

Helping Our Children Develop a Vision for the World Part 2

**Growing Godly Family Series
Manual 21**

By

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Growing Godly Families Series

The “Growing Godly Families Series” is the result of weekly topics were prepared and e-mailed over a period of years. This series is especially designed for those who are already Christian leaders; to give them Biblical principles for the development of additional godly spiritual leaders. Because they give Biblical principles for growth in spiritual leadership, they are also helpful for Christians that want to grow and become godly spiritual leaders.

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.

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 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.” 1 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 make your life count for eternity by bringing glory to God.

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The Lord Worked in the Life of Cornelius

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to minister to the needs of people. In the early church the leaders of the church ministered to both the physical and spiritual needs of people. We also want to show our children by example the importance of ministering to the needs of the people with whom the Lord brings them in contact. In our topic today we are going to see how the Lord led Peter to begin to minister to the spiritual needs of the Gentiles.

In Acts 10 we see how the Lord brought the message of His death and resurrection to the Gentiles. In Acts 10:1-2 we read, “There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.” Here we are introduced to Cornelius. Cornelius was a Roman centurion. A centurion was an officer in the Roman army that was in charge of one hundred men. These soldiers were from the country of Italy.

We learn several things about Cornelius. First, we see that he was a devout man. The word translated “devout” means a godly man. In 2 Peter 2:9 we read, “*Then* the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.” Although Cornelius was a Roman soldier, he had learned about God and had a great reverence and respect for God. However, we will see that he had not yet had the death and resurrection of Christ explained to him.

Second, we see that Cornelius was one who feared God with all of his household. Acts 10:34-35 says, “Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. “But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.” In these verses, we see that Peter recognized that Cornelius had a great reverence for God. We see that Peter said that those who have a reverence for God are accepted by God because God recognizes that they have true faith in Him regardless of their nation or background. God does not show partiality. We also see that Cornelius had taught his whole household about God so that his entire household had a reverence for God.

Third, we see that Cornelius gave alms generously to the people. The word translated “alms” means acts of charity or donations to the poor. Here we see that Cornelius had a great concern for the poor and needy. We see in Acts 10:31 that the angel had told Cornelius, “And said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God.’” God looked at the heart of Cornelius and knew that He had a great reverence for God and it was that reverence for God that caused Cornelius to have a concern for the poor and needy.

Fourth, we see that Cornelius was a man of prayer. The word translated “always” means constantly or continually. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Pray without ceasing.” That was exactly what Cornelius did. In fact verse 4 says, ““Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.” God recognized the faith of Cornelius just as God had always recognized those who had true faith whether they were Jews or Gentiles. However, God wanted Cornelius to learn to have a personal relationship by coming to the Father through Christ.

As a result, God sent an angel to speak to Cornelius through a vision. Acts 10:3-6 says, “About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to

him, “Cornelius!” And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, “What is it, lord?” So he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. “Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. “He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.” God could have revealed the message about the death and resurrection of Christ to Cornelius directly just as God did in to Saul in Acts 9.

However, God knew that the Jewish believers would never give full acceptance to the Gentiles if God spoke to Cornelius directly. This is illustrated in Acts 11:15-18 where Peter told the Jews what God had done. Those verses say, “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?” When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.” Here we see that God had to convince the Jews that the Gentiles could also be saved by faith.

God had a much greater plan when Christ died and rose again than even the believing Jews could understand. A part of the plan of God was to bring the Jews and the Gentiles together in the church through the death and resurrection of Christ. Ephesians 2:14-18 says, “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” The plan of God was to make Jewish believers and Gentile believers one in the body of Christ so that we can all have peace with God.

As a result, God sent an angel to Cornelius to speak to him. At first Cornelius was fearful when he saw the angel in the vision. However, the angel immediately told Cornelius that his prayers and his ministry to the needy had caused God to recognize the faith of Cornelius. Now God wanted Cornelius to know what he must do to show true faith. Cornelius was told to send men to Joppa to the house of Simon the tanner whose house was close to the beach. At that house they were to ask for Simon Peter. The angel told Cornelius that Simon Peter would tell Cornelius what he must do.

