans 2:29.

Central Thought: The outward forms and ceremonies which were practiced under the law are fulfilled in the spiritual life of Christ in the soul and are not needed in this New Testament dispensation of grace.

Word Definitions: *Disputing:* Questioning together and discussion, Greek. *Yoke:* Burden or obligation. The whole ritual part of the law became in time a heavy burden and its fulfillment in Christ brought freedom and rest to the soul. *"Abstain from pollutions of idols":* Partaking of idol worship and eating the meats offered to idols. *"From fornication":* From all acts of moral impurity and infidelity such as adultery, incest, and prostitution which at that time was very prevalent in idol temples. *"From things strangled":* The flesh of animals which were strangled for the purpose of keeping the blood in the body, which were wickedly esteemed a greater delicacy. *"And from blood":* Not only blood itself, but from cruelty, manslaughter and murder.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Paul and Barnabas had returned from their successful missionary journey among the Gentiles to Antioch, and great rejoicing came as they told how God had worked with them, opening the door of faith unto the Gentiles. Right after their return, certain men came down to Antioch from Judea and began to teach that the newly won Gentiles had to keep the law of Moses concerning circumcision to be saved. There was a lot of argument and debate between these men and Paul and Barnabas concerning this. It was decided that Paul and Barnabas and certain others should take this matter up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders. On their way to

Jerusalem they caused great joy among the congregations as they told about the conversion of the Gentiles. At Jerusalem they were received by the Church and the leaders, and declared all the things that God had done with them. Here they met this same element that had come to Antioch. Some of the Pharisees which had believed rose up with the same pressure, that the Gentiles who had accepted Christ would have to be circumcised and commanded to keep the law of Moses. It was hard for these people to give up the law system. That law spirit was not dead and it is still not dead today. Many, many deceived souls today still cling to the law system of tithing, sabbath keeping, and other things. Our lesson today shows how the Church came together with this issue, discussed it, dealt with it, and resolved it. There will always be things that we will have to come together and talk over. May the spirit of love and humility prevail in those sort of times. There is always room for Satan to work if the right spirit and attitude is not retained by all concerned. —Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What did some of the believing Pharisees try to teach?
2. Who came together to consider this matter?
3. What did Peter say that God's attitude toward the Gentiles was?
4. What did he label circumcision and the rituals of the law?
5. What did he say that the Jews and the Gentiles would both be saved by?
6. What did Paul and Barnabas declare?
7. Who spoke after the others had finished their report?
8. What did God visit the Gentiles for?
9. Quoting from Amos 9:11, what did Brother James see in that Scripture that could be applied to that matter?
10. What was the sentence or judgment that James gave?
11. What were the four things that he counseled to warn the newly converted Gentiles to abstain from?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

Perhaps it has not occurred to many of us, but as we consider this lesson today, we need to realize that the coming in of the Gentiles to the faith of the gospel was a difficult thing in the Church. This was because so many of their minds had been programmed by the law against any kind of fellowship or even friendship with non-Jews. Now when it became evident that the door of faith was being opened to the

Gentiles, then the next problem was: "Are these people going to escape the traditions and requirements that have been upon so many of us?" In sensing how human beings react to certain things, I am persuaded to believe that there may well have been feelings in some just like that. "We had to do it, and they are not going to get away without doing it." We must always remember in any kind of problem that comes up that God is God. He is the one who is running things. Peter counted this matter of trying to put this yoke upon the new brethren as tempting God. He said that it was a yoke no one was really able to bear. A law spirit is always devastating to a person, or a congregation. You just let someone get loose with a lot of pull and push who has a harsh and driving law spirit, and you will have trouble a plenty. Zeal is good, but zeal with a law spirit ("Thou shalt and Thou shalt not") can work havoc in the Church. Now the law spirit is always around and it infects conscientious hearts. Notice in our lesson that the elders and apostles (the leaders) were called to settle this matter. It will be that way many times. People are prone to listen more to the ideas and the influence of a law spirit than they are to take counsel from their elders. We need to think about these things and be wise in the times when issues arise. The devil has a trap set for our feet in those kinds of times. It is wise to pray, be humble and be very careful with your attitude and the words that you speak. God can and will help us bring about a resolution if we will follow Him.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The application of the truth as directed by the Holy Spirit must be the guidelines by which we, His people, walk, else we lose His divine image and likeness. In the case given in the lesson, when the Word was brought to bear on the matter, and Holy Ghost-led men began to testify of the Word's fulfillment, there was no more room for controversy, for the Word and the Spirit had spoken. The same rule must apply to us yet today. The prime factor which must be taken into consideration, then, is: what is the teaching of the Word in the matter as applied by the Holy Ghost? This places responsibility before the Lord squarely upon every one of us as individuals. We are not allowed to be moved hither and yon by the opinions and persuasions of others, but must evaluate the circumstances and conditions as they appear when compared to the truth and be led accordingly.

It is also necessary that we apply the proper law to the proper situation. There is a vast difference between a brother and an heretic. Look them up in the dictionary. A brother may err or make a mistake, but if he be a brother, he will react as a brother and conduct himself as a brother. A heretic seeking to introduce foreign teachings into the body of saints will not receive nor pay any attention to brotherly admonitions. Bible rules applying to these two cases are entirely different. One is in Matt. 18:15-18; another is in Titus 3:10, 11. Read them. To misapply the Word will only lead to more confusion and contention, besides failing to hold the teaching of divine truth. An individual who comes adding to or subtracting from the requirements of divine truth cannot be accepted and endorsed as a brother without betraying the truth.

—C. W. Wilson (Written in 1970)

November 6, 1988

A LETTER OF CONSOLATION AND A DISAGREEMENT

Acts 15:22 Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:

24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:

25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.

28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:

29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from

which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:

31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

Memory Verse: Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Matthew 11:29.

Central Thought: Great joy comes when we work together in harmony for the work of the Lord and the benefit of souls, but in times of disagreement we must be careful to keep love and forbearance for one another.

