

Helping Our Children Develop a Vision for the World Part I

**Growing Godly Family Series
Manual 20**

By

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Growing Godly Families Series

This series of manuals is the result of a series of weekly e-mail topics that have been prepared and e-mailed over a period of years. They originally started out as a one page topic that gradually grew to the point where most topics are about three pages in length.

This series is especially designed for those who are already Christian leaders to give them Biblical principles for the development of godly physical and spiritual families. Because they give Biblical principles for developing godly families, they are also helpful for new Christians that want to grow and become godly families.

Mark 10:43-45 says, "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." In these verses Christ taught that godly spiritual leaders do not have the attitudes of leaders in the world. Worldly leadership is based on power and authority and is designed to benefit the leader and place him above others. In contrast, godly spiritual leadership is designed to help every Christian reach their full potential in Christ. The following three statements give a summary of three styles of leadership. The purpose of this series is to help every family develop their full potential as godly families.

If we drive people, we will drive them until they can get out of our way.

If we lead people, we will be able to lead them as far as we have gone ourselves.

If we serve people, we will help each person develop their full God given potential and equip each person for the ministry that Christ has prepared for every Christian.

In the world people often measure success by the amount of things that they accumulate in this world before they die. However, they are unable to take any of those things with them when they die. Mark 8:36-37 says, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Success produces rewards until we die but it produces nothing for eternity.

In contrast, God measures effectiveness by our faithfulness and obedience. Matthew 6:19-21 says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Effectiveness produces eternal rewards. Mark 10:29-30 says, "So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life." I Corinthians 10:31 says, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." The Growing Godly Families Series is designed to help your family life count for eternity by bringing glory to God.

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1.

Christ promised the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Today we are beginning a new series of topics on the book of Acts. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the vision that Christ has for the world. This will include helping our children to understand how the early church developed and the lessons that we can learn from that development that we can apply in our churches today. We will see that the Lord teaches many principles about the way that He worked in the early church to help the church in its development.

Acts 1:1-3 says, “The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” Here we are reminded that this is the second book that Luke wrote to Theophilus. In Luke 1:3-4 Luke wrote, “It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.” Here we see that Luke wrote the book of Luke so that Theophilus would have an accurate written copy of the things that he had been taught about the life and ministry of Christ.

The name “Theophilus” means friend of God. Luke had written Theophilus the book of Luke to give him a clear record of both the things that Christ did and the things that Christ taught. The book of Luke covered the time from the promise that Christ would be born until the time when He was taken to heaven forty days after the resurrection. The book of Luke includes two of the commandments that Christ gave the disciples after His resurrection. Luke 24:46-48 says, “Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.” Christ told His disciples that the message of repentance and remission of sins was to be preached in His name to all nations. The disciples were to start to share this message in the city of Jerusalem and then begin to spread that message from there to all nations.

The word “repentance” means a change of mind. I Thessalonians 1:9 says, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” Here we see that repentance means a change of mind which causes a person to turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God. The word “remission” means to forgive, to pardon and to release from bondage. Ephesians 1:7 says, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” Here we see that Christ paid the penalty that made it possible for Him to forgive our sin, to pardon us and to release us from the bondage to sin because of His grace.

The second command is given in Luke 24:49 where we read, “Behold, I send the Promise of

My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” The word “tarry” means to sit or settle down. The disciples were to pray and wait until Christ sent the Holy Spirit to give them power to minister. If the disciples would have witnessed in their own strength, they would have seen little lasting results because Christ said in John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” In the same way we want to help our children understand that they will do nothing in their own strength but their lives will bear much fruit as they yield to the Holy Spirit.

We are also reminded that Christ showed Himself after His resurrection and gave the disciples many infallible proofs of His resurrection. The word “infallible” means clear proof or evidence that cannot be rejected. Christ was seen at least ten times during that forty day period. He also helped the disciples to understand what the Old Testament taught about His death and resurrection. Luke 24:44-45 says, “Then He said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” During that time Christ also helped the disciples to understand many things about the kingdom of God.

Acts 1:4-7 goes on to say, “And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.” We saw in an earlier paragraph that Luke also recorded this thought as he concluded the book of Luke. Christ made it very clear that the disciples were to wait in Jerusalem until they were baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Here we see that Christ also made it clear that the baptism with the Holy Spirit is not the same as the baptism with water. A few years earlier John had baptized with water those who received his message. However, the baptism with the Holy Spirit mentioned in this passage marked the beginning of the church. In recalling this event Peter said in Acts 11:15-17, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?”” Here Peter said the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples at the beginning.

Once the Holy Spirit came on the Christians at the beginning of the church we see that each Christian is now baptized with the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. The Gentile believers at the house of Cornelius were baptized with the Holy Spirit at the moment that they believed the message about the death and resurrection of Christ. In fact they were baptized with the Holy Spirit before Peter could even complete his message. Romans 8:9 tells us, “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.” Here we see that if we do not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us that we are not yet Christians.

As a result, at the moment we repent and place our faith in the resurrection of Christ we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter promised that the gift of the Holy Spirit would be given at the moment that the people repented. Acts 2:38 says, "Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." This means that every person who has become a Christian has received the gift of the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit also means that we have the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives when we are yielding to the Holy Spirit. When our sins have been confessed our lives are full of the Holy Spirit. That is the thing that gives us the power to share the Word of God with boldness. Acts 4:31 says, "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness." Many times Christians are afraid to share the Word with those who are not Christians because the Christians are depending on their own strength instead of yielding to the Holy Spirit.

As the disciples were gathered together with Christ they asked Christ if He was going to restore the kingdom to Israel at that time. The answer that Christ gave is very important to help our children understand. Christ told the disciples that the disciples did not need to know the plan that God has for Israel in the future. That future for Israel is under the authority of the Father and so it was not to be the concern of the disciples.

Christ reminded the disciples that He had a ministry for them and those who would follow and that was to be the important thing that they understood. Acts 1:8 says, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Here we see that Christ pointed out the fact that the Holy Spirit would give the disciples power to be witnesses unto Him. I Corinthians 6:19-20 says, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." Here we see that when we are baptized with the Holy Spirit that our bodies become the temple of the Holy Spirit.

That means that the temple of the Holy Spirit goes wherever Christians go. This is an important lesson to help every Christian to understand because it means that we are representing the Lord wherever we go and by whatever we do. As a result, we want to help our physical children and also our spiritual children learn to glorify God both by what they do and what they say. Everything that we do or say in our lives reflects on the Holy Spirit because our bodies are His temple. That is why we want to show our children by our example how to bring glory to God by all that we do or say. May the Lord richly bless you as you provide your children with an example to follow.

2.

Christ Commissioned all Christians for Ministry

In our last topic we see that Christ promised the disciples in the first few verses of the book of Acts that they would soon receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We also saw that the Holy Spirit gives us boldness to witness when we are yielding to Him. In our topic today we are going to see that the Holy Spirit will give us His power to cross barriers as we share the Gospel. Then we will learn what the disciples did as they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 1:8 we read the final words of Christ before He returned to heaven. That verse says, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." In this verse we see that the Holy Spirit gives us power to be witnesses of Christ. The disciples were to be witnesses of Christ in a progressive order beginning at Jerusalem and proceeding out to the end of the earth.

That promise also helps us to understand a very key lesson for our own lives as we help our children develop a vision for the world. Each of the four geographic locations that are mentioned also help us to understand that the Lord will give us power to cross the barriers that might hinder us as we give witness to Christ. Jerusalem was the place where the disciples were. To be a witness of Christ in the local area where we live we have to cross the barrier of our own fear. In II Timothy 1:7 we read, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." We want to help our children understand that the Holy Spirit gives us the spirit of power, of love and of a sound mind and He makes it possible for us to witness of Christ to others with boldness.

Judea was the area surrounding Jerusalem. To bear witness to Christ in our surrounding area we have to cross the barrier of making contacts. When we are yielding to the Holy Spirit, He will lead us to make contacts with others. In Acts 8:29-30 we read, "Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot." So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" We want our children to see that as we are yielding to the Holy Spirit He will give us a question or some other way to begin a conversation with new contacts.

Samaria was a nearby area that had a different culture, religion and ethnic group. The Holy Spirit will also show us how to cross the barriers of different cultures, religions and ethnic groups. Acts 11:19-20 says, "Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus." We show our children that the Holy Spirit led the early Christians and helped them cross the barrier of another culture, religion and ethnic group.

Finally, to share the Gospel to the end of the earth usually means sharing the Gospel with

people of a different language. Acts 14:11 shows that the Holy Spirit helped Paul and Barnabas to overcome the language barrier. That verse says, "Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"” In addition to crossing the language barrier, we also see that Paul and Barnabas began with creation. Acts 14:17 says, “Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”” With many people today we will also need to begin with creation to lay the foundation for witnessing to what Christ has done to bring us back to God.

Acts 1:9-11 says, “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” Christ had shared His final words with the disciples. Then once He had spoken His last words Christ was taken up as the disciples watched. Then a cloud came between Christ and the disciples and they saw Him no more.

As the disciples continued to look up in the sky, two men suddenly stood by them. These two men were dressed in white clothing. These two men were actually angels who looked like men. This is not the first time angels have appeared as men. In Genesis 18:1-2 we read, “Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground.” This is an Old Testament appearance of Christ. The two men with Christ later departed for Sodom. Genesis 19:1 says, “Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground.” Here we see that these two men were actually angels.

The two angels asked the disciples a question. They asked why they were continuing to look toward heaven. The angels let the disciples know that Christ would come just as they had seen Him go. I Thessalonians 4:16 says, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” Here we see that Christ is going to descend from heaven just as He went to heaven while the disciples were watching.

Acts 1:12-14 says, “Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” Here we see that the place where Christ ascended to heaven was a mount called Olivet. Luke 22:39 says, “Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him.” Here we see that the mount of Olives (Olivet) was a place where Christ and His disciples frequently went

when they were in the city of Jerusalem so they had not expected Him to leave and return to heaven this time. This hill or mountain was only about one-half mile from Jerusalem.

As the disciples returned from the mount called Olivet, they returned to the upper room in Jerusalem where they were staying. This is probably the upper room where Christ ate the Last Supper and later appeared to the disciples after His resurrection. Mark 14:14-15 says, "Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?" Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us.'" Here we see that this room was the quest room of the owner of the house.

We also notice that this upper room was a large upper room. This is important because Acts 1:15 says that there were a total of about 120 disciples that gathered in that upper room. That verse says, "And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said." Since there were a total of 120 disciples that were praying together daily from the time that Christ returned to heaven until the Holy Spirit came, it was important that it was a large room.

The names of the eleven disciples that remained after the death of Judas are all named in these verses. In addition we see that part of those who were gathered there were women including Mary, the mother of Jesus. Although the women are not named individually, it certainly would have included the women that came to the tomb the morning of the resurrection of Christ plus a good number of other women. Mark 16:1 says, "Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him." This helps us to realize that the women were an important part of the church in its early development.

We also see that the 120 included the half-brothers of Christ. Their names are given in Matthew 13:55 where we read, "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?" Just a little over a half year earlier these brothers had not yet believed in Christ. John 7:5 says, "For even His brothers did not believe in Him." As a result, this makes it clear that some of the 120 had not followed Christ from the beginning of His ministry. Instead at least part of the 120 had become followers of Christ at a later time.

We see that all were of one accord. The word translated "one accord" means with one mind, with one passion or in agreement. Here we see a real spirit of unity among these who would lead the church. We see that they spent their days waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit in prayer and supplication. The word translated "prayer" speaks of prayer to God. "Supplication" speaks of prayer that is based on a need. The early church leaders realized their need of the Holy Spirit to guide them in the development of the church. In the same way we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand our own great need to be guided by the Holy Spirit if we are going to serve the Lord effectively. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand our great need for moment by moment dependence on the Holy Spirit as we serve the Lord.

3.

Christ Led the Apostles to Replace Judas

In our last topic we saw that Christ returned to heaven and the disciples returned to the upper room where they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit. We saw that they spent that time waiting in prayer and supplication. We mentioned that “supplication” speaks of prayer that is based on a need. The early church leaders realized their need for the Holy Spirit to guide them moment by moment in the development of the church. We still have that same need today as we serve the Lord.

Acts 1:15-17 says, “And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, "Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry.” Here we see that a total of 120 followers of Christ were gathered in the upper room as they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit. As we might expect from a study of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Peter was the one who took the leadership now that Christ is gone. His first concern was to see that they were obedient to Christ and fulfilled what was written in the Word of God. As a result, he knew that a man must be chosen to replace Judas as an apostle.

A key thing that we notice in these verses is that there were twelve who were chosen to be apostles but the number of disciples in Jerusalem was 120. Luke 6:12-13 says, “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles.” Here we see that the twelve who were called apostles were chosen from a larger group of disciples.

The definition of a disciple is given in Matthew 13:52 where we read, “Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.” The word translated “instructed” means to be a disciple or to make a disciple. As a result, this verse explains what it means to be a disciple. We see the following characteristics of a disciple. A person that has become a disciple:
Is instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven (is familiar with the Word of God)
Is the head of a spiritual household (has one or more spiritual children)
Has a treasure (the Word of God)
Is able to bring out of that treasure things new (has a learner’s attitude)
Is able to bring out of that treasure things that are old (the basics of Christianity)

The fact that there were 120 disciples was going to be very important when the church began in Acts 2 and the first day added an additional 3000 people. Since most of the teaching was done in homes, this meant that there were 120 disciples who were already equipped to be spiritual parents to help these new Christians grow. On that day the 120 each became a spiritual parent to a small group of Christians to help them in their spiritual growth. Acts 2:46 says, “So

continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” Since the temple was controlled by the religious leaders who had killed Christ just seven weeks earlier, most of the teaching had to be done in homes in small groups.

As Peter spoke to the disciples, he reminded them that the Holy Spirit had spoken through David. The Holy Spirit led David to write about Judas and said that a replacement would need to be chosen for Judas. Acts 1:18-20 goes on to tell why the Holy Spirit had said a replacement would be needed for Judas, “(Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.) "For it is written in the book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it'; and, 'Let another take his office.'" The first quote comes from Psalm 69:25 which says, “Let their dwelling place be desolate; Let no one live in their tents.” The second quote is from Psalm 109:8 which says, “Let his days be few, and let another take his office.” Here we see that the judgment of Judas was prophesied.

The Lord even used the chief priests to fulfill the first prophecy about Judas. Matthew 27:3-8 says, “Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!" Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood." And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.” Here in Acts we see that the field that the chief priests purchased was the very field where Judas had hung himself.

Now we are going to see that the Lord used the apostles to fulfill the second prophecy about Judas. Acts 1:21-22 says, ““Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”” Here we see that Peter explained to all the disciples the qualifications for an apostle. That was due to the fact that the most important ministry of the apostles was to be eyewitnesses of the resurrection.

We see that an apostle had to be one who had accompanied Christ throughout His entire ministry beginning with the baptism of Christ by John. An apostle also had to see Christ during the forty days after His resurrection. These things were important because of the fact that we see here that the most important ministry of the apostles was to be witnesses of the resurrection. Even though he was chosen to be the apostle of the Gentiles, Paul recognized that he did not meet both qualifications for an apostle. I Corinthians 15:8-9 says, “Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

At a later time Paul told the Corinthians that he had been given the signs of an apostle to verify

his ministry. II Corinthians 12:11-12 says, "I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds." The signs of an apostle are defined for us in Hebrews 2:3-4 where we read, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?" Here we see that God confirmed the message of the apostles with signs and wonders, with various miracles and with gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:23-26 goes on to say, "And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles." During His ministry Christ had many other disciples in addition to the twelve who were called apostles. Luke 10:1 says, "After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go." Here we see that Christ had sent out 70 disciples at least once. A fourth century church historian, named Eusebius, said that Matthias was one of the seventy and it is very possible that both of these men were a part of the seventy.

The disciples prayed that the Lord who knows the hearts of all people would show which of the two the Lord wanted to take the apostleship of Judas. As we saw in verse 14, the 120 had spent this entire time in prayer as they waited for the Lord to send the Holy Spirit. Here we see that they prayed for specific direction and guidance about who the Lord had chosen to take the place of Judas. The method that had been used throughout the Old Testament to determine the will of the Lord was the casting of lots. Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." Here we see that the Lord determined the decision when lots were cast. Since the Holy Spirit had not yet come to give them guidance, the disciples cast lots and the lot fell on Matthias.

Christ gave a promise in John 16:13 which says, "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come." Once the Holy Spirit came the church was able to receive His guidance and so this is the last time that we read that followers of Christ cast lots. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that they now have the Holy Spirit to guide them and that is why the casting of lots is no longer needed since this is the last time that the casting of lots is mentioned in the New Testament. We can now depend on the Holy Spirit to guide us and lead us and give us His peace in our decisions. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand how the Lord worked to guide in the replacement of Judas.

4.

Christ Sent the Spirit and Started the Church

In our last topic we saw that the disciples gathered in the upper room and spent the time in prayer as they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit. As they prayed, the Lord led them to select a replacement to take the place of Judas. We saw that Judas was chosen by the Old Testament method of casting lots since the Holy Spirit had not yet come to give them guidance. In our topic today we are going to see that Christ baptized the disciples with the Holy Spirit and then sent them out to begin to church.

In Acts 2:1-4 we read, “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” As we begin this chapter we see that the Lord had chosen a particular day for the church to begin. The word “Pentecost” means fiftieth day because it was celebrated on the fiftieth day after the Passover. It was the first day of the Feast known as the Feast of Harvest or the Feast of Weeks.

The Jews had three feasts that they were supposed to attend each year. The first was the Passover and the second was the Feast of Weeks. Since the Jews had been scattered to many nations, those Jews who lived in distant areas made it their goal to attend these two feasts in Jerusalem at least once in their lifetime. Those who came from a long distance would come for the Passover and then remain the fifty days so that they could also be there for the Feast of Weeks before returning to their homes. For the Feast of Weeks, the Jews were instructed to bring the firstfruits of their harvest. Leviticus 23:20 says, “The priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the Lord, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the Lord for the priest.” Here we see that the firstfruits of their harvest were to be used as a wave offering.

Since the Holy Spirit comes into each believer at the moment of salvation, this was the time when God planned for the church to begin. This is a beautiful picture because the Holy Spirit is the down payment and guarantee of our eternal salvation. Ephesians 1:13-14 says, “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Here we see that we were sealed with the Holy Spirit as the guarantee of our eternal inheritance until that day when we enter into the presence of the Lord in heaven. He is our firstfruits of eternal life. We also see that all of the disciples were in agreement and meeting in one place.

Here we see how the Holy Spirit came that day to begin the church. There came a sound from heaven like a rushing mighty wind. In other passages the Holy Spirit is compared to a wind. John 3:8 says, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” In addition to

the sound like a mighty wind, there were divided tongues that looked like fire that came and sat on each of the people that were in the upper room that day. God wanted each disciple to realize that each one had received the Holy Spirit. We also see that each disciple was filled with the Holy Spirit. They also began to speak in other tongues. The word translated “tongues” is used to speak of a language or dialect that is spoken by a particular people and is different from any other language. In fact the languages of at least sixteen different areas are mentioned. There were able to speak in these different languages because it was the Holy Spirit that gave them this ability.

Acts 2:5-8 goes on to say, “And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?" Here we see that God had even prepared the people that He wanted to hear this message. There were Jews present that day from every country where the Jews had been scattered.

We see that these Jews were described as devout men. The word translated “devout” means an individual who had a great reverence for God. The word is used in Luke 2:25 where we read, “And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.” Here we see that the word was used to describe Simeon, the man who took Christ and blessed Him when Mary and Joseph brought Christ to the temple when he was forty days old. As a result, devout individuals were individuals who had a great reverence for God and were waiting for the coming of Christ. This reminds us that there were Jews who were looking for the coming of Christ in all of the countries where the Jews had been scattered.

The sound of the rushing wind caused people to gather to see what was happening. The disciples began sharing the wonderful works of God in many languages. In addition, we read that the Jews from all of the different countries heard them speaking in the language of the area where each Jew lived. At first this caused confusion because the people could not understand what was happening. The word translated “confusion” means to disturb the mind of a person. Acts 9:22 says, “But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.” In this verse the people were confused and disturbed because Saul was teaching the very things that had caused him to come to Damascus to arrest and imprison the Jews. This helps us to understand the great confusion that was in the minds of the people at Jerusalem.

The Jews both from Judea and from the other countries recognized that all of those who were speaking were from the area of Galilee. The people of Galilee had an accent that was easily recognized by the other Jews. The Jews from Galilee were considered uneducated and untrained by the rest of the Jews. Acts 4:13 says, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” The fact that these Galileans who were considered untrained and uneducated Jews were able to speak in many languages only added to the amazement of the other Jews.

Then we have a list of some of the areas from which the Jews visiting Jerusalem had come. Acts 2:8-11 says, "And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs--we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." The areas from which these visitors had come stretched from the modern country of Iran to the city of Rome in Italy. It also included people from Egypt and other parts of North Africa. These areas had very different languages with little or no similarity.

The people from these different areas were both Jews and proselytes. The word translated "proselytes" means people who came from a Gentile religion to Judaism. The Jews talked about two different kinds of proselytes. One group had been circumcised and tried to keep the whole Mosaic law. This group was called proselytes of righteousness. The people in this group were considered full converts to Judaism. A second group of proselytes were called proselytes of the gate because they attended the synagogues but had not been circumcised and did not try to keep the entire law. Most of the proselytes were in this second group.