It had been the plan of God throughout the years for the Gentiles to hear how to have faith in God through the Jews. Psalm 67:1-4 says, “God be merciful to us and bless us, *and* cause His face to shine upon us. Selah. That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations on earth. Selah.” Since the Jewish nation had failed to share the message of faith with the people of the nations, God was now calling the church to take the message of the death and resurrection of Christ to the nations.

As we have seen, Peter was often the spokesman for the other apostles as the message of the death and resurrection of Christ began to spread among the Jews. Now God was going to give Peter the privilege of being the first apostle to take that message to the Gentiles. However, the Lord also chose to have that request come to Peter through a Gentile. Ephesians 3:4-6 says, “By which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body,

and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” Here we see that the Holy Spirit chose to reveal the plan of God to Peter and the other apostles through the request of a Gentile.

Later God would reveal to John that this plan would include people of every language and ethnic group. John wrote in Revelation 5:9-10, “And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.” The plan of God to provide salvation to all who will believe includes people of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Certainly Cornelius could not understand that he was a part of the plan of God as he sent men to get Peter. In the same way Peter did not understand what God was doing when he received this request. The plan of the Lord is much greater than any human can imagine.

Acts 10:7-8 says, “When the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. So when he had explained all *these* things to them, he sent them to Joppa.” Cornelius may not have understood the plan of God but he was obedient to the Lord. He then called two of his servants and a devout soldier. He explained to these three men exactly what the Lord had told him in the vision so that they understood why they were going to go to Joppa. Then Cornelius sent the three of them to Joppa to get Peter to come with them to the city of Caesarea.

We also want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the way that the Lord is working in their lives. We want them to learn the blessings that come with obedience to the Lord as we carry out the plan that the Lord has for each of our lives. That plan will be different for each of our children so we want to show them the importance of letting the Holy Spirit lead us in our lives so that they can also learn to be led by the Spirit. The Lord will bring great blessing to their lives as they are obedient to the Spirit. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to be led by the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Gave Peter a Vision

In our last topic, we saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children what it means to be led by the Holy Spirit so that they can enjoy the blessing of the Lord as He leads them in their lives. That leading by the Holy Spirit will bring great joy to their lives as they see that the Lord has chosen to work through their lives. The Lord was leading in the life of Cornelius to prepare the way for the Gentiles to receive the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. In our topic today we are going to see how the Lord worked in the life of Peter to prepare him to take that message to the Gentiles.

Acts 10:9-16 says, “The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.” Here we see that the Lord had to prepare Peter for the coming of the messengers from Cornelius.

This preparation happened as Peter was praying on the housetop about 12:00 noon. Most of the houses in the lands surrounding the area of Judea and Galilee had flat roofs. The rooftop provided an ideal place for a person to get away from the activities going on in the house and spend time alone in prayer and meditation. While Peter was praying, he became very hungry and wanted to eat. However, the food was still being prepared. God caused this great hunger to help Peter learn and understand a very important lesson. The word translated “trance” is something that so shocks the mind that it causes the mind to be filled with great wonder and amazement.

In this trance Peter saw the heaven opened and something that looked like a large sheet tied at each of the four corners come down out of heaven. This thing that looked like a large sheet had all kinds of creatures in it. Some were four footed animals. Others creatures in it were wild animals. There were also creeping creatures crawling in this thing that looked like a large sheet. There were also many birds of the air in this large sheet like thing. These animals, creeping things and birds were unclean animals that the Jews were not allowed to eat. Leviticus 11 talks about these various creatures. Leviticus 11:43-44 says, “You shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creeps; nor shall you make yourselves unclean with them, lest you be defiled by them. ‘For I *am* the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I *am* holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” Other verses in that chapter talk about unclean animals and birds.

Then Peter heard a voice saying, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” Since Peter was a good Jew that had tried to be obedient to the Old Testament law, he had never eaten such animals, birds and creeping things. As a result, Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” The Jewish Christians continued to follow those dietary laws even though they had become followers of Christ. Many years later Paul returned to Jerusalem and greeted the leaders of the church. The leaders of the church said to Paul in Acts 21:20, “And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many

myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law.” Peter certainly felt that way as he looked at that sheet that day.