Word Definitions: *"Subverting your souls"*: Misleading your hearts. *"Hazarded their lives"*: Risked their own lives and safety, referring to the recent trip on which Paul and Barnabas had been persecuted severely. *Consolation*: Solace and comfort. *Contention*: Dispute or disagreement. We are not to count this contention between Paul and Barnabas as sinful or carnal. Both men were in the right and kept the love of God in their hearts, but for the sake of the work of God they felt it wise to separate for the time being.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our previous lesson showed how the dispute concerning the new converts among the Gentiles having to be circumcised and to keep the law was settled. It was decided that the Church in Jerusalem send a letter to the Gentile brethren who had accepted the faith of Christ concerning their decision. Paul and Barnabas were accompanied on this mission with

two of the chief men among the brethren, namely, Judas, and Silas. Paul and Barnabas had just come from Antioch with the question to be settled, so it was deemed necessary to send some of the local brethren from the Jerusalem Church to verify the message sent by Paul and Barnabas. Paul and Barnabas had just returned recently from their perilous missionary journey into Asia where Paul had been stoned and almost taken. They were beloved of the Church. It was a great consolation to the Christians at Antioch and to the newly won converts in Asia to know that their faith and obedience to Christ and His gospel was sufficient to save and keep them without the rituals and the ceremonies of the law. Judas and Silas joined their testimonies and exhortations along with Paul and Barnabas, confirming them and their report from Jerusalem to the brethren in Antioch. Judas and some of the others from Jerusalem went back after they had tarried for a while, but Silas felt clear to remain at Antioch. The Lord was going to need him shortly. It was with a good purpose and intention that Paul suggested that he and Barnabas go to visit all the brethren where they had preached the gospel previously. There is nothing said of any special leading or inspiration of the Holy Spirit concerning this. But it was a good and worthy plan and desire. The Holy Spirit does not lead in the same way every time. Here there arose a problem and a strong disagreement. It is said that John Mark was Barnabas' sister's son. His tender and ardent love for his nephew was willing to forbear any inconvenience that his former failures might have caused. He wanted to take John Mark with them, but Paul was not willing to do this. Their disagreement was not sinful nor indicative of sin. It was an understandable and legitimate disagreement. Both brethren kept the right attitude. God worked it all out, and Paul was able to commend John Mark later as being profitable for the ministry (II Timothy 4:11). —Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Who did the Church at Jerusalem send with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch?
2. What did they send with them?
3. What was the feeling of the Church at Jerusalem for Paul and Barnabas?
4. What was their purpose in sending Judas and Silas also?
5. Is it possible for us to lay a greater burden upon souls than what God is requiring?

6. How did the Church at Antioch take the epistle?
7. What did Paul propose to Barnabas that they do, and why?
8. Why would Barnabas want to take John Mark with them?
9. Why did Paul object to taking him?
10. In choosing Silas and taking him, what did Paul have in his favor?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

It is surely a valuable thing in one's life to endure the trials and sufferings that go along with duty and labor for the right. This suffering and endurance works discipline and trustworthiness in one's testimony before others. There are matters that arise that require the service of someone who is dependable, steady and trustworthy. Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint (Proverbs 25:19). There are duties that can only be entrusted and executed by a faithful and honest person. A person who is steadfast in his integrity in doing the right will find doors opening for him all along the way. But he that is proven untrustworthy and treacherous weaves a web of trouble and despair for himself. Faithful and trustworthy men become very valuable and beloved to those who are in the cause that they serve. Their whole life is devoted to the welfare and betterment of others, and such devotion and love wins for them confidence and support from loving hearts who are willing and joyfully ready to return devotion and service. Because our Lord Jesus was faithful and obedient to God to the death of the cross He has been awarded the highest position of honor and service of any person in all time. It really pays to faithfully serve the Lord, and His people, and the souls of men. Serve with no thought or hope of pay or reward. Serve because it is your delight and you know that you are serving the dear Lord Jesus. His reward will far exceed any laurel that man could ever give. This faithful spirit in a person will help him to meet and handle any kind of conflict or disagreement he might meet with his fellow laborer. He will keep his attitude right, and will not take offense at the failure of his fellows to agree with him. He knows that it is best to stifle any temptation for vengeance or offense. Rather than becoming bitter and resentful, he commits all to God that He might in time work all things out for the good of all.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"Disagreement is refreshing when two men lovingly desire to compare their views to find out truth. Controversy is wretched when it is only an attempt to prove another wrong. Religious controversy does only harm. . . . It destroys humble inquiry after truth, and throws all energies into an attempt to prove ourselves right; a spirit in which no man gets at truth."

—F. W. Robertson

Almost all problems stem from one individual believing another should ascribe to his opinions. If the other person has differing views and is of the nature to express them, things can really become heated. When one's convictions are held on another, trouble often develops. There is a difference between an opinion and a conviction. An opinion is not as deeply inbred as a conviction. Opinions many times are derived from a lifestyle or habit, whereas a conviction is formulated on what we are deeply persuaded of as truth. Everyone has convictions and opinions and it is not to say that this is bad. Problems are avoided when individuals have enough wisdom from God to know the difference between a personal conviction and the Word of God from which convictions are drawn. An added ingredient in avoiding problems is to not only discern the difference, but to have enough grace to refuse to represent them as one and the same.

If you were to delve into a saint's life, you would find it a complexity of ideas, thoughts, and convictions. These things are acquired over a period of years and are very relevant to their experience and stand for God. This is how God intends it to be. Our personal lives should continually consist of taking inventory of ourselves, accepting God-given inspiration on how to act so that we may be our best for Him. However, we must not allow the complexity of our own personalities to alter the simple gospel of Christ. The testimony of the apostle Paul was this, "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward." 2 Cor. 1:12.

—Wayne Murphey

November 13, 1988

LED OF THE HOLY SPIRIT INTO MACEDONIA

Acts 16:1 Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek:

2 Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.

3 Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.

4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.

5 And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

6 Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia.

7 After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.

8 And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.

9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;

12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

14 And a certain woman name Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the

Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

Memory Verse: . . . How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! Romans 10:15.

Central Thought: After the Holy Spirit had counselled Paul and Silas not to preach the Word in Asia, they felt led to go to Macedonia as Paul had seen a Macedonian in a dream, calling to them to come over and help them.

Word Definitions: *"Assuredly gathering"*: Concluding or coming to a decision. *"Seller of purple"*: A woman trader of purple cloth. *Assayed*: Tried or sought.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Paul and Silas had departed from Antioch and had traveled through Syria and Cilicia confirming the churches. They came to Lystra where Paul had previously been stoned. There they found a young man who had been growing in the Lord and advancing in the Kingdom of God. Paul was later to testify of this young man that he had "no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state." He went on to say that "as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel," (Phillipians 2:20-22). He later wrote two epistles to this young brother, which epistles reveal the gracious and close bond that was between them. Both the mother and the grandmother of Timotheus (or Timothy) were devout Christians with unfeigned faith in the Lord, and from a child he had known the Holy Scriptures (II Timothy 1:5; 3:15). He was doubtless a very young person, so young that Paul deemed it necessary for him to submit to the rite of circumcision to offset the prejudice that he knew would cause many Jews to refuse to hear him in the ministry. Paul counseled Timotheus later to "let no man despise thy youth," (I Timothy 4:12). Timothy went with Paul and Silas on this missionary trip. It is very interesting to note the restraint put upon Paul and the brethren from preaching the gospel in Asia and Bithynia. This is not only interesting, but it is very important to recognize the leadership of the Holy Spirit in directing the ministry of His vessels. While they waited on the Lord at Troas, Paul had a vision in the night of a man whom he recognized as a Macedonian calling for them to come and help them. Their reaction was an immediate endeavor to reach in that direction, heading for Philippi,

Macedonia's chief city. Waiting upon the Lord for guidance and an open door, they finally found one in the women who met down by the riverside, one of which women's hearts the Lord had opened. How wonderful to be led of the Lord in our service to His name and precious souls!