We read the disciples were speaking the wonderful works of God. Mary used this same word in Luke 1:49 to describe what God was doing in her life. That verse says, "For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name." In this verse we see that the word is translated great things. During the various Jewish feasts and festivals, the people would often quote verses that spoke about the wonderful works of God. The amazing thing to the Jews this day was the fact that Galilean Jews were able to quote these verses in the many different languages that were represented there that day. A good illustration is Psalm 96:3 which speaks of the plan of God. That verse says, "Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples." Since there were Jews from all these nations, we see here that God had a purpose for beginning the church on this particular day. It has always been the desire of God that His glory and His wonders would be declared in all nations to all peoples.

We see the various responses of the Jews in Acts 21:12-13 where we read, "So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?" Others mocking said, "They are full of new wine."" Here we see the most common responses to the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. Some were amazed. Others were perplexed. Then there were those who mocked. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that these will each be common responses when we share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. However, the Lord will use His Word to accomplish His purpose in the lives of others. We will see that is what happened the day that the church began. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand how the Lord worked the day that the church began.

5.

Peter Showed How the Ministry of the Holy Spirit was Promised

In our last topic we saw that Christ sent the Holy Spirit into the life of each of the followers of Christ on the Day of Pentecost. Christ had promised the disciples that when He went back to heaven that He would send the Holy Spirit. He also told the disciples that they were to wait until He sent the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit would give them power from on high. In our topic today we will see that Peter explained to the Jews that God had promised to send the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.

In Acts 2:15-21 we read, “For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’” Here we see that Peter began his message to those who had gathered by reminding them that Joel had prophesied that God would send the Holy Spirit in the last days.

The last days includes the period from the first coming of Christ until He returns to rule on the earth for one thousand years. The full fulfillment of this prophecy will come when Christ returns to rule on the earth because at that time Christ will pour out the Holy Spirit on all flesh. However, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was a picture of this greater fulfillment that will come in the future. Since everyone who will enter into the kingdom in that day will have their faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all people. On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out on all who believed. Later this same thing happened at the house of Cornelius when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles. Acts 10:45 says, “And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.” The Jews with Peter were astonished to see that all of the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius had the Holy Spirit poured out on them because they all believed as Peter explained the Gospel.

In the time of the tribulation just before Christ returns to set up His kingdom, God will do the things that are recorded in these verses. Visions and dreams were used more often in the Old Testament, especially in the prophets when they were writing about the future. God will cause this to happen again during the tribulation. During the tribulation God is also going to show signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. Revelation records the presence of blood, fire and vapor of smoke. The Gospels, especially Matthew, also record the fact that these things will happen. God will offer salvation to all who will call on the name of the Lord during the tribulation. When Christ comes to rule He will pour out His Spirit on all flesh because only believers will be left of the earth. Then in the kingdom both men and women will prophesy by speaking the Word of God.

In Acts 2:22-24 we read, “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know--Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.” After using the passage from Joel to illustrate the fact that what was happening that day was a small picture of what would happen when Christ returned to rule in the future, Peter immediately began to focus on Christ.

Peter began his main message by speaking of the fact that most of those who were listening that day were descendents of Israel (Jacob), the younger son of Isaac. Although they had come from many different nations, they were Jews because they were descendents of Israel. To introduce Christ, Peter chose to use his earthly name, Jesus of Nazareth. When Jesus had come riding into Jerusalem on a donkey eight weeks earlier, Matthew 21:10-11 says, “And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, “Who is this?” So the multitudes said, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.” Since most of the people who were at the Feast of Pentecost had also been in Jerusalem for the Passover, everyone there had probably heard Jesus called Jesus of Nazareth. As a result, they all knew about whom Peter was talking.

The word translated “approved” means to exhibit or make clearly seen. Here we see that God had clearly shown that He wanted everyone to know that Christ was His Son and showed His approval by miracles, wonders and signs which God did through Him. Just a few weeks before His crucifixion, Christ said in John 11:43-44, “Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.” The Father had also verified His approval of Christ by many other miracles, wonders and signs.

We also see that Peter focused both on the plan of God and the rebellion of mankind. Jesus was delivered for crucifixion by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God. In II Timothy 1:9 we read, “Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.” Here we see that the Father planned that He would show His grace to us through Christ. This purpose was determined before the world was ever created because God knew that all would sin. The word translated “foreknowledge” means forethought or arranged in advance. The Father and Christ planned in advance how Christ would pay for sin before creation.

Although the death of Christ to pay for sin was planned by the Father and Christ before the world began, at the same time we also see the rebellion of mankind. Peter pointed out that the Jewish religious leaders had taken Christ and by wicked hands had put Christ to death. In Matthew 27:24-25 we read, “When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.” And all the people answered and said, “His blood be on us and on our children.”” Here we see that the Jewish religious leaders showed their wickedness by saying that the blood of Christ was on their hands and the hands of

their children. They were the ones who had pressured Pilate to crucify Christ and put Him to death.

Then Peter came to the real heart of his message as He spoke of the fact that the Father had raised Christ from the dead. The founder of every religion has died. However, none of those founders of various religions have risen from the dead. Many of their followers go to visit the tomb where their founder is buried. Dead men can offer no help to anyone. However, the Father raised Christ from the dead. Satan had the power of death and only Christ could deliver us from that power. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." The Father loosed Christ from the pains of death.

We see that death could not hold Christ. I Corinthians 15:20-21 says, "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead." Christ defeated death by His resurrection. This is exactly what Christ promised in John 2:19 where we read, "Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."'" Then John 2:22 adds, "Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said." The disciples remembered what Christ had promised and we see that the resurrection was the theme of the message of Peter as the words that he spoke on the Day of Pentecost are recorded here.

Peter backed up what he said by quoting from what David wrote in Psalm 16:8-11. Those verses say, "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Here Peter made it very clear to all the Jews that the resurrection of Christ had been prophesied by David nearly one thousand years earlier.

The soul of Christ did not remain in the grave. The Father did not allow the body of Christ to decay and rot. Instead David had prophesied that Christ would have victory over death. Christ would be raised back to life. Christ would experience joy in the presence of the Father forever. Christ would also be at the right hand of the Father. Here we are reminded of the fact that our message is also the resurrection of Christ. He has defeated death and is alive. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the importance of sharing the message of the resurrection with others. Without that message, people have no hope for the future. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to present the message of the resurrection with boldness.

6.

Peter Preached the Resurrection of Christ

In our last topic we saw that Peter showed as He began his sermon on the Day of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit had been promised. He used the passage that will be fully fulfilled in the future as an illustration of what was happening on the Day of Pentecost. Then he pointed out the fact that God had planned to send Christ to pay for sin. At the same time evil men were responsible for the carrying out that action because of their rebellion. Then Peter began to show that the Old Testament promised the resurrection of Christ. We will see that Peter continued to preach the resurrection in our topic today.

In Acts 2:29-31 we read, “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.” Since Peter was quoting from Psalms written by David, he wanted to make it clear that David was not speaking of himself. He reminded the people that David was dead, he had been buried and that his tomb was still in the land at that very time.

Peter pointed out that David was a prophet who had written about the promise that God had made to David. God had promised him that one of his descendents by physical birth would be raised up to sit on the throne of David. David understood that this was a clear statement about the fact that the Father would raise Christ from the dead to sit on the throne of David. That is why Peter had quoted the words of David in Acts 2:26-27 which say, “Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” David looked forward to the fact that the Father would raise Christ from the dead.

That is why Peter went on to say in Acts 2:32-35, “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool." '” Peter told the Jews on the Day of Pentecost that God had raised Jesus from the dead. He said that the disciples who had been speaking that day were all witnesses of the fact that the Father had raised Christ from the dead.

Peter said that the Father had now exalted Christ and that Christ was sitting on the right hand of God. In John 7:37-39 Christ had said, “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” Peter said that the Father had now fulfilled the promise that Christ had given at the feast by pouring out the Holy Spirit on the followers of

Christ. Peter said that the Jews in Jerusalem could both see and hear that the followers of Christ had received the Holy Spirit. They could see the tongues of fire and hear the wonderful works of God in the various languages of the Jews who had been born in different areas.

Peter then quoted another verse written by David in Psalm 110:1 where we read, "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool."'" It was not David who was sitting at the right hand of the Father. Instead it was Christ, the One that the Father had raised from the dead, that was now sitting at the right hand of the Father. Peter made it clear that what was happening that day was in fulfillment of the promises that were made many years earlier in the Old Testament.

The clear explanation by Peter had shown that Christ was the One who had fulfilled the promises given by God through David. Peter gave one final statement and then we see the response of the people who were listening. Acts 2:36-37 says, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?'" Peter told the people that the Father had fulfilled His promise. Peter said that all Israel could know that the Father had kept His word. The Father had made Jesus, the One that they had crucified, both Lord and Christ. These two names point out that fact that Christ is God and that He is also the Anointed One of God.

As the people heard the words that Peter spoke, the Holy Spirit was convicting the people of their sin and guilt. In fact we read that the people were cut to the heart. Here we see the difference between an intellectual understanding and the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The word translated "cut" means to stab or to pierce. The words of Peter produced sorrow of heart because of the conviction of sin. Christ had promised the disciples the night before His death that He would send the Holy Spirit. John 16:8-9 says, "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me." Here we see that the Holy Spirit does exactly as Christ had promised and convicted the people of their sin of unbelief. The Holy Spirit will do the same today as we share what the Bible says about sin of unbelief, the fact that Christ is the Righteous One and the fact that Satan is already judged.

As the people asked what they should do, Peter and the other apostles told them to repent. Acts 2:38-40 says, "Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."'" The word translated "repent" means to change one's mind. It is illustrated in I Thessalonians 1:9 where we read, "For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." True repentance means that a person turns to God from whatever that person is following and that it causes a person to serve the living and true God. The people were told to show that they had truly repented in their hearts by being baptized to show their identification with Christ. Peter promised that true repentance would result in forgiveness of sins.

Peter also told the people that if they repented that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift is received at the moment of salvation. Acts 10:45 says, "And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also." The Jewish believers were amazed because the Gentiles received the gift of the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation just as they had. When Peter explained this to the church in Jerusalem, Acts 11:16-17 says, "Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" Here we see that Peter explained to the church at Jerusalem that being baptized with the Holy Spirit is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:9-11 says that the gift of the Holy Spirit is what gives us spiritual life. Those verses say, "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." We receive spiritual life and the gift of the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation.

On the Day of Pentecost Peter told those who were listening that the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit was to both the Jews and the Gentiles (those who are afar off). In the church we see that God has broken down the division that had previously existed between the Jews and the Gentiles. Ephesians 2:11-13 says, "Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh-- who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands-- that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." We see that all people whether Jews or Gentiles are brought near to God by the blood of Christ. This is why every Christian can be filled with hope and confidence as we look toward the future.

We also see that Peter spoke many other words in addition to what is written here in the book of Acts to encourage the Jews to repent and place their faith in Christ so that they could be saved from this perverse generation. In this sermon we see that Peter worked with each member of the Trinity because the Holy Spirit convicts (John 16:8-11), the Father draws (John 8:44) and the Son seeks and saves (Luke 19:10). In the same way we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to work with the Trinity as they learn to present the message of the death and resurrection of Christ to others. We want to help them learn to share the Word of God in love so that each member of the Trinity can carry out their ministry to bring people to repentance and faith. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to proclaim the message of the resurrection.

7.

Christ Gave the Church Keys for Development

In our last topic we saw that Peter and the rest of the disciples explained the message of the death and resurrection of Christ to the people that were gathered in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost. As Peter concluded his message, he called on the people to repent and place their faith in Christ. He promised them that if they repented that they would receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. In our topic today we are going to see how the Lord worked in the lives of the people and the lessons that we can learn to help our physical and spiritual children learn to develop others.

We begin by seeing the response of the people to the message about the death and resurrection of Christ. Acts 2:41 says, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." Here we see that the Lord produced a great response when there was the conviction of the Holy Spirit. We see that the people who responded to the message responded with great joy and gladness. This is a reminder of the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the Father as He draws people to Christ.

As a result, the Lord added about three thousand new believers to the 120 who had been praying in the upper room. Suddenly the church was faced with a new challenge. How were they going to help all of these new believers begin to grow in their understanding? Acts 2:42 and 46 tell us about the action that the apostles immediately took. Acts 2:42 says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." Acts 2:46 tells us where the people met to learn the apostles' doctrine. That verse says, "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart." The temple was where the believers went for prayer as we will see in chapter three but here we see that the early church was breaking bread from house to house.

First, as the Christians gathered in houses throughout the city of Jerusalem, we see that they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine. In Acts 1:15 we saw that there were 120 disciples. A disciple is defined in Matthew 13:52 where we read, "Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old."" The word translated "instructed" is the word that is translated make disciples in Matthew 28:19 and Acts 14:21. Here we see that a disciple is the head of a spiritual household. He or she has a treasure (in this case the apostles' doctrine since the New Testament had not yet been written. A disciple is able to bring out of his treasure things that are old (the basics of Christianity) and things that are new (the things that he is continuing to learn). Since there were 120 disciples, each disciple was responsible for about 25 new Christians.

The 120 who were already disciples met with small groups in homes to help them to understand the things that Christ had taught the disciples. They followed the example of Christ in Luke 24:44-45 where we read, "Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you

while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures." The disciples explained what they understood but the Holy Spirit was the real Teacher. Christ had promised the disciples in John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." As we explain the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is the One who gives spiritual understanding.

Second, the disciples and new Christians spent time in fellowship (sharing their lives with one another) as these discussed the apostles' doctrine. John was one of the 120. He wrote in I John 1:3-4, "That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full." In the book of I John he wrote some of the same things that he and the rest of the 120 were helping these new Christians to understand. I recommend to new Christians that they read the entire book of I John every day for a month and then we discuss what they are learning when we get together for Bible study.

Third, the disciples and new Christians spent time together breaking bread. This included both eating meals together and also having communion together to remember the death of Christ and the purpose why He died. I Corinthians 11:28-29 point out the fact that this is also a time of self examination for Christians when those verses say, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." Here we see that one of the best ways to help new Christians understand the meaning of communion is to have communion in their homes so that they can get their questions about the meaning of communion answered.

Fourth, the disciples and new Christians were spending time together praying. Most were probably praying that the Lord would open the hearts of their relatives, friends, neighbors and co-workers. Acts 16:14 shows why such prayer is powerful. That verse says, "Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul." Here we see that the Lord is the One who opens the hearts of those who are hearing the Word of God explained.

We also see that God was working mightily in the lives of people. Acts 2:43-45 says, "Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need." Here we see that God was verifying the message of the apostles about the resurrection of Christ with many wonders and signs. Hebrews 2:3-4 says, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?" Here we see that God verified the message of the apostles with signs, wonders, various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Since there were Jews from many parts of the world that had become Christians, many of them stayed after the Day of Pentecost to learn more about Christ. As a result, the Jews living in Jerusalem began selling their possessions and goods so that they could use the money to provide for the needs of new believers who had not planned to stay in Jerusalem for several extra months. Later the Gentile churches responded to this sharing by sending gifts to the church in Jerusalem to help them with their own needs since the early believers had sold what they had to help new believers. Paul wrote in II Corinthians 8:13-14, “For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack--that there may be equality.” Here we see that the love of Christ working in our lives will also cause us to want to share with needy Christians that are lacking as we share of our abundance to help supply their lack.

Acts 2:46-47 go on to say, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” The Jews had gathered for many years in the courtyard of the temple at the time of the morning and evening sacrifices for prayer. The new believers continued to participate in these times of prayer. This gave them the opportunity to share with other Jews that were not yet Christians the message about the death and resurrection of Christ. Activities in the temple were under the supervision of the Sanhedrin and the high priests who had put Christ to death just a few weeks earlier. However, the believers were not afraid to share about their new faith in the very place where those who condemned Christ provided the supervision.

We see that the believers were also breaking bread from house to house. We saw in verses 42 that this was where the new Christians were getting their questions answered as they learned more about Christ and His teachings. This was also where they had their communion services. The word translated “gladness” means extreme or exceeding joy. That is the way the word is translated in Jude 24 where we read, “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.” When individuals understand that Christ has made us faultless before God, they are able to experience great joy.

The people were filled with praise to God for the way that He was changing and transforming their lives. They were also experiencing the grace of God as He worked in their lives and in the lives of their family and friends. As a result, we see that the Lord was adding people to the church each day. This reminds us of the fact that Christ said in Matthew 16:18 that He would build His church. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that our ministry is to serve one another as Christ is being formed in our lives. This is what makes it possible for the Lord to build His church because those who are not yet Christians see how the Lord changes and transforms the lives of those who are growing in the love of Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand how Christ builds His church.

8.

Christ Used Peter to Heal a Crippled Man

In our last topic we saw how the early church began to grow and develop. That growth was the result of the Lord building His church as people saw how the Lord was changing and transforming the lives of others. We might say that the basic activities of the original church can be summarized by the word FLOCKS:

F – fellowship

L – leadership development

O – outreach

C – caring

K – knowledge

S - service

that were:

Praying and

Praising

In our topic today we are going to see other ways that the Lord was building His church as the early disciples were obedient to Him.

We mentioned in our last topic that one of the key places where the early believers had the opportunity to share the good news about the death and resurrection of Christ was in the temple courtyard before and after the morning and evening sacrifice. That was true because many of the Jews in Jerusalem gathered in the temple courtyard for prayer during the time of the morning and evening sacrifices as well as at noon. We see such a gathering mentioned in Acts 3:12 where we read, “So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” Many people saw the man that was healed because they were in the temple courtyard at the hour of prayer.

Acts 3:1-5 says, “Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, “Look at us.” So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.” Here we see that Peter and John were walking into the temple courtyard at the time of the evening hour of prayer which was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

One of the gates from the temple courtyard into the temple area was the gate called the Beautiful Gate. The gate had that particular name because it was a very large and beautiful gate. Luke 21:1 says, “And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury.” The treasury in the temple was located near this gate so this was a common place for families to bring their crippled relatives to beg since people would often give to the poor to impress others with their generosity. The word translated “alms” meant a donation that a person would give to the poor.

We read that Peter and John fixed their eyes on this man. The word translated “fixed” meant to really look at the man. This is the same word that was used earlier in Acts 1:10 where we read, “And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel.” In that verse the disciples were staring into the sky because Christ had just been taken up from them into heaven. Then Peter told the man to look at them. The man immediately gave his full attention to Peter and John because he thought that they were going to give him a generous gift.

Instead we see that Peter and John had something totally different in their minds. Acts 3:6-10 says, “Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them--walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.” Peter told the man that they did not have any silver or gold. For just a moment the man was probably very disappointed because he had been expecting a generous gift.

However, his disappointment quickly turned to joy as a result of what happened next. Peter went on to say that he did have something to give to the man. Then he said, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” Peter then took him by the right hand and lifted him up. Acts 4:22 says, “For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.” This verse shows us that this man had never stood before. He had been crippled his entire life. At that moment the Lord healed the man and his feet and ankle bones received strength. Even the religious leaders recognized that they could not deny this miracle. Acts 4:15-16, “But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, “What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.” Although they could not deny the miracle, neither were they willing to admit that a miracle had happened.

This man who had never stood before suddenly had his life changed. He immediately leaped up and stood and walked. Here we see another miracle. He had perfect balance even though he had never stood before. He was able to both walk and leap. However, he also recognized the source of the miracles. He was giving all of the praise to God for what the Lord had just done in his life. As I Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” He immediately wanted all glory to go to God so he began to express his praise to God.

This miracle also had an impact on many other people because many people had seen this man laying at the Beautiful Gate for years. They knew that he had never walked. They had seen him ask for alms for many years. As a result, the people in the temple were filled with wonder and amazement. The word translated “wonder” means to be astonished or amazed. Luke 4:36 says, “Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, “What a word this is!

For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.”” In this verse Christ had just cast out demons. The word translated “amazement” means to cause the mind to be thrown out of its regular way of thinking. The word is used in Mark 5:41-42 where we read, “Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement.” In these verses Christ had just raised a girl from the dead. The people in the temple had this same amazement and confusion.

Acts 3:11-12 goes on to say, “Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed. So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” The amazement of the crowd quickly caused a large group of people to gather together in the area known as Solomon's Porch. The area of the temple courtyard known as Solomon's Porch was in the Court of the Gentiles so that both Jews and Gentiles could be in that part of the courtyard. It was also facing the Beautiful Gate so this was the area where the man had been laying and asking for alms.

As Peter saw a large crowd of people quickly gathering, he asked them a question, “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this?” The word translated “marvel” means to be filled with wonder or amazement. The same word is used in the next chapter. In Acts 4:13 after Peter had spoken to the religious leaders that condemned Christ to death, we read, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” Here the very men that condemned Christ to death were forced to realize that Jesus had totally changed the lives of Peter and John. Here we see that the whole crowd had this same wonder and amazement as they saw this man leaping and walking.

Then Peter asked a second question. He asked, “Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” Here we see that Peter wanted to make it very clear that he and John were not the cause of this great miracle. First, Peter reminded the people that this miracle did not happen because of their own power. In fact Christ had told all of the disciples in Luke 24:49, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” In his sermon in Acts 2 Peter talked about the power of the Father that raised Christ from the dead.

Peter also made it clear that this miracle was not the result of the godliness of Peter and John. The word translated “godliness” means reverence or respect toward God. Peter was making it clear that they were not super saints. In the same way we want to help our physical and spiritual children fully understand that what the Lord chooses to do through our lives is not based on either our own power or the fact that we are more godly than anyone else. God works through us because of His choice. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand why Christ used Peter to heal the crippled man.

Peter Responded to the Opportunities Christ Provided

In our last topic we saw that the Lord used Peter to heal a man that had been crippled since birth. This man was more than forty years old at the time that he was healed. We also saw that a large crowd of people gathered because they saw the man that many of them had seen asking for alms for years leaping and walking and praising God. They wanted to know what had happened. We are going to see that Peter used this gathering of people as an opportunity to speak to this crowd about the death and resurrection of Christ. Here we see that Peter gives us an example of how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to use the opportunities that the Lord opens for them to speak about Christ. We saw that Peter began to speak with two questions in verses 12.

In Acts 3:13-16 we read, “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.” In this sermon we see that Peter began by making it clear that he was speaking about the God of their fathers.

Peter called God the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers. This is the same title that God used of Himself when He spoke to Moses in Exodus 3:6 where we read, “Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.” As a result, this was a very familiar title for God among the Jews. He also spoke Jesus as the Servant of God. This was also familiar to the Jews because Isaiah used that title to introduce Christ in Isaiah 52:13-14 where we read, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men. Then the entire chapter of Isaiah 53 describes this Servant in detail.

Peter said that God glorified His Servant Jesus. Peter said that the Jews had delivered Jesus to Pilate and denied that Jesus was their king when Pilate was determined to set Him free. Peter said that the Jews chose to deny the Holy One and Just and asked Pilate to release the murderer named Barabbas instead. In this way the Jews took responsibility for killing the Prince of life. In fact Matthew 27:25 records the words of the Jewish religious leaders when they said, “And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children.”” Peter also reminded the crowd there that day that God had raised Jesus from the dead. Peter said that it was through faith in the name of Jesus that this man that they had known for many years was now made strong. Peter said that faith in Jesus had given this man perfect soundness as the people had observed.

Peter went on to say in Acts 3:17-21, “Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” Here we see that Peter said that he recognized that both the Jews and their leaders had crucified Christ in ignorance. The word translated “ignorance” means lack of knowledge especially of the things of God. Ephesians 4:18 says, “Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” Spiritual blindness is present in every person that is not a Christian. Here we see that spiritual blindness causes ignorance.

Peter pointed out the fact that the Old Testament prophets had spoken in advance of the fact that Christ would suffer. Because of spiritual blindness most of the Jews could not understand these prophecies. The first prophecy about the suffering of Christ was in Genesis 3:15 where we read that Satan would bruise the heel of the Seed of the woman. That verse says, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” Other prophecies throughout the Old Testament point to the fact that Christ would suffer. These prophecies were all fulfilled by Christ.

After explaining that the Old Testament predicted the death and resurrection of Christ, Peter then urged the people to repent (to turn from sin and turn to God). Peter pointed out what would happen if they were converted (turned back to God). Their sins would be blotted out. The word translated “blotted out” means to wipe away or erase and means to wipe away the ink so that there is nothing left. Colossians 2:14 says, “Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” Every sin that was written against us was nailed to the cross.

Since Peter was preaching to the Jews, they were looking forward to the time when the times of refreshing and the times of restoration of all things would come. That time is talking about the time when Christ will rule over the whole earth for one thousand years. What the Jews did not understand was that the Father was going to send Jesus Christ to the earth two times. He came the first time to pay the penalty for sin. He will come the second time to rule for a thousand years. During that future time the Jews will experience the full blessing promised by the prophets. Joel 2:28-29 says, “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.” Peter here reminded the people that they needed to repent and prepare their hearts before that time could come.

Acts 3:22-26 goes on to say, “For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’ Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. You are sons of the prophets,

and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities." Here we see that Peter next quoted from Moses who was considered by the Jews to be their greatest prophet.

Deuteronomy 18:15 says, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear." Then Deuteronomy 18:18-19 adds, "I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him." Here we see that whoever would not hear the words that the Father spoke through this Prophet that God would require it of them (bring judgment on them). Peter is making it clear that Christ was the fulfillment of this prophecy by Moses.

Next Peter pointed out the fact that all of the prophets who followed beginning with Samuel also spoke of these days when the Father would send Christ as the Prophet who would fulfill His promises. Nathan spoke to David and prophesied in II Samuel 7:16, "And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever." Christ is the fulfillment of this promise because He is the One who will rule forever.

Peter also gave a warning to any who chose to reject the Prophet (Christ) who fulfilled the promise given through Moses. He said that any who refused to hear that Prophet would be completely destroyed. In addition to the messages of the prophets about Christ, God had also made a covenant with Abraham that referred to Christ. Genesis 12:3 says, "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." God again confirmed this promise to Isaac after Abraham was willing to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Genesis 22:18 says, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." That seed (descendent) that fulfilled that promise to Abraham was Christ.

Then Peter gave a very personal invitation to the people that were gathered there in the temple and heard him that day. He told them that God had raised up His Servant Jesus. Peter said that they were the first to have the opportunity to experience the blessing that would come to many in the future through Christ. He said that God was giving them the opportunity to turn to Christ who had paid the penalty to take away their iniquities. The word translated "iniquities" means wickedness, evil purposes and evil desires. Here we see that Peter gave them a choice. They could continue in their evil purposes and evil desires or they could turn to Christ and receive the blessing that Christ had provided through His death and resurrection. In the same way we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to respond to opportunities to invite people to turn from their sin and receive life and blessing through Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to respond to the opportunities that Christ provides.

10.

Peter Spoke the Word of God with Boldness

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children recognize the opportunities that Christ opens for them to share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ with others. We want them to be able to clearly explain to others that each person has the opportunity to repent of sin and turn to Christ and enjoy the blessing that Christ has promised. The Jewish religious leaders did not like the fact that Peter and John shared the message of the death and resurrection of Christ with the people. As a result, we are going to see in this topic that the religious leaders put them in jail.

In Acts 4:1-4 we read, “Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.” The priests were the ones who were responsible for the offering of the sacrifices in the temple. The high priest and his relatives were the ones who were in charge of everything that went on in the temple. The captain of the temple was the Levite who was in charge of the temple police.

The priests together with the Sadducees were very upset because Peter taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees were upset because they did not believe in any kind of miracles including the resurrection of the dead. The high priest and his relatives were very upset because the high priest was the one who had condemned Christ to death just a few months earlier. Now Peter was teaching the people that Christ had been raised from the dead. Since it was too late to gather the Sanhedrin (the seventy men who ruled the Jews), these men took Peter and John and kept them as prisoners until the next day.

Meanwhile the church continued to grow as more people repented of their sin and placed their faith in Christ. Every day more people were placing their faith in Christ. As a result, we see that the number of believers had now reached a total of five thousand. As we saw in Acts 2:46-47, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Of course this was part of the reason why the religious leaders were fearful because as more people became followers of Christ the religious leaders were afraid that they were losing their power over the people.

Acts 4:5-7 goes on to tell us, “And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, “By what power or by what name have you done this?”” Here we see that the next morning the Sanhedrin along with other religious leaders all gathered to question Peter and John. These were the very men who had condemned Christ to death and

turned Him over to Pilate just a few months earlier. These were the same men who had paid the Roman soldiers a large amount of money to get them to deny the resurrection. Matthew 28:12-14 says, "When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, 'Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure.'" The religious leaders did not want the people to believe that Christ had risen from the dead.

As a result, the religious leaders now feared the teaching of Peter, John and the other disciples. The religious leaders were only concerned about their own power. That is the difference between religious leaders and godly spiritual leaders. Religious leaders are without true faith and only try to protect their power over people. Godly spiritual leaders love God and want people to know how to come to God by faith in Christ. Peter had told the people in Acts 3:19, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." The religious leaders knew that any of the people who did repent would begin to follow Christ and the religious leaders would lose their power over those people.

As a result, the religious leaders now asked Peter and John the question, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" We have the answer to that question in Acts 4:8-12 where we read, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.'" Here we see that although the religious leaders did not realize it they had asked the very question that God wanted Peter to answer.

The first thing that we notice is that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit as He answered this question. Ephesians 5:18 says, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." Here we see that we are commanded to keep on being filled with the Spirit. This means to be under the guidance and control of the Holy Spirit. This will happen when we have confessed all sin and are depending on the power of the Holy Spirit. Acts 4:31 says, "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness." Here we see that when we are filled with the Holy Spirit that we will speak the Word of God with boldness. That was exactly what happened as Peter spoke to the religious leaders that had condemned Christ to death.

Because Peter was being guided by the Holy Spirit and speaking the Word of God with boldness, the Holy Spirit gave him the words to immediately turn the situation around and put the religious leaders on trial as he said, "If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well." The Holy Spirit led him to point out that the deed was a good deed. It was done to a helpless man and it caused the man to be

completely healed. As a result, the religious leaders had Peter and John on trial for doing a good deed.

Peter said that all who were gathered there that day as well as all of the people of Israel could know that the man was healed by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Peter said that this was the very man that they had crucified and that God had raised from the dead. These very men had admitted their responsibility for the crucifixion of Christ when they said in Matthew 27:25, "And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children."" As we mentioned above, these very men had paid the soldiers a large sum of money to deny the resurrection of Christ. God had raised Christ from the dead and these men knew that He was alive. Peter said that it was by the name of Jesus of Nazareth that this man now stood before them because Jesus Christ had healed him.

Then Peter quoted from Psalm 118:22. Psalm 118:22-23 says, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." When the temple at Jerusalem was being built by Solomon the materials were prepared at a different location and brought to the temple site. One day a stone was brought to the site and the builders could not determine where it would be used so they rejected it. Later they found out that it was the chief cornerstone which was the stone that determined how every other stone was to be placed. Peter is here saying that the Jewish religious leaders had done the same thing when they rejected Christ who is the very One by whom we all must be saved.

In fact Peter went on to point out that Christ is the only One who can save people from the power and penalty of sin. Christ could pay the penalty for sin because He was without sin. That is why His name is the only name under heaven by which men must be saved. Christ said in John 14:6, "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Christ had earlier said in Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." The Jewish religious leaders now had to choose whether or not to enter the narrow gate. We will see that none of them made that choice that day.

Acts 4:13 says, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus." Here we see that because they were filled with the Holy Spirit that Peter and John were able to speak with boldness. It did not matter that they did not have the formal training that was given to religious leaders in the Jewish rabbinical schools. The key to their boldness was the fact that they had been with Jesus and He had given them the Holy Spirit so they were able to speak the Word of God with boldness. In the same way we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that this is also the key that makes it possible for them to speak the Word with boldness. Christ has given them the Holy Spirit so that as they yield to Him they will speak with boldness. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to yield to the Holy Spirit.

11.

Peter Spoke of the Importance of Obedience to God

In our last topic we saw that Peter was able to speak the Word of God with boldness because He was filled with the Holy Spirit. In the same way we want to help our physical and spiritual children come to a clear understanding that it is only as they are filled with the Holy Spirit that they will be able to speak the Word of God with boldness. In our topic today we are going to see that Peter provides an example of the importance of obedience to God.

In Acts 4:13-16 we read, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, “What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.” In these verses we see the importance of helping our children realize the importance of spending time with Jesus. We see that Jesus will change and transform their lives.

The word translated “realized” means to know or to fully understand. The boldness of Peter and John forced the religious leaders to understand the changes that Christ had made in the lives of Peter and John. Many years later in I John 4:18 John wrote, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” Even though these were the very men that had condemned Christ to death, because Peter and John were filled with the Holy Spirit instead of depending on their own strength, the love of Christ had cast out any fear.

The Jewish religious leaders had seen this man laying at the Beautiful Gate for many years and knew that he was unable to walk. Now here he was standing with Peter and John. They had seen him walk into their presence. As a result, the religious leaders knew that they could not punish Peter and John for their good deed to the man since many of the people in the city of Jerusalem had already heard about this miracle. That was why the religious leaders ordered the temple guards to take Peter and John out of the council while they decided what they should do.

Once Peter and John were taken out of the place where the religious leaders were meeting, the leaders began to talk about what to do. They had to admit to themselves that a notable miracle had been done. They also recognized that word had spread quickly around the city of Jerusalem about this miracle so that the people also knew what had happened to the man. In fact the religious leaders recognized that they could not deny this miracle. In this case they could not pay money to a few soldiers who would agree to tell a lie for the money as they had done when they paid the soldiers to say that the disciples had stolen the body of Christ while the soldiers slept. At the same time that they knew that they could not deny the fact that the man had been healed by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, neither were they willing to admit that the miracle had happened.

Acts 4:17-20 says, "But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name." And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Here we see that the religious leaders realized that the only thing that they could do was try to prevent any more people from hearing about the miracle.

As a result, the religious leaders decided that they would severely threaten Peter and John and tell them that they were not to speak or teach any person about Jesus any more. Christ had warned the disciples that they would face opposition. In John 16:2-3 Christ told the disciples the night before He was crucified, "They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me." Here we see the real problem of the religious leaders. They did not know either the Father or Christ. When people do not know God, they will often oppose any message about the resurrection of Christ.

The religious leaders called for Peter and John to be brought back into their council. Then they commanded them and told them that from now on they were not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. We have already seen that Peter and John were filled with boldness. Acts 4:13 says, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus." As a result, Peter and John did not fear these men who had condemned Christ to death just a few months earlier. However, because these men were the Sanhedrin, Peter and John also knew that they were to obey their leaders unless their leaders told them to disobey God.

That provided them with a clear opportunity to help the religious leaders understand their first priority was to God. As a result, they answered the religious leaders, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Here we see an important lesson for our own lives. When we are forced to make a clear choice between obeying God and obeying the leaders of the world, we need to realize that our first responsibility is to obey God and be prepared to take the judgment that may come from political leaders.

Daniel demonstrated this same purpose of heart when the king of the Medes and Persians signed a law that said that anyone who prayed to any god or man for thirty days except the king would be thrown into the lion's den. Daniel 6:10 says, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days." Daniel did not try to hide his prayer. He opened the windows so that those who opposed him could see him praying. He did not fear the king but determined to obey God rather than to obey the king. Peter and John followed the example of Daniel and told the rulers that they were going to obey God rather than to obey the religious leaders. In the same way we want to show our children by our example that our first priority is always to obey God if we are forbidden to speak in the name of Christ.

Peter and John told the religious leaders that there was no way for them to remain quiet. They had spent three years learning from Christ. They had to keep telling the things that they had seen. They had to keep teaching the things that Christ had taught them. Instead of beginning to speak about Christ secretly, Peter and John explained to the religious leaders that they must obey God rather than men. Sometime later they were again arrested. We see their response when they were beaten for preaching about Christ. Acts 5:41-42 says, "So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." In these verses we see that it is a privilege to suffer for Christ because He first suffered for us. They continued to speak in the very temple where they had been arrested.

Acts 4:21-22 says, "So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed." Here we see that the religious leaders made one more attempt to cause fear in the hearts of Peter and John by threatening them again. Their response is found in their prayer in Acts 4:29-30 where we read, "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." Their response was just to pray that the Lord would continue to give them boldness to speak the Word.

The religious leaders knew that they could not stop Peter and John from speaking about Christ because the religious leaders were afraid of the people. The people recognized that a great miracle had happened. As a result, the people were all giving glory to God for what the Lord had done in the life of the crippled man. The leader also knew that the people would turn against them if they punished Peter and John for this good deed. The Lord had changed Peter and John as well as healed the man that was crippled and the religious leaders could not deny that change. Acts 3:2 says, "And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple." The man had been crippled since birth. Here we see that he was now over forty years old. As a result, the religious leaders realized that they had to let Peter and John go free.

We want to show our physical and spiritual children by our example that we are obedient to the government that God has placed over us unless that government forbids us to speak in the name of Christ. However, when any government would try to forbid us to speak about Christ, we want to show our children by our example that we ought to obey God rather than men. This will provide our children with an example of the fact that we are to make it our first priority to be obedient to God in all situations. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to practice obedience to God.

12.

The Church Prayed for Boldness to Speak the Word

In our last topic we saw that Peter and John spoke to the Jewish Sanhedrin and told them that it was right for them to be obedient to God instead of the Jewish religious leaders. We saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children by example the importance of obeying our leaders unless they tell us to disobey God. Then obedience to God must be our first priority. Today we are going to see how God worked after Peter and John reported to the other church leaders what had happened when they spoke to the religious leaders.

We read in Acts 4:23, “And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.” The Jewish religious leaders were forced to let Peter and John go with nothing more than threats because of their fear of the people. Peter and John then went to tell the rest of the apostles and the other leaders of the church what the chief priests and elders had said to them. This is a common response when people have been threatened. However, we will see that the action of the leaders was much different than often happens when people are threatened.

Before we see that response, we see that Peter and John reported what the high priests had said to them. It is helpful to understand who was included as these high priests. In Acts 4:6 we saw that Annas was the high priest recognized by the Jews. However, Annas had been removed as the high priest by the Roman governor who ruled over Judea. John 18:13 says, “And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year.” Here we see that the Romans recognized Caiaphas as the high priest. Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas. In addition, five of the sons of Annas later served as high priest. As a result, these seven men were all considered high priests and so were included with the elders as a part of the Sanhedrin.

In response to the threats of the Sanhedrin, Acts 4:24-25 says, “So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.'" Here we see that the response of the leaders of the church to the threats of the Sanhedrin was to pray to God.

We also see that they were all in one accord as they prayed. The word translated “one accord” is used eleven times in the book of Acts and once in Romans. The word is actually a combination of two words “to rush along” and in “unison”. It is like many different musical notes being played but they are all in harmony with one another. In eight different places in Acts the word is used to show the unity of the early church. In Acts 2:46-47 we read, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” In our verse in

Acts 4 we see that the early church leaders were all in harmony as they prayed together.

The prayer begins by recognizing that God is the One who has all authority. The word translated Lord is not the normal word for Lord. Instead it is usually translated master and means one with absolute authority. In II Timothy 2:21 we read, "Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work." In this verse we see that we are useful to the Master when we have cleansed our lives from sin. In fact our lives are then also prepared for every good work that our Master has for us. The leaders mentioned the fact that the Lord has authority over all creation because He is the Creator. In its use here in Acts the early church leaders recognized that God had all authority and that in their threats the Jewish religious leaders were just giving a fulfillment of what God had said in the Old Testament would happen in response to Christ.

Then their prayer quoted Psalm 2:1 which says, "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?" Without realizing it, the Jewish religious leaders had done exactly what David had predicted would happen in response to Christ. By quoting this verse in their prayer, the early church leaders actually pointed to the way that God would respond to the threats of the Jewish religious leaders because Psalm 2:2-4 goes on to say, "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision." Here we see that David predicted that the Lord would just laugh at those who thought that they could stop the spread of the message about Christ.

Then their prayer went on to say in Acts 4:27-28, "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done." This prayer shows that the believers recognized that God was in complete control. In fact God allowed the rebellion of Herod, Pilate, as well as both the Gentiles and the people of Israel to carry out the plan of God.

The Father and Christ had determined before the world was even created that Christ would pay the penalty for sin so that forgiveness could be offered to all people. Ephesians 1:4 says, "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." This verse points out the fact that it was before the world was ever created that the Father had determined to make us holy and without blame through the death and resurrection of Christ. Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Christ was in agreement that He would shed His blood to buy us back from the penalty of sin and provide forgiveness to us. Here we see that the early church realized that God was carrying out His plan even though they had been threatened by the Jewish religious leaders.

Acts 4:29-31 says, "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with

the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” The followers of Christ asked the Lord to look carefully at the threats of the Jewish religious leaders and then give His servants boldness to speak the Word of God. Here we see that the early church shows us clearly how to handle opposition to the message of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Instead of becoming fearful, we see by the example of the early church that the thing for us to do when we face opposition to the Gospel is to pray and ask Christ to give us His strength to speak the Word of God with boldness. Paul later gave the same encouragement to the church at Ephesus. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians about prayer, he asked them to also pray for him. In Ephesians 6:19 he gave a prayer request for himself, “And for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.” In the same way we want to help our children learn to respond to opposition to the Gospel by praying and asking the Lord to give them boldness to speak the Word of God.

The early church made a second request in addition to the request for boldness to speak the Word of God. They asked the Lord to stretch out His hand to heal. Here we are reminded that the Lord is the One who heals. In order to make sure that all glory goes to Christ, James 5:14-15 says, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” If a group of leaders is praying and the Lord chooses to heal, no one person can claim the credit for the healing. Instead all glory will go to the Lord.

Since the thing that had caused Peter and John to be arrested and brought before the Jewish religious leaders was the healing of the crippled man, the apostles prayed and asked the Lord to respond to the unbelief of the Jewish religious leaders by performing more signs and wonders that would be done through the name of God’s holy Servant Jesus. Hebrews 2:4 says, “God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” We also see how the Lord answered the prayer of the apostles that day.