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Who did Paul find at Lystra?
2. What did Paul want Timothy for?
3. What did they do as they went through the cities?
4. Were the Churches blessed in keeping the decrees the elders at Jerusalem sent to them?
5. Why did they not preach the Word in Asia?
6. What happened when they tried to go into Bithynia?
7. How did they finally decide what God wanted them to do?
8. What did they do when they first came to Philippi?
9. Who did they find down by the riverside, and what were they doing?
10. What especially good thing was said about Lydia?
11. How did Lydia show her hospitality, and what was her attitude toward the brethren?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

There is great joy in living a life consecrated to the will of God and letting the Holy Spirit lead and guide in everything we do and every place we go. Seeking His anointing and guiding hand is a very important part of the Christian's life. It is not what we want to do, but what does the Lord want us to do? We notice along the journey of life as we live for Jesus, that there are wonderful and blessed acquaintances to make and ties to form with loving and gracious hearts. Love flows from heart to heart. As we see the hand of God in a person's life, and as we taste of the gracious fruit of their labors, we are bound with love to them. This love causes us to enjoy their company as well as be blessed by their labors. How sweet the company of the saints! With no covetousness or strife or envy, labor and life is an enjoyable and happy experience! With humility, kindness and spiritual inspiration as a daily and unfailing feature, our journey through this world can be a "little heaven to go to heaven in." In considering our human weakness we should be aware that only what the Lord leads and blesses in will be worthwhile and effective. Instead of scurrying and fretting about what we are going to do, we can

quietly hope, pray, and wait upon God. There are times when the Lord wants us to be silent and still. He wants us to be aware that we are not the ones who are running things. We may be like Paul and Timotheus and Silas when they first went to Phillipi. There they were, in that city abiding certain days. They knew that God was directing them, and they had followed earnestly His hand of love. Here in this city of strangers they waited on the Lord for an open door. And there, down by the lowly river, they found a group of women having prayer meeting on a regular basis. One of these women was a sincere worshipper of God, and she heard the gospel, and the Lord opened her heart. Oh, what a blessing to find a soul like that! What a comfort is the fellowship of others who have like precious faith with us!

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

As it now comes to light, we can see the benefit and realize the necessity of Paul's three years in the Arabian desert. (Gal. 1:17, 18). The ninth chapter of Acts records Paul's conversion and his experience with Ananias and it also says that straightway he preached that Christ is the Son of God. It is of considerable importance that we realize that Paul did not go from a persecutor in the streets to a fully qualified and capable minister of the gospel in a few days. As we have taught before, the calling comes first, and this first public activity of Paul's at the beginning, no doubt, convinced him that he had a place in the Lord's vineyard, but he was far from being ready to go and fill it yet. However, the calling had come. Would you like to know what Paul was doing in Arabia for three years while hungry souls were perishing? He was getting acquainted with his God and becoming familiar with His ways and methods of dealing with humanity. The only experience he knew at first was to be struck down and receive a vision. Had he gone on to the vineyard with nothing more than that he would have expected some sort of supernatural demonstration, as the first one was, every time he needed a leading from God, for that was all he would have known. Some time spent alone with the Lord would provide him with an understanding of the way the Holy Ghost makes Himself known to people, and Paul, like all others, would have to become willing and able to recognize and follow that leading without a vision and a knock-down. I wonder sometimes if the Lord doesn't become weary of having to knock folks down before they will hear His voice. Likewise, we must attain to

the place in Him where we can ascertain His will for us simply by the impressions of His Spirit and that alone without His having to write us a sign or paint us a picture to go with it. Paul encountered times later on in his experience where there would not have been time for all that demonstration in order for him to know the mind of the Lord, yet he knew it. How did he know? Because he had learned his lesson well in the desert and was able to recognize and follow the instantaneous promptings of the Holy Spirit. Produce the individual who relies on fleeces, signs, or demonstrations consistently for his leadings and you will behold one afraid or else who has never learned to trust the leading of the Spirit alone. There are times in everyone's experience where some situations are so perplexing until special help is needed to make the Lord's will plain, but these are by far the exception rather than the rule. This is the day of Holy Ghost leadership. The key that unlocks that treasurehouse for us is to be filled with Him. Our lives directed by Him and our hearts are ever to be in tune with Him and His slightest bidding. To whatever degree we fall short of this to that same degree we are hampered in His service.

—C. W. Wilson (Written in 1970)

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November 20, 1988

PAUL AND SILAS DELIVERED FROM PRISON

Acts 16:16 And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying:

17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.

18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

19 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers,

22 And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.

23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:

24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and

washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

Memory Verse: There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. I Corinthians 10:13.

Central Thought: God allows His servants to suffer and to get into close places for the sake of the gospel and the benefit of souls, but He will deliver them in due season.

Word Definitions: "*Spirit of divination*": Foretelling events by Satan's power. *Soothsaying*: Fortune telling.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Paul and his companions had been meeting with a company down by the riverside where they prayed together. One day while they met there, a young servant girl met there with them and began to manifest the spirit of the devil. She began to go about with the brethren, following them and crying out, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation." For many days the apostle Paul and the others heard this as the young girl followed them everywhere. No doubt they were praying and calling on God to help them and direct them in dealing with this thing. Finally, Paul, being grieved and disturbed in spirit, turned and commanded the evil spirit to come out of her. God broke the power of that evil spirit and the young woman was delivered, much to the anger and displeasure of her masters when they saw that she was no longer able to function as a fortune teller as she had done before. Blaming the brethren, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, "These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans." Then the whole multitude were turned against them, and they were beaten and thrust into the prison, giving a solemn charge to the jailer to keep them securely. Realizing the seriousness of the charge, the jailer put them into the inner prison and fastened them in the stocks. Clarke says that these stocks spread the prisoner's legs

apart and were very painful. With the brethren thus bound and lying on the bare floor with lashed backs, their suffering was great indeed. And yet, they sang praises to God. It was another great victory for the gospel when they were delivered from prison and the jailer and his family were all saved!

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Who met the brethren one day when they went to prayer?
2. What did she cry out to Paul and Silas as she followed them?
3. Why was Paul grieved about this?
4. What damage was being done in the minds of the people to have the brethren advertised by this damsel in her evil way?
5. Why did not Paul immediately rebuke the spirit?
6. Why were her masters angry after she was delivered of the evil spirit?
7. What did the jailer do to keep his charge concerning the prisoners?
8. What did Paul and Silas do at midnight?
9. What caused the jailer to want to be saved?
10. What happened that night that brought joy to hearts and glory to God?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

When the light of heaven and the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ shines forth into a society, it brings to light many corrupt and evil practices that before have gone unquestioned and unchallenged. Evil and wrong thrive in the darkness and ignorance of people's minds, but when light and knowledge breaks forth, it reveals the evil and vanity of Satan's work. On the part of those who are vain and proud and unwilling to be exposed, there arises indignation and anger. Here is where the faith of Jesus Christ and the patience of the saints meets its suffering and heavy cross. It is even as Jesus said in John 3:19, "... This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." When men through their evil practices are able to make gain and live in peace and prosperity unopposed, Satan rules. But when the message of God's love and grace is heralded and people begin to see how wrong and useless are the vanities that they have been deceived by, a movement is begun toward the light of God. There are those

who are honest and weary of the way that they have been going. Then there are those who are stubborn and proud and unwilling to acknowledge their need. A great conflict ensues, but thank the Lord, the truth will win out. Holy men and women have had to suffer and even die in times like this, but the truth will win out. The grace of God will triumph even if a host arises to withstand it. Those who stick to the Lord's side will come forth rejoicing and fruit will be given to them in the souls who are rescued from sin. This has been repeated over and over through the history of the Church. Oh, the courage and strength that it takes to stand fast for God in the face of the contradictions of men! Christ endured it, and He will help us endure it, also. No need to fear and draw back from the conflict when we have such a mighty Captain who is leading us on to certain victory!

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Paul and Silas preached a very simple message to the jailer and his house. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." In the complex world we live in, it seems hard for people to believe; yet it always has been, and still is, a glorious experience for those upon whom the light of faith breaks.

I read of an incident in which a woman went to her pastor and said, "The way of salvation is perfectly plain to me now. The darkness is all gone. I do not know how or why it is so, but you read a hymn the other night with these words:

'A guilty, weak and helpless worm,
On Thy kind arms I fall;
Be Thou my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus and my all!'

"I saw at once that I had nothing to do but trust in Jesus. I sat all evening just thinking of those lines. I did not hear your prayer, nor your text, nor a word of your sermon. I thought of nothing but those lines then and ever since. I am so contented and happy. Why, sir, don't you think that the reason why we do not get out of our darkness sooner is that we don't believe?"

One minister in the mid 1800's told this incident in one of his sermons. "I saw not long ago a woman who said to me, 'Is it indeed true that upon trusting in Jesus I shall be saved at once?' I replied, 'It is even so.' 'Why,' she said, 'my father, when he got religion, was nearly six years a-getting it, and

they had to put him in a lunatic asylum part of the time. I thought that there was not getting saved without going through a very dreadful process.' I spoke to her of the person and work of Jesus, and repeated to her the divine command, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' She caught the idea and obeyed the command. I perceived that she yielded to the truth and really trusted, for I saw a change come over her face which betokened the rest of our soul. Those who are familiar with such scenes know what a beauty lights up the countenance of the plainest person when they come to see the way of peace and enter upon it. 'I am saved!' said she, and she hastened off, saying, 'I will get away now, for your time must not be wasted. I am saved and you can tell the truth to someone else, and perhaps they will rejoice as I do.' "

—Wayne Murphy

Russian Nightmare

When my 73-year-old mother, dressed like a Russian peasant in a dark, blue-flowered dress, stepped off the huge jet airliner at Idlewild Airport, I could scarcely believe it. She trembled all over as I tenderly embraced her for the first time in 24 years.

Smiling as tears streamed down her wrinkled cheeks, she said, "Thank God, son, He has spared my life and before I die, once more I will see my children. I am so glad, so glad."

Later that day as we flew to my home in Indianapolis, Ind., she said, "Hold my hand, son, so I know you are here. I am so afraid I will wake up and find it is a dream." Then she kept repeating, "Thank you, Lord."

Even after her visa had been approved, Russian Secret Police tried to dissuade her from leaving Russia, saying the Americans would poison her on the plane flight and she would never reach the United States alive. Consequently, she ate nothing on the trans-Atlantic trip and was shaking from weakness upon her arrival.

Now, in San Francisco, where her family grew up, the long nightmare of family separation and imprisonment in Soviet and Siberian concentration camps is beginning to fade.

Soon after my father's exile in 1931, my three American-born brothers were released and returned to America in response to a U. S. government demand. So that left Mother, Hope, age 9, Timothy, age 4, and me in Odessa in a damp

basement room with badly cracked walls and dirt floor. On one miserably cold, dark night in March, 1933, Mother had gone to bed sick. After midnight a loud knock at the door awakened us. Three Secret Police officers entered, and one of them shouted, "Citizen Katherine Voronaeff, you are under arrest."

Mother hurriedly dressed. My little brother and sister awoke and began to cry as they saw the police ripping out the linings of our clothes and mattresses, and confiscating our personal letters, Bibles, hymnals, and other books. I can still see my mother standing in the middle of that awful room, with graying hair, lips trembling on her sweet, pale face, and her bright eyes filled with tears. Heartbroken, Timothy and Hope sobbed a last, loving good-bye as our dear mother was dragged away to prison.

This was the horrible beginning of Mother's 24-year imprisonment in Russia and Siberia. There was no court trial. For 15 months she suffered cruel persecution and unimaginable torture in the Odessa prison. Why? Because she had committed some terrible crime? No. Only because she would rather suffer in prison—or die, if need be—than give up her faith in Jesus Christ or incriminate her dear Christian friends. Her ruptured, dislocated internal organs and severe indigestion testify to the brutality of the terrible beatings she received. If she cooperated, they offered her better food, but threatened to shoot her if she did not plead guilty. Mother would not serve two masters—the atheistic Communist state and God. She would rather suffer than become an informer for the godless Secret Police!

Finally, without a court hearing, the police handed down their verdict which could not be appealed: Sentenced to hard labor in Siberia!

Soon afterward, with Hope and Timothy, I fled Russia under Police gunfire and miraculously escaped to Poland, later joining our brothers in the United States to become American citizens.

As ten years dragged slowly by, we received no word from Mother, and wondered if she was dead. Then came a letter from a mutual friend, telling us that she was still alive. She and 40 other prisoners had been herded like cattle into a box-car, and had slept on wooden tiers along the walls for nearly a month before reaching the complex of concentration camps at Karaganda, Siberia. She watched many die en route from hunger, disease, and exposure.