The Lord answered their prayer that day by shaking the place where they were praying. Then the apostles and other church leaders who were gathered together with them were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The evidence that they were filled with the Holy Spirit was the fact that they spoke the Word of God with boldness. Here we see that we do not need to react to the threats of people with fear. Instead we can respond to such threats by asking the Lord to give us boldness to speak His Word. Hebrews 4:12a tells us “For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...” We want to show our children by our example the importance of responding to any threats by asking the Lord to give us His boldness to speak the Word of God. May the Lord richly bless you as you help you children learn to pray for boldness to speak the Word of God.

13.

The Church Served One Another in Love

In our last topic we saw how the leaders of the early church responded when Peter and John were threatened and told not to speak any more in the name of Jesus. The leaders of the early church responded by praying and asking the Lord to give them boldness to speak the Word of God. In the same way we want to show our physical and spiritual children the importance of praying and asking the Lord to give us His strength to speak His Word with boldness. In our topic today we are going to see that the believers in the early church were also learning how to serve one another in love.

In our last topic we saw that the believers were all in one accord as they prayed and asked the Lord to give them strength to speak the Word of God with boldness. This oneness of the early believers was also shown in other ways. Acts 4:32-33 says, "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all." Here we read that the multitude of believers were all of one heart and one soul.

The word translated "heart" is used to speak of the fact that the physical heart is the most important organ for physical life. It also came to mean the inner man from which sin comes. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" In fact the heart is often used to describe the human spirit. Acts 15:8-9 says, "So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." Just as the heart is the source of sin, we see that when the Holy Spirit comes into our human spirit at the moment of salvation that the Holy Spirit purifies our hearts. Instead of being controlled by our sin nature, we are now given a new nature that has a desire to please God. We see in the early church that those who believed were of one heart.

We also see that those who believed were of one soul. The fact that both the heart and the soul are mentioned in this verse shows that they are separate. The soul is the mind, emotions and will. When Christians are of one heart, we see that it affects every area of our lives. Romans 15:5-6 says, "Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here we see that when our hearts are in unity with the Lord that our thoughts and actions will be controlled by our heart. We will have the same concern for others that we have for ourselves and it will cause us to give glory to God with our words and deeds.

Because the early believers were of one heart and one soul, we see that the believers were sharing with one another. Here we see that the love of Christ caused these early believers to have a different view of their possessions. They were glad for opportunities to minister to the needs of one another. Acts 2:44-45 says, "Now all who believed were together, and had all

things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” Here we see that this sharing was continuing. Since new believers had stayed in Jerusalem to learn more about Christ, the other believers shared to help meet their physical needs.

This sharing caused the teaching of the apostles about the resurrection of Christ to have great power. Other Jews saw the changed attitudes and actions of the new believers and realized that the message of the resurrection had changed and transformed the lives of these new believers. Romans 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” When people see the transformed lives of new Christians, those lifestyle changes cause people to realize that the message of the resurrection had great power to change and transform lives. These believers were also experiencing the grace of God in their lives.

The actions produced by these attitudes are seen in the next verses. Acts 2:34-35 says, “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.” This unity in heart and soul caused the believers to take action. They shared what they had with others so that no one lacked. The word translated “lacked” means to be needy or without food or clothing. People were sharing what they had to meet the needs of others.

We read that the people that had land or houses began to sell their land or their houses to provide money to meet the needs of those who lacked. Here we see that the believers that had extra pieces of property or extra houses that they did not need sold these extra things so that they could help share in the needs of the needy Christians. When the leaders of the church at Jerusalem gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and Paul, Galatians 2:10 says, “They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.” Here we see that the concern of the leaders in Jerusalem to share in the needs of the needy was something that they encouraged Paul and Barnabas to practice in their lives and ministry.

Paul later passed this same concern to other Christians. In Acts 20:35 he told the leaders of the church at Ephesus, “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Paul had demonstrated this principle to the leaders at Ephesus by his own example. Paul also told the Christians in Corinth in II Corinthians 8:9, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” Then he wrote a little later in II Corinthians 9:6-7, “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” We see that the early church gives all of us an example of the importance of sharing with others.

Because of the impact that he would later have we see that the name of one man is named in relationship to his sharing to meet the needs of others. We read in Acts 4:36-37, “And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a

Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.” Here we are introduced to Joseb but this is the last time that we will ever hear him called by this name. From this point on he is called Barnabas. The name “Barnabas” means the son of encouragement.

Here we see that Barnabas was a real encourager to others. We see this encouragement illustrated in Acts 9:26-27 where we read, “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.” The other disciples were afraid of Saul (later changed to Paul) and were not willing to believe that he had become a follower of Christ. Barnabas was willing to encourage Saul by sharing with the other disciples how the Lord had worked in the life of Saul in Damascus.

Later Barnabas was sent by the church in Jerusalem to encourage the disciples in the city of Antioch. He saw that there were many more than he could teach alone. Acts 11:25-26 says, “Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” Here we see that Barnabas remembered the change that the Lord had made in Saul and ten years later brought him to Antioch to help the new Christians in that city in their spiritual growth.

We see that Barnabas was from the island of Cyprus. He was a Levite and owned a piece of land. We do not know whether that land was on the island of Cyprus or whether the land was in the land of Judea. Wherever the land was located, Barnabas sold that land to help those Christians that had remained longer in the area of Jerusalem so that they could learn more about Christ. As we saw in verse 35 there were many who were selling their land to help meet the needs of other Christians. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” These Christians understood that they had been set free to serve one another in love.

In the same way we want to help our physical and spiritual children grow to an understanding of the privilege that we have as Christians to serve one another in love. Sharing some of the things that we possess with poorer Christians is just one of many ways that we are able to serve one another in love. However, it is a key way that we can show that we are led by the love of Christ rather than being driven by the fear of people. As we show our children by our example that it is a privilege to serve other Christians in love, they will learn to follow our example. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to serve one another in love.

14.

The Church Had to Deal with Sin

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how the people in the early church served one another in love. They were concerned to meet the needs of those Christians who lacked. However, there were also a few who saw this meeting of needs as an opportunity to get others to talk about their giving. We will meet one such couple in our topic today and will see how the early church chose to deal with this sin.

In Acts 5:1-4 we read, "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.'" In the last topic we saw that Barnabas was commended for sharing with those who had needs. Here we see that Ananias and Sapphira thought that this would be a good way to get recognition from the other Christians.

As a result, this couple also sold a possession. They agreed together that they would keep part of the money and tell the leaders of the church that they were giving the whole amount that they received from the sale of the possession. Many of the early believers had done a similar thing. Acts 2:44-45 says, "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need." Here we see that many of the early believers had sold certain possessions to help meet the needs of other believers.

The difference with Ananias and Sapphira from the rest of these believers was the fact that they had decided to try and deceive others by making them think that they had given the entire amount from the sale of their possession. Since this was not required giving, they had the right to give none, to give part or to give all of the money that they received. However, they chose to lie to the church by saying that they were giving the entire amount and their lie was the sin that they were committing. Colossians 3:9 says, "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds." Here we see that we are not to lie to one another.

However, Peter recognized that the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was actually against the Holy Spirit. That is why Acts 5:3-4 says, "But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.'" Here Peter makes it clear that their sin was to choose to lie to the Holy Spirit. The money belonged to them. They had the right to do with the money as they chose. However, the sin was the fact that they chose to lie to the Holy Spirit. Instead of being led by the Holy Spirit, this couple chose to be led by Satan.

God gave a warning in the early chapters of Genesis when He said in Genesis 6:3, "And the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."" In the Old Testament we see that people recognized that their sin was against the Lord. Achan said in Joshua 7:20, "And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I have done." David said the same thing to the Lord in Psalm 51:4 when he said, "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight--that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge." Here in Acts Peter made it clear that Ananias and Sapphira had chosen to lie to the Holy Spirit and that is why the Lord brought judgment upon them.

That judgment of Ananias is described in Acts 5:5-6 where we read, "Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him." We are reminded here that when we chose to sin that God will discipline us for that sin on the earth since Christians will not face future judgment. In I Corinthians 11:30-32 we read, "For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world." When a Christian chooses to rebel against God, he or she may experience the discipline of God on this earth so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

We see that this discipline of the Lord brought great fear upon the church and also upon those who were not placed their faith in Christ. In I Peter 4:17 we read, "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?" When God disciplines a Christian, even those who are not Christians realize that there is a future judgment waiting for those who totally reject Christ. Jude 22-23 says, "And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh." God calls us to reach out to those who do not know Christ with compassion. However, with some it is necessary for God draw them to Himself through the fear of death. Hebrews 2:15 says, "And release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Christ died to set all people free from the bondage of the fear of death.

When Ananias died, the young men wrapped up his body in the way that the Jews wrapped the bodies of their dead. This form of preparation for burial is described in John 11:44 where we read, "And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."" Then the young men took the body of Ananias out of the city and buried the body. Because of the fact that the Jews did not embalm the bodies of the dead, they usually buried them the same day that they died.

Acts 5:7-11 goes on to say, "Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much." Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Then immediately she fell down at his

feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.” Here we see that Sapphira had not heard about the death of her husband.

About three hours later Sapphira came to the place where the apostles were gathered. Peter asked her a few questions because he wanted to find out if she had been in agreement with her husband in planning this deception. First, Peter asked Sapphira if they had sold the land for the price that Ananias said that they had received for the land. Sapphira agreed that the amount Peter mentioned was the amount that they had received for the land. Then Peter asked her a second question, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?” The word translated “test” here means to challenge God by what is said. Peter told Sapphira that she and Ananias had agreed together to challenge the Spirit of God by their lie that they thought they could hide from the people. They might try to hide the lie from people but could not hide it from God.

Then Peter told Sapphira what had happened to her husband and said that the same thing was going to happen to her at that very moment. Peter told her that the young men who had buried her husband were waiting at the door to carry her body out and bury it. Sapphira immediately fell down to the ground and breathed her last. In this particular case we see that the judgment of God of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira happened immediately. Galatians 6:7 says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” God will not be mocked. As I Corinthians 11:30 says, “For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.” Defiant sin against God by a Christian can lead to physical death. Then the same young men that had buried Ananias came and took the body of Sapphira and buried her by her husband.

The death of Ananias and Sapphira brought great fear both on the church and also on those who were not Christians when they heard about the death of this couple. The word translated “fear” means that which causes terror or causes us to be afraid. The word is translated “terror in II Corinthians 5:11 where we read, “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.” The word is translated three times by the word fear in I John 4:18 where we read, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” When we are walking in disobedience to the Lord, then we will experience fear of discipline. When we are walking in the love of the Lord, we will have a godly fear or reverence for God.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to walk in the love of the Lord moment by moment. Then they will not have to fear the discipline of the Lord. Instead that can enjoy the peace that we experience in our lives when we walk with the Lord and have a godly reverence for Him. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to walk in the love of the Lord.

15.

The Church Saw God Perform Miracles

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that God will discipline those Christians who choose to walk in sin. We saw that such discipline in the life of a Christian can even lead to physical death since any judgment that Christians receive will be on this earth so that the spirit can be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Although God did judge the sin in the lives of Ananias and Sapphira, we see that He also showed His power in other ways that brought great blessing to the church.

Acts 5:12-13 says, “And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.” Here we see that the Lord was performing many signs and wonders in the early church. We see that these signs and wonders were being done through the hands of the apostles. Hebrews 2:3-4 says, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” God verified the message of the apostles and a few close associates about the death and resurrection of Christ by many signs and wonders.

Later when some of the Corinthians were questioning whether Paul had a right to be called an apostle, Paul responded in II Corinthians 12:12 by saying, “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.” Here we see that Paul called these signs the signs of an apostle. This was due to the fact that the signs and wonders were for the purpose of verifying their eyewitness testimony about the resurrection of Christ.

The word translated “signs” means a miracle that God used to back up the words of the apostles. The word is translated miracle in Acts 4:22 which says, “For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.” Then in Acts 4:29-30 the apostles prayed, “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” Here we see that the apostles prayed that God would verify their message as He performed signs and wonders done by the apostles in the name of Jesus.

The word translated “wonders” means a miracle performed by those that God has chosen. Acts 14:3 says, “Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.” Here we see that God allowed signs and wonders to be done by the hands of Paul and Barnabas. In Acts 5:12 we see that it was through the apostles that God allowed signs and wonders to be done. God was working in the lives of many people by the hands of the apostles.

We also see that the early believers were gathering in the outer court of the temple called the court of the Gentiles in the area known as Solomon's Porch. This area was a covered area around the outer edge of the court of the Gentiles. As the believers gathered in Solomon's Porch, we read that they were all of one accord. We saw in an earlier topic that the word translated "one accord" is used eleven times in the book of Acts and once in Romans. The word is actually a combination of two words "to rush along" and in "unison". It is like many different musical notes being played but they are all in harmony with one another. In eight different places in Acts the word is used to show the unity of the early church. Here we are reminded again that the early church experienced great unity as they served the Lord together.

The people had seen what happened to Ananias and Sapphira. They were seeing the signs and wonders that God was performing through the apostles. They noticed the unity that was present among those who had believed in Christ. As a result, unbelievers who had not yet placed their faith in Christ were afraid to join with the believers when they gathered in Solomon's Porch. However, the Lord was working in the lives of many of the common people as they saw what the Lord was doing. Most of the Jews had a very great respect for the believers as they saw how the Lord was changing lives.

We see the impact of what the Lord was doing and of these changed lives. Acts 5:14-15 says, "And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them." The believers continued to share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ with everyone. As a result, the Lord continued to increase the number of believers that were being added to the church. These new believers included large numbers of both men and women.

Here we see that the Lord was answering the prayer of the church in Acts 4:29-31 where we read, "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness." Instead of fearing the threats of the Sanhedrin, the church had prayed for boldness to speak the Word of God. They had prayed that the Lord would verify their words with signs and wonders. Because they were in submission to God, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God with boldness.

In addition to large numbers of people becoming new believers, we also see that the Lord chose to perform great signs and wonders. The people of Jerusalem began bringing the sick out into the streets with the hope that the shadow of Peter might bring healing to those who were sick. As a result, along the streets of the city there were large numbers of sick people laying on bed and couches. The very fact that people were placing the sick out in the streets showed that the great majority of people were amazed at what the Lord was doing. This gave the believers even more opportunities to share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ with the people that were laying on these beds and couches and their families.

As we study the Gospels, we see that most of the recorded miracles of Christ happened in the

area of Galilee. However, these miracles were happening right in Jerusalem. The people in the area of Judea that surrounded Jerusalem also heard what was happening. As a result, Acts 4:16 says, "Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed." The people of these surrounding cities began to bring their sick and afflicted to Jerusalem.

We see that a multitude of people came from these surrounding cities to bring their sick and those tormented by evil spirits to be healed. God chose to work in a very powerful way in answer to the prayers of the church. We read that all of the people that were sick and all of the people that were tormented by evil spirits were all healed. Three times in the book of Acts we read about large numbers of people being healed. The first time is right here.

The second time that we read about large numbers of people being healed is in Acts 8:7 where we read, "For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed." In Acts 8:4-5 after the death of Stephen and the persecution that followed, we read, "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them." Many believers were scattered because their lives in danger in Jerusalem. One of those who left Jerusalem was Philip and he went to the city of Samaria.

Here we see that in this city of Samaria the Lord chose to verify the message of Philip by performing many miracles. Although Samaria was near Jerusalem God chose to perform many miracles among the Samaritans just as he had done among the Jews. The result of the message being preached is recorded in Acts 9:31 where we read, "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied." We see that God multiplied churches in each of these areas.

The third time God performed many miracles is recorded in Acts 28:9 where we read, "So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed." Here we see that all of those with diseases on the island of Malta were healed as God verified the message of Paul as he shared the message of the death and resurrection of Christ with the people on that island. This means that God verified His message about Christ among the Jews, among the Samaritans (who were of mixed Jewish and Gentile background), and among those who were Gentiles on the island of Malta. Here we see that God verified the message of the apostles among both the Jews and the Gentiles as He began to build His church among the nations. We want to help our children understand how God worked in the early church by verifying the message of the death and resurrection among both Jews and Gentiles. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand that the Lord is the One who builds His church.

16.

The Church Faced New Persecution

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how God verified the message of the death and resurrection among both the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jewish religious leaders were not happy when they saw that many people were placing their faith in Christ. As a result, the religious leaders chose to try and stop the apostles and their ministry again. We will see that instead of stopping the apostles that they Lord gave the apostles boldness as they spoke about Christ.

In Acts 5:17-21 we read, “Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life." And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.” We saw in the previous topic that the Lord was doing many miracles through the hands of the apostles to verify the message of the resurrection of Christ. This made the high priest and all of those who were Sadducees very angry.

The Sadducees did not believe in miracles. They especially did not believe in the resurrection. Now they were seeing the apostles healing all that were sick with various diseases. They saw that Christ was using the apostles to cast out demons out of the lives of those who had been demon possessed. Peter and John had already told the high priest and the Sanhedrin that they were doing these miracles through the power of Christ whom the religious leaders had crucified and God had raised from the dead. The high priest and the Sadducees could not deny what was happening and so they became very angry.

Then the Sadducees seized the apostles, had them arrested and taken to the public jail. However, the Lord had a surprise for the high priest and the Sadducees. During the night the Lord sent an angel to open the doors of the jail. The angel also gave the apostles instructions about what the Lord wanted them to do. The angel said, “Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.” Christ said in John 10:10, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” Christ came to give people spiritual life. This was the message that the angel told the apostles to speak as they returned to the temple. Here we see a key lesson for our own lives. When we talk to people that are not Christians Christ has called us to share the message of His death and resurrection because that is the message that will give people spiritual life.

The apostles were obedient and early in the morning returned to the temple and began to teach the people again about the resurrection of Christ. Meanwhile the high priest called the Sanhedrin together to discuss what to do with the apostles. The Sanhedrin included the priests

and the elders who were the religious leaders of the Jews. Part of the men that made up the Sanhedrin were Sadducees and part of them were Pharisees. John 12:19 says, "The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!"” Before His death it was the Pharisees and scribes who led the opposition to Christ. This changed after the resurrection. Acts 4:1-2 says, “Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” After His resurrection it was the Sadducees who led the opposition because they hated the message of the resurrection. Once the men of the Sanhedrin were gathered, they sent the guards to the prison to bring the apostles before the Sanhedrin.

When the officers went to the prison to get the apostles they received a surprise. Acts 5:22-25 says, “But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!" Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"” The officers came to the prison and the guards were standing in front of the door into the prison. However, when they opened the door of the prison and went inside the apostles were not inside the prison.

The officers immediately returned to the Sanhedrin and told them what had happened. They said that the prison door was securely locked. They said that the guards were outside the door carefully guarding it so that no one could enter or leave the prison. Then the officers said that when they opened the door of the prison that they did not find anyone inside the prison. The apostles were all missing. When the high priest, the captain of the temple and the other leading priests heard this report, they were filled with confusion. They wondered what the final outcome of this would be. About that time someone came from the temple and told the men of the Sanhedrin that the apostles were back in the temple and were teaching the people again.

Here we see that the apostles were obedient to the words of Christ when His words were in conflict with the words of the Sanhedrin. Peter and John had told the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:19-20, “But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” They had said that it was impossible for them to keep quiet about the death and resurrection of Christ. We want to show our children by our example that it is also impossible for us to keep quiet about the death and resurrection of Christ. I Corinthians 15:1-6 tells us that this is our most important message.

We go on to read in Acts 5:26-28, “Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!"” We see that the captain of the temple then went with the officers to the temple to get the apostles and bring them to the place where the Sanhedrin was meeting. We also see that the captain and the officers went with great

fear. They were afraid that the people might choose to stone them when they arrested the apostles again. Here we see something that is often true. People without Christ will act out of fear because they are driven by the fear of people instead of being led by the love of Christ.

Once the apostles had been brought into the room and placed in front of the Sanhedrin, the high priest immediately began to question them. He said, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?" The high priest and all of the Sanhedrin had heard Peter and John say that it was more important for them to obey God than it was for them to obey men. They had heard them say that they could not keep quiet about the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. Here the high priest now asked them why they had not obeyed the Sanhedrin. In Acts 5:29 we see the answer of the apostles. That verse says, "But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'" We are to submit to our leaders when they do not command us to disobey God. However, when they command us to disobey God, we are to obey God and be ready to suffer the punishment of those men who are controlled by their own sin. That was the choice that the apostles had made.

The high priest also said that the apostles had filled Jerusalem with their teaching. We should have the same goal in the area where we are serving the Lord. We want all people to hear the good news of the death and resurrection of Christ. When Paul was in Ephesus Acts 19:10 says, "And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." Here we see that the goal of Paul was for all of the people in the Roman province of Asia to hear about the death and the resurrection of Christ. The leaders of the early church give us a good example for our own lives and the lives of our children. We should have the same desire that all would know about Christ and His death and resurrection.

Then the high priest told the apostles, "And (you) intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" Here we see that the high priest and the Sanhedrin were actually trying to cover their own sin. These same religious leaders as they stood before Pilate said in Matthew 27:25, "And all the people answered and said, 'His blood be on us and on our children.'" Now they were trying to blame the apostles when they had spoken the words themselves. The high priest and the other religious leaders did not want to admit that they were guilty of condemning Christ. Instead they tried to blame the apostles and say that the apostles were accusing them falsely. Sinful people never like to admit their sins.

The Lord showed clearly by bringing the apostles out of the prison that He was with them. Then He showed that they could trust Christ and speak boldly for Him even to those who had condemned Christ to death. We want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that the Lord will be with them and give them the words to speak when they face opposition. We help our children to understand that they do not need to fear opposition as we show them how to depend on Christ for strength. May the Lord richly bless you as you prepare your children for opposition and even persecution.

The Church Rejoiced in Persecution

In our last topic we saw the need to prepare our physical and spiritual children for opposition and even persecution. We saw that the Jewish religious leaders arrested the apostles for speaking about Christ. Christ showed the Jewish religious leaders that they were not in control by sending an angel to let the apostles out of prison so that they could go back to the temple and share with the people about the death and resurrection of Christ. The apostles were again taken back to the face the Jewish religious leaders. In our topic today we are going to see how the apostles answered the religious leaders.

In Acts 5:29-32 we read, “But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.” The Jewish religious leaders reminded the apostles that they had told them not to speak any more in the name of Jesus. Here we see the answer of Peter and the other apostles. Their answer was, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” This gives us an example of how to answer if anyone tries to stop us from speaking about the death and resurrection of Christ.

However, the apostles did not stop speaking after they had said that they ought to obey God. They continued speaking and again spoke about the death and resurrection of Jesus. The apostles said that God had raised Jesus from the dead after the religious leaders had murdered Him by hanging Him on the cross. I Corinthians 1:18 says, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Then I Corinthians 15:19-20 adds, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Those who reject Christ do not want to hear about the death and resurrection of Christ but that is the message that they need to hear in order to have life. Our desire is for them to receive that life.

The apostles also said that the Father had exalted Jesus. At that very moment Jesus was sitting at the right hand of the Father. The Father said that Christ is both a Prince and a Savior. The word translated “Prince” here means the author or originator of something. In fact the word is translated author in Hebrews 12:2 where we read, “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Jesus is the One who provided salvation and made our faith possible. Then in Hebrews 2:10 we read, “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” Here the word is translated captain and points out the fact that Jesus is the One who provided that salvation through His sufferings. That is why Christ is able to provide forgiveness of sins to all who repent.

The apostles said that they were witnesses of the death and resurrection of Christ. They also said that God has given the Holy Spirit as a witness to all those who obey Him. Romans 8:9 tells us, "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." Every Christian has the Holy Spirit dwelling in us as a witness of our salvation which we received as a result of our repentance and our faith in the death and resurrection of Christ.

When the Sanhedrin heard the words of the apostles they reacted with great anger. Acts 5:33-34 says, "When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them. Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while." Most of the Jewish religious leaders were ready to kill the apostles. However, a Pharisee by the name of Gamaliel spoke first. Gamaliel was a highly respected teacher of the Jewish law. As a result, the others on the Sanhedrin were willing to listen to him before they killed the apostles. Gamaliel told the officers to take the apostles outside while he spoke to the Jewish religious leaders.

Acts 5:35-40 tells us what Gamaliel said to the rest of the Jewish religious leaders. Those verses tell us, "And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it--lest you even be found to fight against God." Gamaliel told the religious leaders to think carefully before they killed anyone.

Then Gamaliel reminded the Sanhedrin of two other leaders that had arisen and gathered a group of followers around themselves. Theudas had claimed to be a leader who would set the Jews free from Roman control. He persuaded four hundred men to join him in his plan. However, he was killed and the men who had followed him were scattered. Later a man named Judas of Galilee became a leader during the time of the census. Luke 2:2 says, "This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria." This was the census which caused Mary and Joseph to go to Bethlehem so that they were in Bethlehem at the time of the birth of Jesus. Many people followed Judas. However, he was also killed and the people who followed him were scattered.

After giving these two illustrations Gamaliel told the Jewish religious leaders to leave the apostles alone. He told the Sanhedrin that if the apostles were depending on their own strength that their plans would come to nothing. Christ told the apostles the same thing the night before He was crucified. John 15:5 says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." Christ told the disciples that they would bear much fruit if they would abide in Him but their lives would produce nothing if they depended on themselves.

Gamaliel then warned the Sanhedrin that if the apostles were depending on God for their

strength that the Jewish religious leaders could do nothing to stop the apostles. Philippians 4:13 says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." We can do nothing in our own strength but Christ can give us His strength to do all things. Gamaliel knew that God would give the apostles strength if they were serving God. As a result, he also warned the other leaders that they could not stop the apostles if they were depending on God. In fact the religious leaders would be fighting against God if the apostles were receiving their strength from God.

The rest of the Sanhedrin listened to Gamaliel and had to agree that he was right. As a result, Acts 5:40-42 says, "And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." The Jewish religious leaders were willing to choose not to kill the apostles but they did give them each a beating and commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus any more.

The apostles had already said in Acts 5:29, "But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men." As a result, the religious leaders knew that their threats would not stop the apostles from speaking. However, the beatings did give the religious leaders a way to show their anger and try to use fear to silence the apostles. However, those beatings did not produce the result that the religious leaders wanted. We see that as the apostles left the Sanhedrin that they were filled with joy. They counted it a privilege to suffer shame for speaking boldly about Jesus. Here we see that we want to show our children by our example that it is a privilege to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. He died for us so it is a privilege to suffer for Him.

In addition, to rejoicing for the privilege to suffer for Christ, the apostles continued to tell the people about Christ. They spoke about Him daily in the temple when the crowds came for the times of prayer at the morning and the evening sacrifices. In addition, we see that they were sharing the message of the death and resurrection of Christ in every house. In Acts 2:46-47 we read, "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." Threats and a beating did not stop or even slow down the apostles. They continue to share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ just as they had done when the church first began.

We may face opposition and even persecution for sharing the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. However, we provide an example for our physical and spiritual children to follow as we continue to share that message. Our children will see from our example that the Lord will work in great ways through our lives as we are obedient to Him and others will be drawn to Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you provide your children with an example of the fact that it is a privilege to suffer for Christ.

18.

The Church Experienced the Importance of Priorities

In our last topic we saw that we want to prepare our physical and spiritual children for opposition and even persecution. We saw that when we are faithful to speak about the death and resurrection of Christ that there will certainly be those who will oppose us. We also saw that it is a privilege to suffer for Christ because He died for us. In our topic today we are going to see that the church continued to grow and it became necessary for the apostles to set priorities for their own lives. The apostles provide an example of how to show our children how to set priorities in their lives as well.

Acts 6:1 says, “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.” The Lord was doing some exciting things in the church and the number of the disciples was multiplying. It is possible that by this time the number of believers had grown to somewhere between 15,000 and 25,000 as the church had been in existence between six and seven years by the time we come to chapter six. The church began and 3,000 new believers were added on the Day of Pentecost. Then Acts 2:47 says that the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Acts 4:4 says that the number of men by that time was about 5,000. Since the word used here means to increase or multiply, we see that the church had continued to grow.

However, we also see that growth caused the church to face a problem. There arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists. The Hebrews were the Jews who lived in the land of Palestine including the areas of Judea and Galilee. The Hellenists were the Jews who were scattered in other parts of the world. They were called Hellenists because they had absorbed part of the Greek language and culture. These changes in language and culture caused the Jews living in Palestine to feel that the Greek speaking Jews were not being totally faithful to the Jewish culture.

The problem that the church faced was the fact that the Greek speaking Jews felt that their widows were being neglected when food was distributed to the widows. We see that the church had taken the responsibility to provide for the needy widows because the other Jews would not provide for the needs of the widows who were following Christ. The church felt that it was their responsibility to provide for the needs of these widows.

The word translated “complaint” means to be unhappy and grumble secretly. In Philippians 2:14-16 we read, “Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.” We live in a world where the world does a lot of complaining. However, the apostles realized that followers of Christ should be lights to the world and that would not happen if the believers were complaining.

As a result, Acts 6:2-4 says, "Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."'" The twelve recognized that there was a problem that needed to be solved or there would soon be conflict in the church. As a result, they realized that they needed to do two things. They needed to solve the problem and at the same time they needed to set priorities for themselves.

When the twelve had called together the followers of Christ, they explained the fact that they understood that there was a problem because of the complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists. At the same time the twelve also realized that they should not be the ones to try to solve the problem because God had a different ministry for them as the apostles of Christ. As a result, the twelve suggested a solution to the problem. They suggested that the believers look for seven men to meet the needs of widows that were Hellenists. The word translated "business" is used 49 times in the New Testament and it is almost always translated need. Acts 2:44-45 says, "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need." Here we see that the early church shared what they had to meet the physical needs of others. The twelve suggested that Jews that were Hellenists would be the ones who would be most effective at recognizing and meeting the needs of those widows that were Hellenists.

We see that the twelve gave three basic qualifications for the men who would carry out this ministry to the widows. First, they were to be men of good reputation. The word translated "of good reputation" means to give witness or testimony and is usually translated by one of those words. Here we see that the seven men were to have a good testimony among the other believers. Second, they were to be men that were full of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:16 says, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Men who were walking in the Spirit would not be tempted to misuse their ministry for self gain. Third, they were to be men that were full of wisdom. These were to be men that walked in godly wisdom like the wisdom described in James 3:17. That verse says, "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." Men with godly wisdom would serve without partiality.

The twelve said that they would devote their lives to two things: prayer and the ministry of the Word. Here we see that the twelve recognized the things that were their two highest priorities. First, they were to devote themselves to prayer. The word translated "devote" means to continue to do something constantly. In the New Testament it is used most often to talk about faithful prayer. Acts 1:14 says, "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." Colossians 4:2 says, "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving." The greatest weakness in many churches today is a lack of continuing in prayer by the leaders. Second, they were to devote themselves to the ministry of the Word. Acts 2:42 says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." Effective church leaders understand these key priorities and devote their lives to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

Acts 6:5-7 goes on to say, “And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.” The seven men that were chosen all had Greek names so they all may have been Greek speaking Jews except Nicolas. We read that he was a proselyte from Antioch. A proselyte was a Gentile who accepted the Old Testament teaching about God and followed the Jewish law. Those who received circumcision were called proselytes of righteousness and they promised to keep the whole Mosaic Law.

Once the people had chosen the seven we see that the seven came and stood in front of the apostles. Then the apostles prayed and laid their hands on them. Later Acts 13:3 says, “Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.” In both passages we see that the laying on of hands was a way that the leaders showed their recognition that God had called these individuals to this particular ministry and that they had the support and encouragement of the rest of the leaders.

We see that the recognition of additional leaders in the church brought blessing to the church in three ways. First, we see that it made it possible for the Word of God to be able to continue to spread to more people. Second, we see that the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. This caused the opposition to grow even stronger against the church and led to more persecution. In fact the persecution became so great that many of the Christians were forced to flee from Jerusalem. However, that only spread the Gospel further. Acts 8:4 says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” As a result, Acts 9:31 says, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” Persecution did not stop the church but instead caused churches to multiply throughout the region.

Third, we see that a great number of priests were obedient to the faith. During the time of the New Testament it is estimated that there were about 22,000 Jewish priests. These were the men who were the descendents of Aaron. The priests were scattered throughout the land and would come to serve in the temple for about two weeks at a time. Here we see that many of these priests were placing their faith in Christ because they recognized that He was the Promised One that had been promised in the Old Testament. As we will see in future topics, this only stirred up the anger of the chief priests.

However, we see that the fact that the church chose more leaders caused the church to experience blessing in three ways. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the way that the Lord used the new leaders to bless the early church. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand the importance of priorities.

19.

The Lord Worked Through New Leadership

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to develop priorities in their lives. We saw that the apostles realized that their two most important priorities were prayer and the ministry of the Word of God. Those are the two most important priorities of any godly leader. As a result, we saw that the Twelve delegated the responsibility for distributing the food to the Hellenistic widows to seven men who all had Greek names. We also saw that the church grew as a result of selecting additional leaders. In the next few topics we will see how the Lord worked through these new leaders as they did much more than just care for the widows.

Acts 6:8-10 says, “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.” In Acts 6:4 we see that Stephen is described as, “A man full of faith and the Holy Spirit.” Here we are reminded that He was a man full of faith. We also see that He was full of power because of the fact that He was depending on the power of the Holy Spirit and not his own strength.

The Holy Spirit gave Stephen power to do great wonders and signs among the people. In Acts 5:12 we read, “And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.” This verse shows that the Holy Spirit gave the apostles power to do many signs and wonders among the people. Here and then in Acts 8 we see that at least two of these seven new leaders who were Greek speaking Jews were also given power to do wonders and signs. In this chapter we read about Stephen being given the power to do these signs and wonders. In Acts 8 it will be Philip who does signs and wonders through the Holy Spirit.

The fact that Stephen was a Greek speaking Jew caused the Jews from the Synagogue of the Freedmen to dispute with Stephen. The word translated “disputed” means to examine by formal discussion or debate. Here we see that the men in this synagogue were trying to examine the teaching of Stephen with questions. Later Saul (Paul) would come back to this same synagogue to discuss the teaching about the death and resurrection of Christ with these same men. Acts 9:29 says, “And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.” The Synagogue of the Freedmen was a synagogue where Greek speaking Jews gathered together to worship God but they rejected the message of the resurrection of Christ.

At this point in time Saul was one of the men that attended the Synagogue of the Freedmen as we see in Acts 7:57-58, “Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” However, we see that even with someone like Saul in the synagogue that the men of the synagogue could not resist the wisdom

and the Spirit by which Stephen spoke. I Corinthians 2:13-14 says, "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Stephen depended on the wisdom that the Holy Spirit gives and the men could not resist that wisdom.

Since the men of the Synagogue of the Freedmen could not resist the wisdom and Spirit by which Stephen spoke, they chose to try and get rid of Stephen. Acts 6:11-12 says, "Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council." The word translated "secretly induced" means to instruct a person privately to give false witness in a trial or to commit a crime. Here we see that they instructed several men to give false witness and accuse Stephen of blasphemy.

These false witnesses agreed to say that they had heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses (the Old Testament law) and against God. We see that Jezebel had used this same method many hundreds of years earlier to get Naboth stoned to death. I Kings 21:10-13 describes the false charge that Jezebel told the elders of the city of Jezreel to make against Naboth. Those verses say, "And seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, "You have blasphemed God and the king." Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die. So the men of his city, the elders and nobles who were inhabitants of his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them, as it was written in the letters which she had sent to them. They proclaimed a fast, and seated Naboth with high honor among the people. And two men, scoundrels, came in and sat before him; and the scoundrels witnessed against him, against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth has blasphemed God and the king!" Then they took him outside the city and stoned him with stones, so that he died." Here we see that the men from the Synagogue of the Freedmen decided to do a similar thing.

In order to carry out their plan these false witnesses were told to stir up the people, the elders and the scribes by making these false charges. Then the people came and seized Stephen and brought him to the council (the Sanhedrin). This was a very serious charge because Leviticus 24:16 says, "And whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall be put to death." Here we see that the men of the Synagogue of the Freedmen were so angry with the wisdom of Stephen that they were willing to make false charges against him in order to give them permission to stone him to death.

The Council or Sanhedrin could not answer the words of Peter when the man who was born crippled had been healed. They had no evidence to condemn the apostles the second time they were brought before the Sanhedrin and so all they were able to do was to give them a beating. However, now the Jewish religious leaders had to be concerned about more than just the apostles who had been with Christ. Now they were even more upset because these were Greek speaking Jews that had not known Christ. Instead these Jews had become followers of Christ because of the preaching of the early church.

As a result, the Jews from the Synagogue of the Freedmen decided that the only way to stop Stephen was to use false witnesses as the religious leaders had done at the trial of Christ. Matthew 26:59-61 says, "Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward and said, "This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" We see that those who are in total rebellion against Christ are willing to do anything to try and stop the preaching about Christ.

The false witnesses said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." Here we see that these false charges are similar to the charges made against Christ. They accused Stephen of continually speaking blasphemous words against the temple. The words that Christ had actually spoken and which had probably been repeated by many Christians are given for us in John 2:19-21 where we read, "Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body." Here we see that Christ was actually predicting His death. Peter explained that those who are not Christians twisted the words of Paul to their own destruction. II Peter 3:16 says, "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." The religious leaders of the Jews also twisted the words of Christ.

The false witnesses accused Stephen by saying that he taught that Jesus would change the customs that Moses had delivered to them. Matthew 5:17-18 records the words that Christ actually spoke when those verses say, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled." Here we see that the words of these false witnesses actually showed that they lacked spiritual understanding.

As the Sanhedrin watched Stephen while the false witnesses were speaking against Stephen, they were forced to see the face of Stephen. They saw that his face was as the face of an angel. The faces of the angels reflect the glory of the Lord. II Corinthians 3:18 says, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." Here we see that it is possible for any Christian to reflect the glory of the Lord as we are being transformed into the image of Christ. One of the key things that we want to do is help our physical and spiritual children become transformed into the image of Christ so that their lives will also reflect the glory of the Lord. One of the things that has a great impact on the world is the presence and peace of Christ reflected in our appearance. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to reflect the glory of Christ.

Stephen Reviewed the Rebellion of Joseph's Brothers

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how the Lord had developed new leadership in the early church. We saw that we want to help our children learn to reflect the glory of the Lord. That will only happen as they are being transformed into the image of Christ. We also saw that Stephen was falsely accused and brought before the Sanhedrin. In our topic today and the next five topics we will see how to help our children learn to understand and then apply lessons to their own lives from the answer of Stephen to the Sanhedrin.

In Acts 7:1-4 we read, "Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?" And he said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell." The accusation that had been made against Stephen in Acts 6:13-14 says, "They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." Stephen did not immediately answer the question of the high priest. Instead he began to give a review of the history of the nation of Israel. In this review Stephen was going to show a history of the rebellion of Israel against God and show that the Jewish leaders were also in rebellion against God.

Stephen began by calling the Sanhedrin brethren and fathers. Since the accusers of Stephen were from the Synagogue of the Freedmen, he considered them as brothers in the family of Greek speaking Jews. The men of the Sanhedrin were the spiritual leaders of the Jews and so they were considered fathers. Here we see that Stephen shows great respect for these men even though he was being falsely accused. We want to help our children learn to show respect even to those who accuse them falsely.

This review of the history of Israel began with the call of God to Abraham to leave his nation and go to a new land to form a new nation. Genesis 15:7 says, "Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." This call had come to Abraham when he was still in Mesopotamia which Abraham was still on the other side of the river. Joshua 24:2-3 says, "And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.'" This call had come to Abraham when his family worshiped idols.

Abraham had made this trip to the land of Canaan in two stages. Genesis 11:31 says, “ And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there.” Abraham stayed in Haran until the death of his father and then he completed the move to the land of Canaan.

Acts 7:5-7 goes on to say, “And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them four hundred years. 'And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.’” Abraham had no land in Canaan and even had to buy a piece of property as a place to bury Sarah when she died. Genesis 23:7-9 says, “Then Abraham stood up and bowed himself to the people of the land, the sons of Heth. And he spoke with them, saying, "If it is your wish that I bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and meet with Ephron the son of Zohar for me, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he has, which is at the end of his field. Let him give it to me at the full price, as property for a burial place among you.”” Abraham bought that burial place for 400 shekels of silver.

Later God told Abraham that his descendants would be in a foreign land for 400 years. This happened at the time that God made a blood covenant with Abraham. Genesis 15:13-14 says, “Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.” Israel did suffer for many years in the land of Egypt. This suffering really began when there arose a king that did not know how Joseph had saved the land of Egypt from starvation. Acts 7:18-19 says, “Till another king arose who did not know Joseph. This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.” However, we will see that God used Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt.

God also promised Abraham that He would judge the nation of Egypt for the way that they made the people of Israel suffer. In Exodus 10:7 the servants of Pharaoh told Pharaoh, “Then Pharaoh's servants said to him, "How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?”” Later Exodus 14:30-31 says, “So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses.” In these verses we see that God first judged the land of Egypt and then He judged Pharaoh and his army.

God later promised Moses that the people would worship the Lord in the place where God had called him. God had told Moses in Exodus 3:12, “So He said, "I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”” Later Moses saw God carry out that promise as well.

Acts 7:8-10 goes on to say, "Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs. "And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house." Here we see how God kept His promises to Abraham. Isaac had not been born when God made this promise to Abraham that Canaan would be the possessions of his descendants forever.

When Abraham was 99 years old God gave Him the promise that Isaac would be born to fulfill this promise. Genesis 17:8-10 says, "Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised." The Jews were reminded of the promise of God to give them the land every time circumcised their sons. God did not want them to forget His promise to them.

Two generations later Jacob had twelve sons. The older ten sons all became envious when they saw that Jacob favored Joseph and gave him a coat of many colors. As a result, the brothers sold Joseph to some Midianites and Ishmaelites who in turn sold him as a slave in Egypt. Genesis 39:1 says, "Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there." However, God was with Joseph in Egypt and protected him even when he was falsely accused.

God worked through the man in charge of the prison to give Joseph the opportunity to learn how to lead others. Then the Lord worked to bring Joseph out of prison. God gave Joseph the ability to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh. Joseph also gave Pharaoh advice about how to prepare for the coming famine. Pharaoh replied in Genesis 41:38-41, "And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you." And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." We see that God had a very different plan for Joseph than the plan of his rebellious brothers.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn that God will also work through difficult circumstances in their lives to prepare and equip them for the ministry that the Lord has for them. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand how the Lord works to carry out His will in spite of the rebellion of others.