At Karaganda, watched day and night by guards with trained police dogs, and surrounded by deep swamps many miles from the nearest foreign country, she had no way of escape. Here, Mother lived in a tent barrack built like a corral for cattle and surrounded by barbed-wire fences.

Wattery cabbage soup, dry salted fish, and black bread was the only pay she received for 12 hours of hard labor each day. At times Mother was so weak she could scarcely stand, but when she paused to rest, a guard clubbed her. While felling trees in waist-deep snow in 50 degrees below zero temperatures, many were crushed because they couldn't move fast enough. Others became ill, lost fingers and toes from frostbite and gangrene, and others froze or starved to death!

Mother suffered for four years in Siberia—16 months of the time in solitary confinement in a dark dungeon in the Fergana maximum security prison. A crack in the stone allowed a little sunshine to penetrate the darkness. Yet she didn't feel lonely—the Lord was present and she sang of His goodness. Then she spent 20 more years in several Russian prisons and concentration camps before the letter came from a mutual friend telling us that Mother had been released from prison because she was old and sick. She was living as a civilian in Odessa.

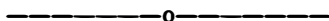
I prepared a petition in the Russian language, pleading for the release of my elderly mother. In September, 1959, as I entered the lobby of the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D. C., to present this petition, whom should I meet but Premier Nikita Krushchev. For two minutes I pleaded with him face to face, but he would not accept my petition. Instead, he put his hands behind his back and motioned with his shoulder for his body guards to throw me out. They almost dragged me to the door and told me to leave my petition with the janitor outside at the service entrance.

However, upon seeing me being thrown out of the embassy, news, radio, and TV reporters surrounded me, asking questions. I told them I was pleading to see my mother before she died—whom I had not seen for 24 years. This story was reported in the news media across the nations, and I appealed to President Eisenhower, the State Department, congressmen, and editors for help. As a result, hundreds of appeals in behalf of my mother poured into the Kremlin. All this helped. But it really was the miraculous answer to the prayers of thousands of Christians across America and Canada that caused the Iron Curtain for one moment to be lifted.

When I question Mother about those years in prison, she talks a few minutes and then bursts into tears, leaves the room, and falls on her knees to weep and pray.

At times in the middle of the night, we are awakened by her screams, and find her shaking with fright and wringing wet with sweat. She is always glad to be awakened from these terrible nightmares, and thanks the Lord for setting her free.

—Paul Voronaeff



November 27, 1988

CONFLICTS IN THESSALONICA AND BEREА

Acts 17:1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:

2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,

3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;

7 Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.

8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.

9 And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.

11 These were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

14 And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

15 And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

Memory Verse: For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. Romans 1:16.

Central Thought: It is usually the vain, inconsiderate, and blinded minds of people who refuse Christ, because they are not concerned and interested to the point of faith and obedience.

Word Definitions: *Alleging:* Presenting truth for others to see and hear. *Consorted:* Joined up and associated with. *"Lewd fellows of the baser sort":* Clarke states that the original Greek expression here refers to low class and wicked lawyers, corrupt attorneys who were always ready to defend any question for a price. *"When they had taken security of Jason":* The word from the Greek translated "security" here means sufficient or satisfactory. Just how Jason and the other brethren satisfied these rulers is not for certain. It could be that these brethren were loosed on "personal recognizance," that is, their lives testified to their integrity and moral quality, and when the rulers found out who they were and what kind of men they were, they were let go. *"More noble":* This indicated a people who studied the Scriptures with an open mind, not wild-headed or quick to persecute, but ready to acknowledge the truth when it was manifest.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Paul and Silas had just previously encountered the arrest and imprisonment at Phillipi in Macedonia. God had marvelously and miraculously delivered them from prison and had saved the jailer and his family. On the next day the rulers sent word to let Paul and Silas go, and for them to depart and to go

in peace, but Paul felt that the rulers ought not to be relieved of all responsibility in the matter. He let them know that they were Romans who had been beaten and cast into prison. He said that they, the rulers themselves, should come and publicly release them just as they had publicly beaten them. When the leaders heard that they were Romans, they were afraid and took heed to Paul's words and came and brought them out, and requested them to leave the city. Before they left, however, they went back to Lydia's house and comforted the brethren. The cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia were both cities of Macedonia wherein little, if any, opportunity to preach the gospel was found. But in Thessalonica there was a synagogue of the Jews. There Paul sought to preach Christ and reason from the Scriptures. There was quite a number who believed the truth. Here the unbelieving Jews took a hand, as had been done before, to make trouble for the brethren. Somehow Paul and Silas avoided the uproar and assault. Jason and some of the other brethren were brought up before the rulers, but somehow they were able to satisfy the rulers and were dismissed. At Berea the gospel found more ready minds who were willing to search the Scriptures to assure themselves of the truth. But the Jews from Thessalonica came and stirred up mobs again. Paul was sent away by sea, and after arriving at Athens, Greece, he sent a message to Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible. —Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What opportunity did the Jews' synagogue at Thessalonica present to the brethren?
2. What did Paul use and reason from in his presenting Christ?
3. What was the effect of his ministry there in Thessalonica?
4. What moved the Jews to cause trouble?
5. What did they say about the brethren to the rulers?
6. How does the gospel "turn the world upside down"?
7. Did the people accuse Paul and Silas rightfully?
8. How were the people at Berea more noble?
9. What effect did the gospel have upon them?
10. Where was Paul conducted and brought to?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

As we have seen already, the gospel has different effects on different people. People who will listen attentively, weigh

carefully with an unbiased mind the preached Word of God, and be humble enough to acknowledge their need and the truth when it is brought forth, will believe and cast their lot with the people of God. But there are always those who will not do this. Their shallow minds and unbelieving hearts will grope for ways and means to contest the truth. In our society and nation, we have freedom of speech and religion and the law will not permit uproars like the one in our lesson over religious matters. However, the process goes on of some accepting the Lord and others rejecting Him. Right in a congregation of saints this takes place. When young people come to the age of responsibility before God, there is a decision to be made. Sad to say, many are influenced by the vain world to refuse the Living Stone upon which they should build. To the Jews and many, many of our day, Christ is a stumbling block. (I Corinthians 1:23). They do not realize what they are doing when they refuse to obey the gospel. They forfeit a hope that will assure them of life beyond this veil of tears. They live their lives with no foundation. The flesh and the world is their moderator and they drift from style to style, from fashion to fashion, and in the end they go into eternity with no hope of eternal life in the resurrection. People resist the truth to their own hurt and destruction. But for those who believe and obey the gospel there are blessings and joys in this world and an assurance of a part with Jesus in that world without end.

—Leslie Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Jews gave quite a testimony for Paul and Silas. "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." Although they meant it in an evil way, they very aptly described the effect the gospel has on those whom it touches. The Jews had their own little private world of religion with which their leaders were quite content, and someone came along, invaded it, and revealed it to be full of flaws and unholiness. They refused to acknowledge that it was for the better that Christ "turned the world upside down." Sin is what threw things into havoc. Salvation puts things back in their proper order.

When God changes something, He does a complete job by going to the very root of the problem. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give

you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Ezekiel 36:26, 27. The law which the Jews strictly adhered to and altered to suit their own personal interests, was woefully inadequate when it came to keeping man from sin. Their ritual's effectiveness could be likened to turning a weathercock to the east when the wind is blowing from the west. It is rather ironic that when the law which they professed to honor was fulfilled, they opposed it. It is sad that even as many today are doing, they refused to humble themselves before the preaching of the gospel and allow their lives to be turned right side up. —Wayne Murphey

December 4, 1988

PAUL PREACHES AT ATHENS, GREECE

Acts 17:16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

17 Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

18 Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest is?

20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.

21 (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead.

32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

Memory Verse: God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands. Acts 17:24.

Central Thought: God gave Paul an opportunity to speak to the people of Athens, Greece, about the true and living God who sent His Son to bring light and knowledge for all men to repent of their sins and prepare for the great day of judgment.

Word Definitions: *Epicureans:* Followers of Epicurus. They believed in the gods by name only, and denied that they had any jurisdiction over man. *Stoics:* Followers of another sect who held that all human affairs were governed by fate, and that no good was received from the gods. *Babbler:* A seed picker; one who picks up sayings and teachings to give out to whoever will listen. *Areopagus:* A hill not far from the Acropolis (the upper city) where the supreme court of justice was held. It was also called Mars' hill. *"Too superstitious":* The Greek word for these two words means "more religious than others. *"God winked at":* Overlooked and did not punish for.

LESSON BACKGROUND

To escape the uproar created by the Jews at Berea, Paul was brought across to Athens by the sea, conducted there by his friends. Paul gave them a commandment to take back to Silas and Timotheus who had remained in Berea, to come to him with all speed. While Paul was waiting for them to get to him, he began to take notice of the city of Athens. He beheld to his sorrow, that the city was dominated by the worship of idols, the work of the hands of men. The buildings and architecture of the city of Athens was, at that time, the best built in the world. The Athenians prided themselves for their wisdom and ability. They were skilled craftsmen, talented with art and sculpture. This skill and the craft of their hands in producing images and temples was really the object of their worship. Paul readily recognized this and brought it out in his message. As the people were always ready to hear some new doctrine or the latest ideas of the day, they were eager to hear what this Paul had to say. He was brought up to Mars' hill, where the supreme court met. There Paul was permitted to give his message, the substance of which we have in our lesson for today. Since he had seen an altar dedicated to "the unknown god," Paul felt it well to call the true God to their hearts, for He was the unknown God to these people. Paul declared the true God to them very well. His message had a great effect, for one of the judges, Dionysius, the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others joined him. It is interesting to note that, despite Paul's command to come at all speed, Silas and Timotheus never reached him at Athens. They finally reached him later at Corinth.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What did Paul see in the city of Athens?
2. Where did he first dispute with the people?
3. What was the first impression of the people about Paul?
4. What did the people of Athens spend most of their time doing?
5. What altar took Paul's eye more than the other idols?
6. How could he rightfully associate the true God with this altar?
7. Why did he stress that the true God did not dwell in temples made with hands?
8. What did Paul say that men should do concerning the true God?

9. What did he say that God hath commanded all men everywhere to do?
10. What will take place in that appointed day?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

Men who have already devised their ideas about the gods will not seek to know God. They felt content with their idols and philosophy. Something that is seen takes the place of what God wants to reveal to the inner man. Every man will shape his own ideas into images that satisfy his imagination, and you will have as many different idols as you have people. This explains the multiplicity of gods, even in our present world. Even the Christian religion is divided and subdivided because of the images shaped by the mind of man in the realm of Bible study. It means much for us to keep with the basics of Christianity. The persuasion that God made the world and that we should seek Him with all of our heart and feel after Him is a very vital, basic principle. If you leave this out of your religious thought, you are going to miss the mark. That God is not likened unto the vain images that man has tried to ascribe to Him is another vital truth. "We are his offspring." These were words found in the writings of Aratus, a Cilician of Paul's own country, who lived about 300 years before him. Being the offspring of God renders man incapable of producing any image that would be justly the likeness of God. God is no longer willing for man to be deluded by these vain ideas. He must now reform and come to the knowledge of the truth, for God will one day bring every man to the judgment. And He will judge the world by Jesus Christ, whom He hath ordained. The assurance that He gives us of this judgment to come is found in the resurrection of His Son Jesus from the dead. We can be assured that the judgment will come, for Jesus has conquered death and sin and will have to dispose of every soul who refuses to obey Him.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

There surely was something lacking in worshipping an unknown God. The Athenians, who were great philosophers, had spent much time in thought and discussion about the mysteries of the universe, but to know nothing of the Supreme Creator pretty well leaves one groping in the dark. Jesus' mission on earth was to enlighten mankind about their relationship with God and to reveal where they fit in the plan of God's creation.

When man begins figuring out the phenomena of the universe and his place within it, and leaves God out of the picture, he can come up with some pretty fantastic theories. It is rather interesting to study Greek mythology. The Greeks had very imaginative minds. But there on Mars' hill, by having an inscription to the unknown God, they were acknowledging there was more to life than what they could explain. Paul was very wise in introducing the gospel in conjunction with the inscription. Had he sought to introduce a totally new God, or set about to tear down their gods, he would have seemed intrusive and offensive to them.

An interesting thought in comparing Christianity to their mythology: Christianity superceded anything they had dreamed up. When the truth of the resurrection of the dead was presented, some mocked. It seems evident by this that the idea of a resurrection was not a part of their religious beliefs. Herein, Christ had already proven something that was above even the thoughts of men.

—Wayne Murphey

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December 11, 1988

AQUILA AND PRISCILLA AND APPOLOS

JOIN THE RANKS

Acts 18:1 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;

2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.

3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tent-makers.

4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.

5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.

6 And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

7 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.

8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:

10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.

24 And a certain Jew named Appolos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

27 And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace:

28 For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

Memory Verse: For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. I Corinthians 3:9.

Central Thought: Paul found some friends in Christ who proved to be a great blessing to him in the work of the Lord, who were also a help to others in learning the way of the Lord more perfectly.