21.

Stephen Reviewed the History of Israel in Egypt

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how Stephen showed that God worked in the life of Joseph even when his rebellious brothers sold him into Egypt. We saw that God carried out His plan in spite of the envy and rebellion of those brothers. In the same way we want to help our children learn that God will work through the difficult circumstances in their lives. In our topic today we are going to see how God continued to work.

In Acts 7:11-13 we read, “Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh.” Joseph had told Pharaoh what to do to prepare for this famine. Pharaoh had recognized that the Spirit of God was with Joseph and that there was no one in the entire land of Egypt that had the wisdom that God had given to Joseph. Pharaoh then appointed Joseph to prepare for the coming famine.

As a result, Joseph had been gathering grain for seven years to help prepare Egypt for the famine. There was so much grain stored at the end of the seven years that it was impossible to give the amount stored. Genesis 41:56-57 tell the condition of Egypt and the surrounding countries once the famine began. Those verses say, “The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt. So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands.” Both people from Egypt and people from other countries began to come to buy food from Joseph because of the famine.

Jacob and his family were also experiencing the famine in the land of Canaan. As a result, Genesis 42:1-3 says, “When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?” And he said, “Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die.” So Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt.” Here we see that the very brothers who had sold Joseph as a slave were now going down to Egypt to buy food in order to survive.

On their first trip to Egypt they did not realize that they were talking to Joseph. Then on the second trip Joseph revealed to his brothers who he was. Genesis 45:3-5 says, “Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph; does my father still live?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come near to me.” So they came near. Then he said: “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.” Here we see that Joseph explained to his brothers that God had sent him to Egypt to preserve the lives of many people. Here we see that Joseph understood that God had worked to carry out the will of God even though the brothers had sold Joseph as a slave because of their envy and hatred.

Pharaoh heard that the brothers of Joseph had come. Genesis 45:16-18 says, "Now the report of it was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, 'Joseph's brothers have come.'" So it pleased Pharaoh and his servants well. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: Load your animals and depart; go to the land of Canaan. Bring your father and your households and come to me; I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land.'" Joseph followed the instructions of Pharaoh and sent his brothers back to bring his father and the rest of their families.

Acts 7:14-16 says, "Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people. So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem." When the entire family arrived in Egypt, Joseph had the opportunity to introduce his family to Pharaoh. Genesis 47:1-2 says, "Then Joseph went and told Pharaoh, and said, 'My father and my brothers, their flocks and their herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; and indeed they are in the land of Goshen.'" And he took five men from among his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh." A short time later Joseph presented Jacob to Pharaoh. Genesis 47:7 says, "Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob and set him before Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh." In this way the family of Jacob began their 400 year period in the land of Egypt.

Seventeen years later Jacob came to the time of his death and gave instructions to his sons to bury him back in the land of Canaan. Genesis 49:29-30 says, "Then he charged them and said to them: 'I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place.'" Joseph followed the instructions of their father regarding his burial.

After his father died, Joseph told Pharaoh in Genesis 50:5-6, "My father made me swear, saying, 'Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.'" Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come back." And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear.'" A large group of people traveled with Joseph and his brothers back to the land of Canaan. Then Genesis 50:13 says, "For his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as property for a burial place." Joseph and his brothers returned to the land of Egypt and Joseph continued to serve Pharaoh for many years.

Later Joseph also died. However, he believed the promises of God and looked forward to the day when God would carry out His promise to bring the people of Israel back to the land of Canaan. The last recorded words of Joseph are found in Genesis 50:25 where we read, "Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.'" Here we see that Joseph had such a great faith that God would carry out His promise to Abraham that he asked to have his bones taken back to the land that God had promised to Abraham.

Joseph had an impact on the land of Egypt for many years. However, through the years he was gradually forgotten. Acts 7:17-19 says, "But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph. This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live." God had told Abraham that his descendents would be in Egypt for four hundred years. As a result, Moses was born more than three hundred years after Jacob and his family came into Egypt.

The time mentioned here when God prepared to fulfill the promise that had been made to Abraham was over three hundred years later. During this three hundred year period the descendents of Jacob multiplied greatly. In fact in Exodus 1:8-10 we read, "Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, "Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land." Here we have a description of the fear of the king that did not know Joseph.

This ruler became fearful of the people of Israel because God had greatly blessed the descendents of Abraham. The new king felt that there were more people of Israel than there were of his people. He felt that the people of Israel were stronger than the people of Egypt. Here we see that his thoughts were controlled by fear. He suggested to his leaders that they develop a plan to keep the people of Israel from continuing to multiply. His fear caused him to realize that in the event of war that Israel would fight with the enemies against the people of Egypt. He was afraid that Israel would use such an opportunity as an excuse to fight against Egypt and to leave the land of Egypt.

As a result, the king of Egypt devised a plan to try and control the multiplication of the people of Israel. His plan was to kill the male children of Israel. In Exodus 1:16 he commanded the Hebrew midwives, "And he said, "When you do the duties of a midwife for the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstools, if it is a son, then you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." The Hebrew midwives did not obey the king. Then the king told the Egyptians in Exodus 1:22, "So Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive." Here we see that the Egyptians were commanded to throw every male child of the people of Israel into the river. As Stephen spoke to the leaders of Israel, he showed in these verses the rebellion of the king of Egypt. We want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that when people become controlled by fear that their fear will cause them to try to hurt and destroy others. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand the impact of fear.

Stephen Reviewed the Rejection of Moses by Israel

In our last topic we saw that Stephen was speaking to the Jewish religious leaders and gave them a review of the fear of the king of Egypt when the people of Israel were in the land of Egypt. He showed how the fear of the king caused him to try and destroy the people of Israel by killing all of the male children. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the tremendous impact that fear has on the life of any person. In our topic today we will see that Moses tried to set Israel free by his own efforts. Then we will see how God called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt.

In Acts 7:20-22 we read, “At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months. But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.” Moses was born at the very time that the king of Egypt had commanded his people to kill all of the male children of Israel. We see that Moses was described as one who was well pleasing to the Lord.

When his parents could no longer hide Moses, Exodus 2:3-4 says, “But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river's bank. And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him.” The one who found Moses in this ark of bulrushes was the daughter of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt that had ordered the death of all of the male children of Israel.

God caused the daughter to have compassion on the baby and she raised him as her own son. As a result, Moses received the best education that Egypt had to offer in that day. We read that he was learned in all of the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was also mighty in words and deeds. He received this training for forty years. As a result, he understood man's ways but he had no understanding of God's ways.

As a result of his understanding of man's ways, Acts 7:23-25 says, “Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand.” When Moses was forty years old he decided to see what was happening to the people of Israel. He saw an Israelite mistreated by an Egyptian. As a result, Moses used man's way to deal with this mistreatment. Exodus 2:12 says, “So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” Here we see that Moses became a murderer in his efforts to defend the people of Israel. Moses thought that the people of Israel would understand that God was going to use Moses to deliver the people of Israel from the king of Egypt. However, the people of Israel did not understand. We want to help our children understand that man's ways will never solve the problems of the world.

This lack of understanding was shown the very next day. Acts 7:26-28 says, “And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?’” Here we see that Moses found two men who were both from Israel fighting with each other. He wanted to help them have peace with one another. The word translated “reconcile them” is almost always translated peace and speaks about peace between individuals or nations.

Moses tried to bring peace between the two men of Israel by asking them why they were doing wrong to one another. The one who had started the fight immediately reacted to the words of Moses. He said, “Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?’” Moses could not bring peace between others because he had not acted with peace the previous day. In fact he had killed a man. Since Moses had used man’s way to try to solve the problem, he was unable to bring peace between the two men of Israel. In fact the people of Israel as a whole rejected the leadership of Moses and did not recognize him as a ruler or a judge.

Acts 7:29-33 says, “Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons. And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, saying, 'I am the God of your fathers--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and dared not look. 'Then the Lord said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’” Moses had tried to solve problems his way and it did not work. As a result, he was forced to flee to the land of Midian which was out in the desert. There he gave birth to two sons.

For the first forty years of his life, Moses lived in the palace of the ruler of Egypt and learned to solve problems in man’s way. He found out that man’s way does not solve problems. Then for forty years Moses was taught out in the desert how to trust God instead of himself. After forty years in the desert, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses near Mount Sinai. The “Angel of the Lord” is the common name for Christ when He appears in the Old Testament. Moses had to learn to depend on Christ instead of himself before he could effectively lead the people of Israel out of Egypt.

We see that Christ appeared to Moses as a flame of fire in a bush. Although the bush was on fire, the bush was not burned. Moses was amazed when he saw that the bush did not burn even though it was on fire. To try and understand what was happening Moses went close to the bush. Then the Lord spoke to Moses and said, “I am the God of your fathers--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Here we see that the voice speaking from the fire said that He was the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. When Christ told Moses to go and speak to Pharaoh, Moses asked who he should say sent him. Exodus 3:14 says, “And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.’” As we see “I AM” is a name that is frequently used of Christ in the book of John.

As Moses heard the voice he was filled with fear and was afraid to look. Then Christ said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." First, Moses had to learn to be obedient to Christ. It is only when we serve the Lord in the strength of Christ and serve Him in God's way instead of man's way that we will be effective in our ministry for the Lord. Second, Moses had to learn that the place where he met Christ was holy ground. It was just a small piece of the desert just like the rest of the desert. However, it was the place where he met Christ and became obedient to Him. The same is true in our lives. When we meet Christ and become obedient to Him we have been on holy ground. As we are obedient to Him we will do what God calls us to do in God's way instead of man's way. Moses failed in his first effort to try and free Israel because he depended on his own way. This time God would accomplish His purpose through Moses because Moses was learning to do God's work in God's way.

Acts 7:34-36 goes on to say, "I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt." ' ' This Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years." God had both seen and heard when His people were experiencing in Egypt. He was now going to deliver them and He had chosen to deliver them through Moses.

The people of Israel had chosen to reject the leadership of Moses. Now after forty years in the desert learning that he must depend on Christ, the Lord sent Moses back to Egypt to deliver the people of Israel. We will see that the people continued to rebel against the Lord throughout the time that they were in the desert. However, this time the Lord could use Moses to carry out His purpose. Moses did bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt. This only happened after God judged the land of Egypt and the king of Egypt. The servants of Pharaoh said in Exodus 10:7, "Then Pharaoh's servants said to him, "How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?"'" Pharaoh would not listen even though his land had been destroyed.

Then God had to judge Pharaoh. This happened at the Red Sea. Exodus 14:27 says, "And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea." Israel rejected the leadership of Moses. The Lord did judge Egypt. Next Stephen will show that God also had to judge Israel because of their personal rebellion. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that God must always judge rebellion against Him. He will judge our rebellion just as He judged the rebellion of Egypt and Israel. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand the consequences of rebellion.

Stephen Reviewed the Further Rebellion of Israel

We saw in our last topic that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the consequences of rebellion against God. We saw that God judged the land of Egypt and the king of Egypt for rebellion against God. However, Israel was also guilty of rebellion against God. In our topic today we will see how to help our children understand how God judged the rebellion of the people of Israel as they traveled through the desert on their way from the land of Egypt to the land of Canaan.

God used Stephen to show the Jewish Sanhedrin that the people of Israel had rebelled against the Lord and reject His leadership throughout the time that they were in the desert. Acts 7:37-41 says, “‘This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.' This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, 'Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.’” Here we see that Stephen showed both the past rebellion of Israel and the rebellion of Israel at the time of Stephen.

In these verses Stephen quoted a statement from Moses given in Deuteronomy 18:15. That verse says, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.” This statement by Moses in Deuteronomy was actually a prophecy about Christ. Then Deuteronomy 18:19 says, “And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.” Through Moses God had given a promise that any person who rejected Christ would be judged by God. Now Stephen was speaking to the very men who had rejected Christ, condemned Him to death and then sent Him to Pilate to carry out their death sentence. His warning was a warning that they would be judged for sin.

The Lord had spoken through Moses to the people in the desert. Exodus 19:3-6 says, “And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.'” Moses told the people what God had said and the people answered in Exodus 19:8b, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” Stephen said that the Prophet mentioned in Deuteronomy is also the Angel who spoke on the mountain and gave Moses the Ten Commandments.

Even though the people of Israel said that they would obey God, they rebelled against God in

less than forty days. Moses went back up on Mount Sinai to receive the living oracles (the Ten Commandments given to Moses by Christ). Meanwhile the people were rejecting God in their hearts instead of obeying Him. In their hearts they turned back to the idols of Egypt. The people said to Aaron in Exodus 32:1 and repeated by Aaron in Exodus 32:23, “Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” Both the people of Egypt and the people of Canaan worshiped the calf at that time so Aaron made them a golden calf. Then the people “Offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.” Here we see that the people of Israel had accepted the idols of Egypt.

God knew the hearts of the people of Israel. Stephen said in Acts 7:42-43, “Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: ‘Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, images which you made to worship; and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.’” Stephen also said that Israel chose to worship the sun, moon and stars. To verify his words, Stephen quoted the statement above from Amos 5:25-27. Stephen said that the people of Israel had practiced false worship from the time that they were in the wilderness until the time that they were taken to the land of Babylon.

Although the people of Israel offered sacrifices for the forty years that they were in the desert, most of the people were not offering those sacrifices to God. Instead they were offering their sacrifices to their idol and later to the sun, moon and stars. This false worship was happening even though Acts 7:44-46 says, “Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob.” Here we are reminded that throughout their time in the wilderness that the people of Israel had a visible reminder of the presence of God with them as they traveled through the desert.

While Moses was on Mount Sinai, God gave him the instructions for the building of the tabernacle. Before God gave Moses very complete instructions for the tabernacle, God said in Exodus 25:8-9, “And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.” Moses was told to make everything in the tabernacle according to the exact pattern that God had shown him. This was due to the fact that the various things in the tabernacle all pointed forward to Christ. As a result, God reminded Moses in Exodus 25:40, “And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.” God had even prepared gifted men to design everything in the tabernacle so that it was according to the pattern.

This tabernacle was a visible reminder to Israel throughout their forty years in the desert. Exodus 40:38 says, “For the cloud of the Lord was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.” The fact that Stephen talked about this tabernacle did two things. First, it showed the high respect that

Stephen had for the tabernacle and later for the temple. That was important because the false accusations against Stephen said that he had blasphemed both the temple and the law. Here he showed that He had a high respect for the tabernacle and temple. Second, he showed the Jewish religious leaders that the people had been in rebellion against God and His law throughout the time that they were in the wilderness. That will be of great importance in our next topic because Stephen said in Acts 7:51, “You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.” Here we see that Stephen showed the present rebellion of the Jewish religious leaders against the Father, against the Holy Spirit and against Christ.

David wanted to build the temple to replace the tabernacle but God said that he could not because he was a man of war. However, God told David that Solomon would build the temple. Acts 7:47-50 says, “But Solomon built Him a house. However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: 'Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the Lord, or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?’” Solomon recognized that the temple could not contain God just as the earlier tabernacle could not contain God. In his prayer in I Kings 8:27 Solomon had said, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!” Stephen said the Jewish leaders had blasphemed God by saying he had blasphemed the temple instead of accusing him of blaspheming God. By saying this he pointed to their guilt.

Then Stephen quoted from Isaiah 66:1-2 which says, “Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist," Says the Lord. "But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.” Stephen did not quote the last sentence of verse two because the Jewish religious leaders certainly did not have a poor and contrite spirit. They did not tremble at the Word of the Lord.

The charge against Stephen in Acts 6:13 was that he spoke blasphemous words against the holy place (temple) and the law. The question of the high priest in Acts 7:1 asked Stephen whether these two charges were true. Stephen showed that He had a very high respect for the temple. He showed that he was obedient to the Word of God. However, at the same time he also showed that throughout their history as a nation the most of the Jews had not followed God in their hearts. As a result, they had blasphemed God.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand clearly the way that Stephen answered the Jewish religious leaders in this chapter. Stephen did give the evidence that proved that he was innocent of the charges that had been made against him. At the same time Stephen also made it clear that the nation of Israel had been in rebellion against God throughout their history. The religious leaders must now choose whether they were going to rebel against God or come to Him through Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn how to explain the choice people face.

Stephen Was Stoned to Death

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children clearly understand how to explain to others the choices that they face in their lives. Stephen showed the religious leaders that throughout their history most of the Jews had been in rebellion against God. He showed the religious leaders that they must now choose whether to continue to rebel against God or to come to the One that God had provided to pay for their sin. In our topic today we will see that the religious leaders made the choice that day to reject Christ and stoned Stephen to death.

After showing the religious leaders the pattern of rebellion that had been shown by most of the Jews, Stephen said in Acts 7:51-53, "You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it." Stephen knew that he was speaking to the men that had condemned Christ to death. As a result, he now pointed out their spiritual condition.

The word translated "stiffnecked" means stubborn or obstinate. God had used this word to describe Israel in the wilderness. God told Moses in Exodus 32:8-9, "They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' " And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people!" Stephen now used this same word for the religious leaders that had condemned Christ. Stephen also said that they were uncircumcised in their heart and ears. Although the religious leaders were physically circumcised, in their hearts and with their ears they were rejecting God and His Word and were separated from God.

Stephen went on to say that just like their fathers in the Old Testament these religious leaders were resisting the Holy Spirit. He said that their fathers had persecuted the Old Testament prophets who had spoken of the fact that the Just One would come. Then Stephen identified the Just One as Christ, the One that these very religious leaders had betrayed and murdered. As they stood before Pilate and condemned Christ, these very religious leaders had said in Matthew 27:25, "And all the people answered and said, 'His blood be on us and on our children.'"

Stephen showed here that the religious leaders were guilty of blasphemy against God and not just blasphemy against the temple.

Then Stephen reminded them that Moses had given them the law more than 1400 years earlier through angels. Galatians 3:19 tells us that the angels were involved in the giving of the law since that verse says, "What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator." However, the Jewish religious leaders had not kept that law. The word translated "kept" means to guard or observe. Here we see that Stephen now

tells the Jewish religious leaders that they are the ones who are guilty of blaspheming the law because they have not kept the law.

We see the response of the Jewish religious leaders in Acts 7:54-56 which says, "When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" The word translated "cut" means to mean to cut with a saw or to divide into two with a saw. The only other place that this word is used in the New Testament is in Acts 5:33 where the apostles were speaking to these same religious leaders. That verse says, "When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them." In this verse it is translated furious.

The fact that the religious leaders were cut to the heart in both passages shows that the Holy Spirit was convicting them of their sin of condemning Christ to death. Since this is the second time that this had happened, this left these religious leaders with only two choices. They could either repent or rebel. They chose to rebel. In fact they were so angry that they ground their teeth together in anger. At the same time that these religious leaders were filled with anger, Stephen was filled with peace.

Stephen was also filled with the Holy Spirit. He was so full of peace that he was able to gaze right into heaven and see the glory of God. The word translated "gaze" means to fix your eyes on something. This same word was used to describe the disciples in Acts 1:10-11 where we read, "And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." The disciples gazed toward the heavens as they watched Christ taken up from the death. Here we see that Stephen had the opportunity to gaze right into heaven.

As Stephen gazed into heaven he said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" Normally we are told that Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. An illustration is Colossians 3:1 which says, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Here we see that Christ is standing at the right hand of God. People stand to show great respect to others. Here we see that Christ is standing to show His great respect for Stephen because He spoke so boldly to the men who had condemned Christ to death. Christ was preparing to welcome Stephen to his eternal home in heaven.

In contrast to the peace and joy that Stephen felt as He saw Christ and the glory of God, the Jewish religious leaders could no longer control their anger. Acts 7:57-60 says, "Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep." The word translated

“they cried out” is used most commonly in Acts when people are crying out in anger against the Christians. They also pressed their ears so that they would not hear anything else that Stephen said.

Suddenly their anger caused them to all begin to run toward Stephen. They dragged him out of the city and began throwing stones at him in order to kill him. Leviticus 24:16 says, “And whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall be put to death.” However, this was not the innocent stoning the guilty. Instead this was the guilty stoning the innocent.

Meanwhile we are also introduced to Saul as the one who held the coats while the others stoned Stephen. The fact that he held the coats is an indication Saul was deeply involved in the murder of Stephen. That is why Paul wrote in I Timothy 1:12-13, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” Here we see that at least one of the men involved in the murder of Stephen later had a great ministry for Christ. Christ is certainly able to transform any life.

As Stephen was being stoned, Stephen prayed and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” We see that Stephen still had great peace even as he was being stoned. However, Saul could not enjoy a similar peace. His anger and hatred caused him to try and prove that Christ cannot give such peace. Acts 8:3 says, “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” We see that Saul definitely became the leader of the opposition and persecution of the followers of Christ.

We also see that Stephen made one more statement before his death. Stephen knelt down on the ground. Then he cried with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” Here we see that the last thing that Stephen did before he entered the presence of the Lord was to pray for those who were stoning him to death. He followed the example that Christ had given as He was hanging on the cross. Luke 23:34 says, “Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” And they divided His garments and cast lots.” Just as Christ asked the Father to forgive those who put Him to death, Stephen also asked the Lord to forgive those who were putting him to death. He showed the love of Christ at the very moment that he was dying. Then we read that he fell asleep. This is a common way that the death of Christians is described.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to show the same kind of love to any who would persecute them or make them suffer for their faith in Christ. Such love is a powerful example of the power of Christ to change and transform our lives. We will only help our children to understand such love as they see us practice that kind of love in our own lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to show the love of Christ in their daily lives.