Word Definitions: *"Pressed in the spirit"*: Compelled and constrained, urged. *"Joined hard to the synagogue"*: Adjoining or bordering the synagogue. *Eloquent*: Fluent, capable of speaking clearly and well, an orator, gifted in speech. *Disposed*: Of a mind or purpose.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Of Aquila and Priscilla Paul spoke in Romans 16:3, 4, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches [congregations] of

the Gentiles." Clarke observes that in an account of the life of Claudius Caesar it was written that "he (Claudius) expelled the Jews from Rome as they were making continual insurrections." The decree made by the emperor continued in force only during his lifetime, for in a short time after his death, Rome again abounded with Jews. While Paul worked with Aquila and Priscilla in the tentmaking trade he preached in the synagogue. The Jews tried to make trouble for Paul, and brought him up before Gallio, the deputy, to the judgment seat, accusing him of worshipping God contrary to the law and persuading others to do so, also. But before Paul could defend himself, Gallio told the Jews that he would be no judge of such matters, and drove them all from the judgment seat. Crispus, who had been the chief ruler of the synagogue, had believed on the Lord, and was evidently replaced by Sosthenes. Sosthenes suffered a beating, probably because he was being won over to the truth by Paul, also. After this, Paul accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla, tarried in Corinth a good while, then sailed to Syria. At Ephesus, he reasoned with the Jews for a time, and then he left the others and sailed to Caesarea, then went on down to Antioch and spent some time there. Then he went into Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. About this time Appolos made his entry into the picture. We find that he was not only busy and zealous for what he believed, but he was open for counsel and instruction to the way of the Lord more perfectly. —Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. What did Paul have in common with Aquila and Priscilla?
2. Why was Paul pressed in the spirit?
3. What did he do when the Jews opposed and blasphemed?
4. Where did he say he would go henceforth?
5. How do we know that Paul's ministry was effective in Corinth?
6. What did the Lord in a vision say about that city?
7. How long did Paul continue there?
8. What kind of man was Appolos?
9. How was he limited in his knowledge?
10. How did Aquila and Priscilla help him?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

In working for Jesus there is a particular enjoyable pleasure that one experiences, and that is the fellowship and friendly, happy times spent with those of like precious faith.

The love—the tender affectionate love, wrought by the love of Christ in the heart, is a source of the greatest pleasure man can have. How dear and close in heart can be the believers in Jesus who have been won to His loving embrace! In the midst of the persecutions and sufferings encountered in the spread of the gospel, we find sweetness and rich pleasures enjoyed in the fellowship of the holy brethren! This is the peculiar joy and rich treasure that is the real spice that helps keep one moving forward. Sad is the heart that is void of true fellowship with others in Christ. We lament the falling away of those who refuse to serve the Lord, but we turn from the sorrow and find comfort in the few who willingly obey the Saviour. The unity of God's people in tender love and deep feelings of kindness and humility bring a glory and blessing that is too wonderful to put into words. What sorrow is caused when people divide and separate over issues that are best committed to the Lord to work out! This is caused by a lack of the real love of God. Even when we are lacking in understanding, the love of God will help each one bear and forbear, and pray, and give instruction to help us understand the way of God more perfectly. It is God who is over His work, and we are His children to be submissive to Him. What a blessing to love one another, and to seek to help one another instead of being quick to condemn. Let us seek to promote tender love and the mind of Christ in the congregations and learn to enjoy one another as God planned that we should.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Paul's ministry in Corinth was a profitable ministry. As was the case in most places the Jews opposed him, but he did not become discouraged or give up. He turned to the Gentiles and was faithful to stay with them for a year and a half, and much good was accomplished. The letter he later wrote to the Corinthian Church gives us insight into this. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God." 1 Cor. 6:9-11. When we read this catalog of sin which

they were; guilty of and what a change was made in their lives by the gospel, it gives us hope for our generation of unbelievers. Let us be faithful in the position where God places us.

The apostle Paul knew the worth of Christian companions. They helped spur him on to be faithful. It is folly to have the attitude that you can stand alone. One person said to John Wesley, "Young man, the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion. You must find companions or make them."

—Wayne Murphey

December 18, 1988

THE WORD OF GOD PREVAILS AT EPHESUS

Acts 19:1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,

2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.

4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

7 And all the men were about twelve.

8 And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

9 But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

10 And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

11 And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul:

12 So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

17 And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

18 And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.

19 Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

20 So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

Memory Verse: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever. Isaiah 40:8.

Central Thought: When people are made aware of their need and their true condition before God, they are able to open their hearts to the Lord, and His Word will prevail in their lives.

Word Definitions: *"Separated the disciples":* Took the new converts to another place away from the synagogue.
Divers: Different ones.

LESSON BACKGROUND

After Appolos had been with Aquila and Priscilla, who instructed him in the way of the Lord more perfectly, he went to Corinth in Achaia with letters of recommendation from the Church in Ephesus. We find Paul running into some more disciples, who like Appolos, knew only the baptism of John. After Paul had explained about Jesus Christ, the men were ready to be rebaptized in the name of Jesus, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit, of whom they had not heard before. As we see in our lesson, God mightily worked with Paul in the spread of the gospel in that part of the world for the next two years. During that time there were some wandering Jews who took upon themselves to call over them which had evil spirits in the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth." There were seven sons of a Jew, the chief of the priests whose name was Sceva, who tried to do this. Adam Clarke observes that these men attempted this probably in the hope of being rewarded. The evil spirit did not recognize them and through his power the man leaped on these seven men and overcame them, and prevailed against them so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded. The news of this incident caused great fear to come on every-

one. A great bonfire was made of all their books of magic and curious art. People were made to realize that their idol gods and their arts of magic were no good. People today need to burn up a lot of books and magazines that are leading souls to perdition. We need to esteem the gospel and the holy Word of God and let it prevail in our hearts and lives.

—Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. Who did Paul find at Ephesus?
2. What did these disciples know about concerning the Lord?
3. Why had not these disciples received the Holy Spirit?
4. What were they willing to do after hearing about Jesus and the Holy Spirit?
5. How long did Paul speak in the synagogue and what did he dispute about?
6. Why did Paul depart and separate the disciples from the synagogue?
7. How long did he continue in Asia?
8. What did God do by the hands of Paul?
9. What did the people do when the fear of the Lord fell upon them?
10. What were the works of Satan that the Word of God prevailed over? Name some present day things that need to be prevailed over by the Word of God.