The Church Went Everywhere Preaching the Word

In our last topic we see that Stephen became the first follower of Christ to die for his faith. We saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children how to show the same love that Stephen showed to others. In our topic today we are going to see that Saul became the leader of those who began to persecute the followers of Christ in an effort to try and stop the message of the death and resurrection of Christ.

The death of Stephen had a great impact both on the church and on the Jewish religious leaders. Acts 8:1-3 says, "Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison." We see that Saul had a large influence on the changes that happened among the Jewish religious leaders. Saul also helped cause some of the changes that happened in the church.

Saul had held the coats of those who stoned Stephen to death. The word translated "consenting" means to be pleased with or to be in hearty agreement. Many years later as Saul (Paul) made his defense before the Jews in Jerusalem, he said in Acts 22:19-21, "So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'" Saul told the crowd which included some of his former companions in that persecution that he had been in hearty agreement with the death of Stephen until Christ transformed His life.

Saul also helped cause some of the changes that happened to the church because he became the leader of the great persecution that arose against the church at Jerusalem. This caused many of the followers of Christ to flee from the city of Jerusalem. These followers were scattered throughout the region to different places in Judea and Samaria and as we will see in the future to points even further away. Acts 11:19-20 says, "Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus." We see that this persecution had a particular impact on the Hellenistic (Greek speaking) Jews because Saul was a Hellenistic Jew who had grown up in the city of Tarsus where he had a strong Greek influence. This is probably why it was possible for the apostles to remain in the city of Jerusalem at this time.

On the day that Stephen was stoned to death, we see that devout men carried Saul to the place where he was buried. The word translated "devout" means those who reverence God. Acts 2:5 says, "And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under

heaven.” Many devout Jews that had a great reverence for God were from other countries. These devout Jews were in Jerusalem and heard about the wonderful works of God on the Day of Pentecost. As a result, many of them became followers of Christ. We see that it was men with this reverence for God that buried Stephen. They also showed their great sorrow for his death.

Saul showed His rebellion against the followers of Christ by treating those followers shamefully. He began going to the synagogues looking for followers of Christ. Later as he talked about what he had done Paul said in Acts 22:19, “So I said, ‘Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You.’” Everyone in Jerusalem had heard what Saul had done to Christians. When he found followers, it did not matter whether they were men or women. He dragged them to the judge and then would take them to the prison. He also caused many of them to be beaten for their faith.

Although many followers of Christ were forced to leave Jerusalem that did not mean that the spread of the Gospel was stopped. Acts 8:4 says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Here we see that persecution could not stop the development of the church. Some fled to other parts of Judea. Others settled in the area of Samaria. As we saw in an earlier paragraph some even went as far as the city of Antioch. Instead of stopping the Gospel, persecution spread the Gospel because those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. Here we see an important lesson. We want every Christian to learn to clearly explain the Word of God so that each Christian will be equipped to serve the Lord wherever they might be scattered when persecution comes.

We see the impact that persecution had on the early church. Acts 9:31 says, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” This persecution quickly caused the Gospel to spread throughout the regions of Judea, Galilee and Samaria. As a result, we see that churches were established throughout all three of these regions. Then we see that the churches continued to multiply in these regions. In fact history shows that persecution always causes churches to multiply. As Christians are forced to flee, they share the Word of God wherever they go and God causes churches to multiply.

We see what the Lord did though one individual that was forced to flee from Jerusalem in this chapter. Acts 8:5-8 says, “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city.” Like Stephen, Philip was one of the Greek speaking Jews that was chosen to distribute food to the Greek speaking Jews in Acts 6. Acts 6:3 says, “Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” Then Acts 6:5 adds, “And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.” Like many others that were forced to flee, Philip began sharing the message about the death and resurrection of Christ wherever he traveled.

We see that the first place where Philip went was to the city of Samaria. He immediately began to speak about Christ and His death and resurrection to the people of that city. This is the key message that we should share with anyone who does not yet know Christ. I Corinthians 15:1-5 says, "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve." We also see that God chose to verify the message of Philip with miracles just as he verified the message of the apostles by signs, wonders and mighty deeds.

We see that the people of Samaria gladly listened to the preaching of Philip. The multitudes responded to the message of the death and resurrection of Christ and many turned from their sin and placed their faith in Christ. Here we see that many people are often ready to hear about the death and resurrection of Christ and turn to Christ. Romans 10:17 says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." In order for people to come to faith they need someone to share the Word of God with them. It was in another city in Samaria that Christ had told the disciples in John 4:35, "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" People are often more ready to hear the Word of God than we are to share the Word of God. We will help our children develop a vision for the world as they see us share the Word with others.

Among the miracles that Christ chose to do through Philip to verify the message of Philip were cleansing people from unclean spirits (demons). Philip prayed and asked the Lord to heal those with unclean spirits. The unclean spirits cried with a loud voice as they came out of many people that were possessed by the demons. I John 4:4 says, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Christ is able to defeat any unclean spirit. We also see that the Lord chose to heal those who were paralyzed and those who were crippled in answer to the prayers of Philip.

The way that the Lord was working in the lives of the people of that city caused great joy in that city. This was the same thing that had happened in Jerusalem when the church began. Acts 2:46-47 says, "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." The word translated "gladness" means extreme joy. We want to help our physical and spiritual children fully understand that the message of eternal life brings great joy to those who place their faith in Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to share the message of salvation.

The Lord Gave the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans

In our last topic we saw that persecution in the city of Jerusalem caused many of the followers of Christ to flee from Jerusalem for safety. That did not stop the growth of the church because we saw that those who were scattered shared the Gospel wherever they went. We want to show our physical and spiritual children how to share the Gospel wherever they go by our example so that they will be equipped to do the same. In our topic today we will see why the Holy Spirit came on these new Samaritan believers as a group instead of at the moment of salvation.

Before Philip had arrived at the city of Samaria, a man by the name of Simon had exercised a great influence in that city. Acts 8:9-11 says, "But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time." Here we see that Simon had that great influence because he practiced sorcery.

The word translated "sorcery" means the practice of magic or witchcraft. Deuteronomy 18:9-12 says, "When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you." Israel was forbidden to do these things because those who practice such things depend on the power of demons to do the things that they do.

Simon had amazed the people of Samaria by the things that he did through the power of demons. As a result, he had been able to maintain control over the people for a long time. In fact he had claimed to be someone great for a long time. The people thought that the things that Simon did were through the power of God. That should not surprise us because II Corinthians 11:13-15 says, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works." Here we see that many false teachers claim to get their power from God when they are actually depending on Satan for power. This is one of the ways that Satan is able to deceive many people.

Acts 8:12-13 goes on to say, "But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done." Satan is the great deceiver. However, the miracles that God was doing through the ministry of Philip were

genuine miracles. The people heard the message of Philip as he preached concerning the kingdom of God and the death and resurrection of Christ. They saw the genuine miracles that God was performing through Philip and they quickly realized that the things that Simon had been doing were not genuine. This caused many people to repent of their sin and place their faith in Christ. They were then baptized in the name of Christ as a public testimony of their faith in Christ.

We read that then Simon also believed. In fact he was also baptized. However, we do not read that there was any repentance in his life. That is why it is important to understand the difference between true repentance and false repentance. II Corinthians 7:9-10 says, “Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.” People are always sorry when they have done something wrong and get caught. Here we see the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Godly sorrow produces repentance that leads to salvation. Worldly sorrow produces death because people are only sorry that their sin was exposed. In the next topic you can decide which kind of repentance Simon showed.

Simon began spending time with Philip because he wanted to see the miracles that were happening. He was filled with amazement as he saw the signs and miracles that the Lord was performing through Philip. Here we see that Simon could clearly see the difference between the way that he had deceived the people and the genuine miracles that God chose to do through the power of the Holy Spirit. That reminds us of one reason why each Christian is given the power of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:8 says, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” The power of the Holy Spirit is given to Christians so that we can be witnesses of Christ and speak about Him with boldness instead of having to depend on our own strength.

The apostles at Jerusalem heard what was happening in Samaria. Acts 8:14-17 goes on to say, “Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” Here we see the concern of the apostles to help the Samaritans develop in their new life in Christ.

The apostles immediately sent Peter and John to see what was happening in the city of Samaria. Peter and John came and saw that the people of Samaria had repented and placed their faith in Christ. However, they realized something unusual. They realized that the Samaritans had not received the Holy Spirit. This is not normal so we see that God had a reason for not giving them the Holy Spirit immediately because the Holy Spirit is the down payment and guarantee of our salvation.

There are four times in the book of Acts that people received the Holy Spirit as a group. In

Acts 2 the Jewish followers of Christ were all present together in the Upper Room where they were waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:4 says, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." We see three things happened here. The apostles were present. All the believers received the Holy Spirit as a group. The Holy Spirit gave them the ability to speak and share the wonderful works of God in other languages.

The Samaritans were mixed Jewish and Gentile. As a result, the Jews rejected the Samaritans and God wanted the church to realize its oneness in Christ. Again there were apostles present. All of the new believers received the Holy Spirit as a group. Although there is no mention that they were able to speak the wonderful works of God in other languages, it is possible that they did so because Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was received by the Samaritans when the apostles laid their hands on them. Acts 8:18-19 say, "And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'" Something happened that caused Simon to recognize that Christ had done something unique.

The other two times that people received the Holy Spirit as a group are in Acts 10 and Acts 19. In Acts 10:44-45 we read, "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also." Here we see that the first group of Gentiles to receive the Holy Spirit received the Holy Spirit as a group and spoke in tongues. This time Peter was present so there was an apostle to verify the fact that the Gentiles had also received the Holy Spirit. In fact Peter had also brought six other Christians with him who could also verify that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit. Acts 11:12 says, "Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house." Peter knew he would be questioned when he returned to Jerusalem and so took witnesses.

In Acts 19:1-6 Paul went to the city of Ephesus. In this city he found Jews who had a strong faith in God but had never heard of the death and resurrection of Christ. As a result, they were like Old Testament saints. Acts 19:5-6 says, "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied." Here we see that a group of Old Testament saints received the Holy Spirit as a group and spoke in tongues. In this case Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand why each group received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues the first time that they received the Holy Spirit as a group. This was verified by one or more apostles each time. God wanted to make certain that there was unity in the church between all Christians. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand how various groups received the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Showed the Destructive Power of Bitterness

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn why four different groups received the Holy Spirit as a group. We also saw that as Philip preached in Samaria that a sorcerer by the name of Simon was amazed as he saw genuine miracles happen as a part of the ministry of Philip. We even read that Simon believed and was baptized. However, in this topic we are going to need to ask ourselves if the belief of Simon the sorcerer was genuine belief or just sorrow for the fact that the genuine miracles exposed the fact that his sorcery was not from God.

In our last topic we saw that the Holy Spirit came on the Samaritan believers as a group when Peter and John laid their hands on the believers. Acts 8:18-19 says, "And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'" Simon immediately saw that something had happened in the lives of those who had placed their faith in Christ when the apostles laid their hands on these new believers. We mentioned in the last topic that it was probable that these Samaritan believers also spoke in tongues just as each of the other groups did when they first received the Holy Spirit.

Simon was quick to see that something had happened with the apostles laying their hands on this initial group of Samaritan believers. For many years Simon had made much money through his practice of sorcery among the Samaritans of that city. Those who practice sorcery are always looking for new ways to make money. Suddenly he saw his opportunity to continue to make money by laying his hands on people and charging them money when they wanted to receive the Holy Spirit. As a result, Simon immediately offered money to Peter and John to try and buy this same power. In some cultures some people buy demonic power with money. In other cultures that may kill a close relative to gain demonic power.

As one who had practiced sorcery for many years, Simon knew that demonic power had to be purchased by paying some price. We meet another sorcerer in Acts 13:6-12. That sorcerer tried to resist Paul in order to maintain his power. Acts 13:8-10 says, "But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, 'O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?'" Paul described this sorcerer as a person full of all deceit and all fraud who was actually a son of the devil. Simon wanted to buy spiritual power. The question we need to ask is, "Was he seeking to buy godly power or was he hoping to get demonic power?" You can determine the answer to that question as we look at the following verses.

Acts 8:20-22 goes on to say, "But Peter said to him, 'Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your

wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.” Here we see that Peter made it very clear that the Holy Spirit is given to all Christians as the gift of God. That is why Romans 8:9 says, “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.” Once the Holy Spirit was given to each of the four groups mentioned in Acts, every Christian since then has received the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. Here it says that if we do not have the Spirit of Christ that we are not yet Christians.

As a result, Peter told Simon that his money would perish with him. The word translated “perish” is usually translated destruction or perdition. I Timothy 6:9-10 says, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” In this case we see that the love of money can drown people in destruction and perdition. Philippians 3:18-19 says, “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things.” Here we see that those who have their mind on earthly things are facing eternal destruction.

As a result, we see that Peter made it very clear that the heart of Simon was not right in the sight of God. The word translated “right” is usually translated straight. John the Baptist used this word when he quoted Isaiah in Luke 3:4 which says, “As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.'” Peter used the word in II Peter 2:15-16 where it is translated “right”. Those verses say, “They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.” The context of these verses show that the way of Christ is straight or right and the way of Satan is the way of unrighteousness used by people who have set their minds on earthly things.

This led Peter to tell Simon, “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.” Peter called the fact that Simon tried to purchase the ability to give the gift of the Holy Spirit as wickedness that must be repented of. The word translated “wickedness is usually translated maliciousness or malice. Titus 3:3 says, “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.” Here we see that before we became Christians that we were living in malice. Peter told Simon to repent and pray that God would forgive him the thought of his heart.

Acts 8:23-25 then says, “For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.” Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me." So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.” The word translated “bitterness” means extreme wickedness and is only used four times in the

New Testament. In Romans 3:14 it is used in the passage that shows that all have sinned and stand guilty before God. In Ephesians 4:31 it is given in a list of sins that are to be replaced by kindness and a tender heart that causes us to forgive. Then Hebrews 12:14-15 says, "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled." Peter made it clear that Simon was bound by his sin.

Peter had just told Simon that his money would perish with him. He had been told his heart was not right with God. He had been told to repent of his extreme wickedness. Peter said he was poisoned by bitterness and bound by his iniquity (unrighteousness). Instead of repenting and turning from his wickedness, we see that he chose instead to ask Peter to pray for him that none of the judgment that Peter had just described would come upon him.

Since Acts 8:12 says that Simon had believed and been baptized, that leads to a very important question, "Was this a true repentance and belief or not?" James 2:19 says, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble!" In contrast, II Corinthians 7:9-10 says, "Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." Here we see that each person faces a choice. Godly repentance leads to salvation. This is true sorrow for sin that leads to faith in Christ. Worldly repentance leads to death. This is sorrow that a person got caught in their sin that never leads to true repentance. Did Simon have a true faith or a false faith in verse 12? That is a key question that we want our children to know how to explain to others.

We see that for some time after this meeting with Simon that Peter and John continued to preach the Word of God in Samaria for a time. However, they were confident that Philip would remain and help those who had followed Christ until the new believers were mature enough to continue their own spiritual growth. In fact Peter closed his second letter in II Peter 3:18 by saying, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen." Peter and John were confident that Philip would help these new believers grow both in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. On their way back to Jerusalem Peter and John preached the Gospel or good news or salvation in each of the Samaritan villages through which they traveled. They wanted every Samaritan to hear how to have forgiveness of sin through Christ.

We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to share this same good news with the people that they know and meet. In order to help them learn to explain the Gospel clearly, we need to take them with us and show them how we explain the Gospel to others. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to share the Gospel with others.

The Lord Worked Through Philip Again

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children fully understand the destructive power of bitterness. We also saw that we want to help them learn how to explain the difference between false repentance and true repentance. We saw that the Lord worked through the life of Philip to bring great joy to the city of Samaria. Today we are going to see that God recognized that Philip had completed his ministry in Samaria and led him to the next person to whom the Lord wanted him to share the Gospel.

In Acts 8:26-31 we read, “Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, “Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is desert. So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and overtake this chariot.” So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.” Philip gives us a real example of the importance of being led by the Spirit. When the Lord sent an angel to Philip with a message, Philip was obedient immediately and went to the road leading to Gaza.

The area where the Holy Spirit led Philip was an area that is desert. However, the Lord had one person with whom Philip was to share the message of Christ. This man was the man in charge of the treasure of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This was a position of great authority for the entire land of Ethiopia. We see that he had come to Jerusalem to worship God and was now returning to the land of Ethiopia. While he had been in Jerusalem he had bought a copy of the book of Isaiah and was reading it as he traveled back toward Ethiopia. At that point the Holy Spirit told Philip to catch up with the chariot. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Then Galatians 5:18 says, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” Here we see that Philip was led by the Spirit and the Lord led him to an opportunity to serve the Ethiopian eunuch in love.

Philip ran to the chariot. He heard the man reading from Isaiah. Philip began the conversation with a question, “Do you understand what you are reading?” This gives us an effective illustration of a way to show our children how to begin an evangelistic Bible study. Many people are curious about the Bible. However, they do not understand when they try to read the Bible. As we are sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, He will guide us to ask such people if they would like help in understanding the Bible. The man showed by his question his desire for understanding when he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” Then he asked Philip to come up and sit with him in the chariot so that Philip could explain what he was reading. The same thing will happen to us if we are available to be used by the Lord to help others understand about Jesus.

Acts 8:32-35 says, "The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth." So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Here we see how the Lord works to prepare people to hear the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This man was reading from Isaiah 53:7-8. He could have been reading from anywhere in the entire book but the Lord brought Philip just at the time when the man was reading a passage about the suffering and death of Christ.

Then the eunuch asked Philip the question, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" Here we see two things. First, we see the lack of understanding that people without Christ have about the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. Second, we see that the Father draws people to Christ by giving people a desire for understanding of the Word of God. The same thing happened to Paul and Silas in the city of Berea. Acts 17:11-12 says, "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men." Here we see that these people were ready to study the Scriptures so that they could understand.

We see that Philip began at the very Scripture about which the man had questions and used those verses to explain to the man what Isaiah had predicted about the suffering and death of Christ. A key thing to recognize from this event is that people that have been reading the Bible have questions because they lack understanding. If we begin with their questions, the Holy Spirit in time will guide us to share exactly what each person needs to hear to come to a clear understanding of who Christ is and why He came to die. Romans 10:17 promises, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The Lord will work through His Word to draw people to Himself. In fact the whole Trinity will be involved in their salvation because the Holy Spirit convicts (John 16:8-11), the Father draws (John 6:44) and the Son seeks and saves (Luke 19:10).

Philip began by answering the question of the man and then explained why Christ died and rose again. It was important to begin with his question because at that time the Jews thought that there were three possible meanings. Some Jewish teachers thought the sheep referred to Israel, some thought Isaiah spoke of himself and some thought that the sheep that was slaughtered was the Messiah. That discussion may have gone on for many hours as Philip explained the meaning of that passage and explained how Jesus provided salvation through His death and resurrection. As Philip explained about Christ, the Lord was working in the heart of the eunuch.

Acts 8:36-40 says, "Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus

Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea." Notice that it was the explanation of the Word of God that drew this man to Christ.

The eunuch is the one who asked Philip if he could be baptized to show that he had repented of sin and had placed his faith in Christ. Philip then asked him if he believed with his heart. Philip had good reason to ask this question after his experience with Simon the sorcerer in the previous verses. Philip wanted to make sure there was genuine faith. Romans 10:9-10 says, "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." It is in the heart that a person believes and which God sees. In I Samuel 16:7 we read, "But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."" We believe in the heart (the inner person). The man showed his belief by his action.

The man commanded the chariot to stop. Then Philip and the eunuch both got off the chariot. They walked together down into the water and Philip baptized the eunuch. Here we see the meaning of water baptism. Water baptism is a public testimony to others that a person has repented of the sin of unbelief and placed his or her faith in Christ and His death and resurrection. True belief happens in our hearts and gives us new life at the moment of salvation. Romans 6:3-4 says, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Here we see that from the moment of true belief that we are able to begin to walk in newness of life.

When Philip and the eunuch came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit caught away Philip and the eunuch saw him no more. However, that miracle was also seen by any that were traveling with the eunuch as people in that day often traveled together in caravans. Since we read in the earlier verses that the eunuch worshiped God, he had knowledge of at least parts of the Old Testament. Now he understood that Christ was the One that God had promised would come to pay the penalty for sin. At the moment he placed his faith in Christ, he also received the Holy Spirit. Christ promised in John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." The eunuch could depend on the Holy Spirit to guide him to a greater understanding of the Old Testament teaching about Christ. Philip was found in Azotus and preached in the cities along the coast.

We see that we want to show our physical and spiritual children how to be led by the Spirit and see Him lead us as we share the message of Christ with others. May the Lord richly bless you as you provide your children with an example of being led by the Spirit.

The Lord Stopped Saul on the Road to Damascus

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to help people come to an understanding of repentance and faith through evangelistic Bible studies. We saw that as we help our children learn to explain the Word of God that God will work through his Word to bring people to faith in Christ. Today we are going to see how Christ stopped Saul as he was on his way to the city of Damascus to arrest and imprison any followers of Christ that he found in that city.

We saw in chapter 6 though the first part of chapter 8 that Saul was doing everything possible to try and persecute those who followed Christ. We saw that he was the one who held the coats of those who stoned Stephen to death. We also saw that Saul began to do everything possible to stop the development of the church. Today we begin our topic by seeing that Saul made plans to spread that persecution to other cities. Acts 9:1-2 says, "Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." Here we see that Saul was ready to arrest and kill additional followers of Christ in an effort to try and stop the development of the church.

We see that Saul was still breathing threats and murder. Paul described his actions in I Timothy 1:12-13 where we read, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." Paul said that before he met Christ he was a blasphemer, a persecutor and a man filled with pride and treated others with shame. Christ completely changed and transformed his life and Christ gave him a great ministry for many years.

In his efforts to try and stop the followers of Christ, Paul went to the Jewish high priest and asked for letters to the leaders of all of the synagogues in Damascus giving him permission to arrest and bring to Jerusalem any men or women that had become followers of Christ. Many years later when Paul gave his testimony to the Jews in Jerusalem he said in Acts 22:4-5, "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished." Paul said that he was heavily involved in the arrest and even the death of followers of Christ.

However, we see that Jesus stopped Saul as he traveled to Damascus to arrest additional followers of Christ. Acts 9:3-6 says, "As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." Here we see that Jesus suddenly stopped Saul with a bright light that shone around him from heaven.

As Paul fell to the ground, he heard a voice speaking to him from heaven. The voice said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Here we see a key statement. The voice said that the persecution by Saul of the church was a personal attack on the One who was speaking. That caused Saul to ask a question. Paul said, "Who are you Lord?" Paul recognized that since the voice was coming from heaven that it had to be God speaking to him. As a result, He addressed God as Lord. The word translated "Lord" is most commonly used to refer to God or the Messiah. Christ answered Saul by saying, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Here we see that Christ personally identifies with all those who suffer for His sake. That means that an attack against a Christian is actually an attack on Christ.

Jesus told Saul that He was Jesus, the One that Saul was persecuting. The word translated "goads" is a word that was used to speak of the stick or the metal bar that was used to keep oxen and other animals moving as they worked. It led to the development of the proverb "to kick against the goad". An ox that was poked with a stick or metal bar to keep it moving also had a yoke around his neck so that it was impossible for the ox to fight against the one who was poking him with the goad. The ox would only hurt itself by trying to fight. Jesus was telling Saul that it would be impossible for him to try and fight against Christ any longer. To do so would only hurt Saul.

Suddenly Saul realized that in his attacks against the followers of Jesus that he was actually fighting against God, the very person that he claimed to serve. Suddenly his whole body began to tremble and shake in fear. He was filled with amazement. Since he suddenly recognized that he was fighting against God, Saul asked a second question, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" We said that "Lord usually refers to God or the Messiah. This question of Saul showed that his heart had been transformed in a moment. He now recognized that Christ is God and that everything that he had heard about Christ was true. Saul immediately wanted to know what Christ wanted him to do. Christ had said in Luke 6:46, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" In contrast, we see that Saul was immediately ready to do what Jesus said to do.

Jesus did not answer the question of Saul immediately. Instead Jesus told him to go into the city and there he would be told what he was to do. Here we see that Christ knew that Saul needed time to think through all that had happened. He also needed to become identified with the church since he had actually come to destroy the church. As a result, Christ let Saul think for three days and then he sent Ananias, one of the leaders of the church in Damascus, to visit him. Acts 9:17 says, "And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." We will study more about Ananias in a future topic but here we see that he recognized Saul as a new brother in Christ.

Acts 9:7-9 goes on to say, "And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a

voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.” There was a whole group of men traveling with Saul to arrest the followers of Christ in Damascus. Suddenly these men became speechless and could not say anything. They were unable to speak because of the fear that filled their lives.

Meanwhile Saul got up from the ground where he had fallen. However, he suddenly realized that he could not see. Paul described this event in Acts 22:10-11 where he said, “So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.' And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.” Paul had seen the glory of Jesus when that bright light from heaven had shown upon him. That was an experience that he would never forget.

Later Paul described this same event to King Agrippa. Acts 26:15-19 says, “So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.' ”Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” On the road to Damascus Saul had his physical eyes blinded so that he could open the spiritual eyes of others and turn them from spiritual darkness to the Light of Christ.

Since the eyes of Saul were blind so that he could not see, the men that were traveling with him led him into the city of Damascus and brought him to a place to stay. For three days Saul did not see anything, did not eat anything and did not drink anything. This gave him a lot of time to think so that he could understand all that had happened to him. It gave him three days to meditate on all that he knew from the Old Testament. Joshua 1:8 says, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” Saul had three days for uninterrupted meditation on the Word of God. Since he now knew that Christ is God, Saul could think about everything that he knew from the entire Old Testament from a different viewpoint.

In the same way we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that the entire Bible will only come alive in their lives when they understand that Christ is taught from Genesis to Revelation. The Holy Spirit will guide them as they learn to meditate on the entire Word of God and what it teaches about Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how Christ makes the whole Bible come alive.

The Lord Worked Through the Ministry of Ananias

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand why Saul was on his way to Damascus. We want them to understand how his life was changed when Jesus appeared to him from heaven as he came near the city of Damascus. We saw that he asked Jesus what Jesus wanted him to do. Then Saul spent the next three days blinded so that he could think about all that had happened. Today we are going to see what happened to Saul after three days.

In Acts 9:10-14 we read, "Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." Saul had been without sight, without food and without water for three days. This gave him a lot of time to think. Then after three days the Lord spoke to Ananias and told him to go to visit Saul.

Ananias had become a disciple of Christ. He may have been among those who had been forced to flee from Jerusalem because of the persecution that had started. However, it is more probable that he had not been forced to flee from Jerusalem but had been in Damascus for a period of time before the persecution started. When the Lord spoke to Ananias, he said that he had heard from many others how much harm Saul had done to the saints in Jerusalem. He had also heard that he had been given the authority from the chief priests to bind and imprison all of the Jews who had chosen to follow Christ.

We see that Christ spoke to Ananias in a vision. The Lord spoke to several people in Acts through a vision. The Lord called to Ananias in the vision and Ananias answered the Lord. The Lord told Ananias to go to Straight Street to the house of Judas. The street was called Straight Street because it went from the west gate of the city straight across the city to the east gate of the city. Ananias was told to ask for Saul of Tarsus when he arrived at that house. He was also told that Saul was praying. Then he was told that Saul had also received a vision of a man by the name of Ananias coming to him and putting his hand on him so that Saul could receive his sight.

What would you have done if you would have been Ananias? As we have seen, Ananias had already heard a lot about Saul of Tarsus and had even heard why he had come to the city of Damascus. The first thing that Ananias did was tell the Lord the things that he had heard about Saul of Tarsus. Ananias told the Lord that he had heard about the evil Saul had done to the saints in the city of Jerusalem. Ananias said that he had heard that Saul had been given authority from the chief priests to arrest all those in Damascus that had placed their faith in Christ.

Acts 9:15-18 says, "But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized." Here we see that the Lord let Ananias know that the Lord had chosen Saul for a special ministry.

Christ said that He had personally chosen Saul to speak for Christ to the Gentiles, to kings and to the Jews. Christ also said that He would show Saul how many things Saul would suffer for the name of Christ. This helps us to understand Romans 8:28-29a much more clearly. Those verses say, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son." Suddenly we learn why Christ allowed Saul to persecute the church so severely. Since Saul was going to suffer many things for Christ, he understood clearly why he had been motivated to persecute the church so that he could understand when he was persecuted.

Ananias immediately went to Straight Street when he heard about the plan of Christ for Saul. Ananias went with boldness because the Lord had explained His plan for Saul. Ananias saw this as an opportunity to help Saul understand the love that Christ gives to us for one another. His first words to Saul were "Brother Saul." Saul had been persecuting the followers of Christ with great severity. Now the very first words he heard from a follower of Christ as a new believer were, "Brother Saul." Later Paul wrote in Romans 8:16-17, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." Saul suddenly realized that he was a part of a new family, the family of God.

The second thing that Ananias said to Saul was that the Lord Jesus had sent Ananias to Saul. This was also important. When Saul asked the question on the road, "Who are you, Lord." The first part of the answer he was given was, "I am Jesus." Now Ananias told Saul that it was the Lord Jesus who had sent him. This certainly confirmed to Saul that Jesus is God because He knows all things. Third, Ananias told Saul that the Lord had sent him to restore the physical sight of Paul. This happened immediately as soon as Ananias spoke the words.

Fourth, Ananias told Saul that he was to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Many years later Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus in Ephesians 5:18, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." One of the first things that Saul learned as a new follower of Jesus was the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life. Christ had said in John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." Saul learned right from the beginning of his new life in Christ that he had the Holy Spirit as his Helper to teach him and guide him.

Saul wanted to make it clear that he had a new identity. He was now a follower of Christ. As a result, we see that the first thing that happened was that he was baptized by Ananias. Then Acts 9:19-22 says, "So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ." We also see that Saul was very anxious to tell others about the new life that he had in Christ.

Saul immediately began going with the disciples at Damascus to the various synagogues in that city. As Saul taught about Christ, he was able to make it very clear from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Son of God. This certainly caused the people to be very surprised in the Jewish synagogues in the city of Damascus. Those who were followers of Christ knew that Saul had come to arrest them. Those who were not followers of Christ expected Saul to arrest those who were believers. Instead in each synagogue Saul used the Old Testament to prove that Jesus truly is the Son of God. As a result, there was great amazement among all of the Jews in Damascus.

The Jews began asking if this was the same Saul that had destroyed those who called on the name of Jesus in Jerusalem. They talked about the fact that he had come to the city of Damascus for the same purpose. They knew that he had permission from the chief priests to arrest those who called on the name of Jesus. Acts 9:1-2 describes what these Jews had heard about Saul. Those verses say, "Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." This caused great confusion among both followers of Christ and those who rejected Him.

Meanwhile Saul continued to gain strength. The word translated "strength" means to receive strength or to become bold. Many years later Paul used this same word when he said in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Even as a new follower of Jesus Saul was already beginning to learn that Christ would give him strength as he depended on Christ for strength. This caused the Jews that lived at Damascus to become even more confused. They did not know what they think as Saul proved from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Promised One for whom the Jews had been waiting for Him to come.

We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to be able to prove from the Word of God that Jesus is the Christ that was promised in the Old Testament. In order to do this we need to help them learn how to explain the Old Testament passages that apply so that they can help others to understand that Christ is God. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain the Word of God to others.

The Lord Caused Churches to Multiply

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how completely the Lord changed and transformed the life of Saul as he went from being a persecutor of the church to one who was able to prove from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Christ. We want to help our children gain that same understanding. In our topic today we are going to see how the Lord used the persecution that caused the followers of Jesus to flee from Jerusalem to cause churches to multiply throughout the regions of Judea, Samaria and Galilee.

Acts 9:23-25 says, “Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket.” It was actually about three years before Saul returned to Jerusalem. Part of that time was spent in the city of Damascus and part of that time was spent in the desert of Arabia where Paul received instruction from Christ to equip him for his ministry.

During the period called many days Galatians 1:15-17 says, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.” Here we see that Saul spent part of this period out in the desert southeast of Damascus as that area was part of Arabia. There Saul received personal instruction from Jesus to equip him for the ministry that the Lord had for him as the apostle to the Gentiles.

It was after this time in the desert of Arabia when Saul returned to Damascus that the Jews in Damascus plotted to kill him. Saul and the other disciples learned about the plot to kill him. At that time the city of Damascus had a wall around the entire city. As a result, the Jews watched the gates of the city so that Paul could not escape. However, the disciples helped Saul escape by letting him down over the wall in a large basket.

Acts 9:26-28 says, “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.” Here we see that many of the disciples were fearful when Saul tried to join them. Acts 8:3 says, “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” Because of the things that Saul had done in the past, most of the disciples probably thought that Saul was using this as a way to find other Christians that he could arrest. As a result, most of the disciples acted out of fear and did not trust Saul.

However, Barnabas took Saul and brought him to the apostles. As you remember a man by the

name of Joses had his name changed to Barnabas. Acts 4:36 says, “And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus.” Here we see that Joses had his name changed to Barnabas because of the fact that he was such an encouragement to the other Christians. We see that he now became an encourager to Saul who introduced him to at least Peter and James. Galatians 1:18-19 says, “Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.” Barnabas introduced Saul to at least these two key leaders in the early church.

Barnabas told at least these two how the Lord had stopped Saul on the way to Damascus. He said that Saul had seen the Lord on that road and had talked to him. Then he said that Paul had boldly preached in the city of Damascus. As Acts 9:20 says, “Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” Peter listened to Barnabas and then Saul spent fifteen days getting better acquainted with Peter before he was forced to leave Jerusalem.

However, Acts 9:29-30 says, “And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.” Just as he had been bold in the city of Damascus, Saul also spoke boldly about the Lord Jesus during the time that he was in the city of Jerusalem. When Saul was in Damascus, Acts 9:22 says, “But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.” Now we see that Saul did the same thing when he came back to the city of Jerusalem.

In fact we read that Saul disputed with the Hellenists. This is the same group that disputed with Stephen in Acts 6. Acts 6:9-10 says, “Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.” Saul held the coats at the stoning of Stephen. This was the synagogue that was responsible for the stoning of Stephen. As a result, Saul was probably a close friend of the people in this synagogue and one of the leaders of this synagogue at the time that Stephen was stoned. Now he was proving to them from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Christ.

Saul spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus even though he knew that these former friends were the men who had helped him stone Stephen. The last words of Christ before he had returned to heaven in Acts 1:8 were, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Saul depended on the power of the Holy Spirit as he spoke and the Holy Spirit gave Saul boldness to speak about the death and resurrection to the very men who had stoned Stephen between three and four years earlier. Saul realized that they might stone him as well but the Holy Spirit gave him boldness to speak about the death and resurrection of Christ. This is the same power that we need in order for us to speak boldly about the death and resurrection of Christ to those who might oppose that message.

In fact an attempt to kill Saul was exactly what happened. These same Jews that killed Stephen attempted to kill Saul also. Some of the other followers of Christ heard about the plan of the

Hellenists to kill Saul. Then these brethren traveled with him down to Caesarea and sent him to his home town of Tarsus for his own protection. Saul understood the feelings of these Hellenists perfectly. He wrote about his own past in Galatians 1:13-14 when he said, “For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” The Lord was allowing Saul to experience opposition even in the early years of his life in Christ to prepare him for his future ministry when the opposition would continue to grow.

Acts 9:31 says, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” Here we see the results of the severe persecution that developed in Jerusalem following the stoning of Stephen. Acts 8:4 says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Instead of persecution stopping the growth of the church, persecution caused churches to develop throughout the regions of Judea, Galilee and Samaria.

Now we see that these churches throughout the region were able to experience peace for a period of time. Persecution often lasts for a period of time and when something happens to the leaders of that persecution then persecution eases for a period of time. We also see that the churches throughout the region were being built up. I Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.” Churches are built up when the Christians in those churches are building up one another. The Lord greatly blesses that ministry.

We also see that the churches were walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. The fear of the Lord speaks of a godly reverence for the Lord. Ephesians 5:21 says, “Submitting to one another in the fear of God.” When we have a reverence for the Lord we will be submitting to one another. In John 14:16 Christ said, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever.” Christ sent the Holy Spirit to be the Comforter of every Christian. We also see that the Lord continued to cause the churches to increase and multiply. In Acts 2:47 we saw that the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Then in Acts 6:1 and 6:8 we saw that the number of disciples multiplied. Here we see that the number of churches multiplied.

In Matthew 16:18 we see that Christ said “I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” As we provide an example by allowing the Lord to work through our lives, we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn by example that the Lord will also work through their lives to build His church. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand how the Lord multiplies His church.

The Lord Worked Through the Ministry of Others

In our last topic we saw that the Lord allowed the early church to experience persecution so that the early church would spread out and multiply. We saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children by our example the importance of letting Him work through our lives as the Lord builds His church. In our topic today we will see how the Lord worked through the lives of many believers to build His church.

Acts 9:32-35 says, “Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda. There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.” Then he arose immediately. So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.” The city of Lydda was near a place where two roads crossed. One road went from Syria to Egypt and the other road went from the city of Jerusalem to the city of Joppa. Lydda was only about ten miles from Joppa.

Peter was visiting the followers of Christ that lived in the various towns and cities in that area. As a result, he came to visit the saints that lived in the town of Lydda. A certain man by the name of Aeneas lived in that town. He was paralyzed and had been forced to stay in bed for about eight years. Peter met this man when he came to the town of Lydda. We saw in Acts 4:15-16 that the Lord had used Peter to heal all that came to him in the city of Jerusalem. Here we see that Peter told Aeneas, “Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.” Aeneas had been paralyzed for eight years and had not been able to get out of bed by himself for eight years. However, he believed the words that Peter spoke and immediately got out of bed.”

The Lord used that miracle in a mighty way. Lydda is the name of the town and Sharon is the name of the whole surrounding area. When the people heard what had happened to Aeneas we see that all of the people in the town as well as the people in the surrounding area turned to the Lord. Here we see a large response to the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. Acts 11:21 says, “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” These examples show us that at times the Lord chooses to draw whole groups of people to Himself from extended families, people groups or even people from throughout an area.

We go on to read in Acts 9:36-38, “At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them.” Joppa was a town about ten miles from the town of Lydda. There were also disciples living in that town. One of those disciples was a woman by the name of Tabitha. The Greek translation of that name is Dorcas.

We read several things about this woman. We see that she was full of good works. The word translated “good” means good in its character and beneficial in its effects. Such works should be a characteristic of the life of every Christian. Galatians 6:10 says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” As followers of Christ we should be looking for opportunities to good to all people and especially to other Christians. Here we see that Dorcas was full of these good works that were helpful to other people.

We also see that Dorcas was full of charitable deeds. The word translated “charitable deeds” means acts of mercy or pity and spoke especially of acts that were done to help the poor and the needy. Dorcas had been a woman who continually looked for opportunities to help the poor and needy. Dorcas had a special concern for those who were widows. The last part of verse 39 says, “And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.” Here we see that Dorcas had helped many widows by sewing clothing for those widows and their children.

Dorcas gives us an example for our own lives. Years later as Paul spoke to the elders in Ephesus he said in Acts 20:33-35, “I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'” As Christians it should also be our desire to look for opportunities to minister to those who are in need. James 1:27 says, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” James said that we should have a special concern for the orphans and widows.

However, Dorcas became sick and died. Instead of burying her immediately as was commonly done, the people washed her body and laid the body in an upstairs room. We mentioned earlier that Joppa was only about ten miles from Lydda. As a result, the other followers of Christ sent two men to Lydda to get Peter and told the men to beg Peter to come immediately because they knew that Peter was in that town. Peter responded and returned with them to Joppa.

We read what happened when he got to Joppa in Acts 9:39-43 which says, “Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.” When Peter arrived at Joppa he was immediately taken to the upstairs room where the body of Dorcas had been placed.

That room was filled with widows who were in great sorrow. They stood by Peter and told him about the kind deeds that Dorcas had done to help them. These widows showed Peter some of

the clothing that Dorcas had made to help them and their families. Peter had been in a similar situation a few years earlier with Jesus when the daughter of Jairus died. Luke 8:50-54 says, "But when Jesus heard it, He answered him, saying, "Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well." When He came into the house, He permitted no one to go in except Peter, James, and John, and the father and mother of the girl. Now all wept and mourned for her; but He said, "Do not weep; she is not dead, but sleeping." And they ridiculed Him, knowing that she was dead. But He put them all outside, took her by the hand and called, saying, "Little girl, arise." Peter had seen that Jesus had raised the girl back to life.

Now we see that Peter did the same thing with Dorcas. Peter put everyone out of the room. Then he knelt down and prayed to the Lord. Then after he had finished his prayer he turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, arise." The Lord worked in answer to the prayer of Peter. We see that Dorcas immediately opened her eyes. When she saw that Peter was kneeling beside her she immediately sat up. Peter then gave Dorcas his hand and helped her get up. Here we see that in addition to being raised from the dead that she immediately had strength to stand. When the Lord healed a person, we see that there was complete healing.

Peter then called the widows and the other saints back into the room and presented Dorcas to them. Word of this miracle quickly spread throughout the town of Joppa. As a result, many of the people in this town also believed in Christ. In this case we see that the Lord used these two miracles of healing in these two towns to draw many people to Christ. This is a reminder to us that the Lord can choose to work in many different ways to draw people to Himself.

Peter knew that these new followers of Christ would also need help in their spiritual growth. As a result, we see that Peter stayed for many days in the town of Joppa to help them get started in their spiritual growth. Peter stayed with a man by the name of Simon, the tanner. He was called the tanner because his occupation was the tanning of the skins of animals. This was an occupation that most Jews hated and so they probably avoided this man. Here we see that Peter chose to stay in his home for an extended period of days. This was important because it showed that followers of Christ are to reach out to those who have occupations that many people reject. Christ came to save all people regardless of their background or occupation.

We learn several important lessons that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand from these verses. Peter took time to minister to the physical needs of people and the Lord worked through that ministry to draw many people to Himself in both Lydda and Joppa. Peter saw every situation as an opportunity to share the good news about the death and resurrection of Christ. Peter was very willing to change his schedule to meet the needs of others. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children various ways to minister to others.