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

It is wonderful to find sincere, honest people who are willing and eager to walk in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ! Walking diligently in what light we have will qualify us to be able to receive further light and counsel from the Word of God. Jesus said, "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." Matt. 13:12. The knowledge of God comes little by little. All along the journey of life we are to increase in the understanding of God's will. There should be sincere and honest attitudes of heart with a submission to God in every person. Here at Ephesus were some men who were walking in all the light they had. Their baptism was not up to date and they had not heard of the gracious Comforter that Christ had sent, but they were willing and eager to move up for God. Perhaps they had been longing for more light and understanding of the truth. They were ready for it when it came, however, and moved

right on into the inheritance of the saints. Many, many people harden themselves when a move is to be made for God. It is easy to become self-satisfied and blind to any forward move that the Lord Jesus would have us make. There are many caught in the net of complacency or self-content. When the Lord enlightens the soul there is a move to be made. The great bonfire of curious arts books indicates a great move forward for souls enlightened by the gospel. There needs to be some bonfires today of filthy books and magazines that people are feeding on. Closets need to be emptied of ungodly apparel. The television needs to be removed from its front room pre-eminence, out the front door, and away from sight and use. So shall the Word of God mightily grow and prevail in hearts and lives today.

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"Last night I paused beside a blacksmith's door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;
Then looking in, I saw upon the floor
Old hammers worn with beating years of time.

" 'How many anvils have you had,' said I,
 'To mar and batter all these hammers so?'
'Just one,' he answered, then with twinkling eye,
 'The anvil wears the hammers out, you know.'

"And so I thought the anvil of God's Word
For ages skeptics' blows have beat upon,
Yet though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The anvil is unworn—the hammers gone."

"Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away." Mark 13:31. What a vain and futile thing it is to attempt to do away with the Word of God. I think of the infidels and skeptics of the past who did all they could to discredit the very existence of God. Time has rolled on and they are history, but still we have God's Holy Word. Catholicism attempted all within its power to remove the Word from the people, and yet it remains, changing the lives of all who will believe it.

John 1:14, tells us, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." When the Word of God appeared on the earth in the form of Christ, many people were angered because it condemned their pro-

fession. They sought both openly and secretly to do away with Him. No doubt some of them thought it a great victory when they saw the stone rolled in front of the tomb that held the body of Christ. Was this the end of the story? No, far from it! The Word of God arose the third day and filled the hearts of men and women. Three thousand souls were saved on that day of Pentecost. The stream gathered momentum, sweeping away the opposition. Puny man has been diligent to throw impurities in its path ever since, but those hindrances have been cast upon the banks of time, and the pure stream from the throne of God flows on, continuing to wash the vilest of sinners in its flow.

—Wayne Murphey

December 25, 1988

CHRIST THE SAVIOUR IS BORN

Matt. 1:23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

2:6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Heb. 10:5 Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:

Luke 2:7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Memory Verse: And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Matthew 1:21.

Central Thought: In fulfillment of prophecy, Jesus Christ was born into human flesh, a body prepared for Him, in Bethlehem, of the lowly virgin Mary of Nazareth.

Word Definitions: *Swaddling clothes:* Strips of cloth.
Taxed: Enrolled and assessed for taxation.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of prophecy. We have included the New Testament rendering of three of these prophecies: one concerning His mother, the virgin Mary; one of the location or city where He was to be born; and one of the human body that He was to inhabit during His earthly pilgrimage. Matthew 1:23 is a quotation from Isaiah 7:14, and adds with the prophecy the meaning of the name Immanuel, which is "God with us." The prophecy concerning Bethlehem is from Micah 5:2. The Old Testament rendering adds concerning Him who was to rule Israel as He "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." The Hebrews quotation is from Psalm 40:6. The Old Testament rendering of this prophecy reads thus: "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required." The New Testament rendering in our lesson is the Septuagint translation. Instead of "mine ears hast thou opened," the

Septuagint says, "A body hast thou prepared me." This was a direct prophecy of Christ coming into the world to satisfy what the offerings and sacrifices of the law could never do. The rest of our lesson is the beautiful and familiar account of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem. A decree had gone out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled and assessed for taxation. Everyone had to report to the city of his birth to comply with this edict. As Joseph and Mary were both of the lineage of David, they made the long journey to Bethlehem, the city of David. Mary was great with child, and so it was that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. —Leslie C. Busbee

QUESTIONS:

1. In what two ways was the birth of Jesus a miracle?
2. Who was the Governor to come out of Bethlehem to rule Israel?
3. What did God prepare for Christ when He brought Him into the world?
4. Why did Christ have to be laid in the manger?
5. Who did the angel appear to with news of Christ's birth?
6. What kind of tidings did the angel bring to the shepherds?
7. How were the shepherds to know which child was the Christ?
8. What were the angels saying in their praise to God?
9. What did Mary do concerning the wonderful birth of her son?
10. What did the shepherds do after beholding the new-born Saviour?

ADULTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMENTS

The coming of the Son of God into the human flesh of men
Is one great thought of heaven's plan to save His people
from their sin.

A virgin shall conceive and bear a son whose name Immanuel
Means "God with us": a Prince and King to rule the hosts
of Israel.

"A body thou prepared for me": a sacrifice, atoning love,
To bear the sins of all the world, and fit mankind to live
above.

Yes, God came down and took upon Himself the bands of mortals here,
To tried and tempted be; to bear the weight of all our
wretched fear.

Oh miracle of love! To be the child of her untouched by man
 The mighty gulf 'twixt man and God by grace and truth to
 over span.
 Oh miracle of life! The son born by the virgin Mary mild,
 Was Christ the Saviour who would die that hearts could
 now be reconciled.
 Not just a story to be told at Christmas season once a year,
 But truth to cherish and uphold, proclaimed and taught
 without a fear;
 To be believed and loved always; to ponder, study, and enjoy,
 With comfort, consolation, peace, the praise of creatures
 to employ!
 Thank God for Christ who took upon Him human flesh our
 sins to bear!
 Thank God for sending Him to earth our deepest woe and
 pain to share!
 And now He lives above this world beyond the veil of human
 sight
 Upon the everlasting throne above all pow'r and earthly
 might.
 Our Saviour, Master, Lord, and Friend, who intercedes for all
 our need:
 Lift up your heart; have faith and hope, and all His grace
 and blessings plead!

—Leslie C. Busbee

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

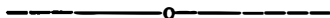
"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I
 bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all
 people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a
 Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:10, 11. What a
 beautiful message of hope to a care-worn, sin-laden world!
 Christ's appearance to the world was announced with great
 splendor. As we note His ministry, we have to conclude that He
 was surely worthy of such publicity. This was because God's
 approval and anointing was upon this plan of salvation. It
 was shown initially by the divine deliverance of the message
 to the shepherds. We find God's approval manifested at
 Christ's baptism as well as at His death. Christ once said, "I
 do nothing of myself." John 8:28.

There have been others who came into the world, cried
 their own virtues, conquered cities and spread their doctrines,
 but none have brought the healing of the soul which Christ

did. How vain, worthless and transitory are doctrines of men that are without God's inspiration.

How glad we should be that it was a divinely inspired message that heralded the coming of the baby Jesus into this world.

—Wayne Murphey



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