That sheet like object came down three times and each time the Lord invited Peter to kill and eat. Each time the voice told Peter, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” Each time Peter refused to eat. Then the object was caught back up into heaven. Acts 10:17-18 says, “Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon’s house, and stood before the gate. And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.” Here we see that Peter was really trying to figure out what this vision meant.

Meanwhile the men that had been sent from Caesarea to Joppa had arrived in the town of Joppa. They asked the people of the town where Simon, the tanner, lived and had been directed to his house. Peter was still on the rooftop trying to figure out the meaning of the vision when the men arrived at the gate of the house. These three men followed the instructions of Cornelius and called to ask whether Simon who was surnamed Peter was staying at the house.

Acts 5:19-22 says, “While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are seeking you. “Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.” Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, “Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?” And they said, “Cornelius *the* centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you.” Peter was still thinking about the vision that he had seen when the three men arrived at the house.

Then the Holy Spirit spoke to Peter and let him know that there were three men standing at the door. The Holy Spirit told Peter that these men were looking for him. The Holy Spirit did not tell Peter that these men were Gentiles and had been sent by a Gentile Roman soldier. Instead the Holy Spirit told Peter that he was to go with the three men. He was not to have doubts in his heart or even to ask any questions. Ephesians 2:14-15 says, “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace.” Here we see that the Lord had chosen Peter and Cornelius to be the first to show what God meant by the fact that Christ had broken down this middle wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles and create in Christ one new man.

The Lord told Peter that he was to go with these three men without any doubts in his mind. The word translated “doubting” means to make a distinction or to discriminate. James 2:2-4 says, “For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?” In these verses, the word is translated partiality and talks about those who discriminate against the poor. In Acts Peter was warned not to discriminate against the men who were at the door but he was to go with them. He would soon learn that they were Gentiles.

Peter immediately went down to the men that had been sent to him from Cornelius. He told them that he was the person for whom they were looking. Then he asked them for what reason they had come. They began their request by telling Peter that they had come from Cornelius who was a Roman centurion. As soon as they mentioned that Cornelius was a Roman

centurion, Peter knew that he was talking to Gentiles. Suddenly Peter understood what God had told him in the trance. Acts 10:15 says, “And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” Verse sixteen said this was repeated a total of three times. Christ had told Peter three times in John 21:15-17 to feed His lambs and shepherd His sheep. Since Christ repeated the statement here in Acts three times Peter suddenly realized that the Lord also had lambs and sheep among the Gentiles. Peter had been told that Christ had sent these men.

The three men told Peter that Cornelius was a respected man. He was a just man. He was a man that feared God. He had a good reputation among all of the Jews. However, the last two things that these three men said were the most important things. They said that Cornelius had been divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon Peter to his house. The word translated “divinely instructed” means to be instructed by or commanded by God. Luke 2:26 says, “And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.” God had instructed Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Christ. Here these men said that they had come for Peter because Cornelius had been given instructions by God to send for him.

The three men said that Cornelius had been instructed to hear words from Peter. In John 6:44 Christ had said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.” We are to always remember that the Holy Spirit convicts – John 16:8-11, the Father draws – John 6:44 and the Son seeks and saves – Luke 19:10. Our part in the ministry of evangelism is defined right here. We are to speak the Word of God so that each member of the Trinity can do His part in bringing people to salvation. Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” We want to show our physical and spiritual children how to work with the Trinity in evangelism by sharing the Word of God instead of our own words. The Lord will work through His Word to bring people to true faith in Christ. We become partners with the Trinity as we share the Word of God. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to work with the Trinity in the ministry of evangelism.

The Lord Led Peter to the House of Cornelius

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to work with each member of the Trinity in the ministry of evangelism. We saw that the Holy Spirit convicts, the Father draws and the Son seeks and saves. Our responsibility is to help our children learn to work with each member of the Trinity by sharing the Word of God so that each member of the Trinity can carry out His part in bringing people to true faith through the Word of God that we have shared. In our topic today we are going to see how the Lord continued to work in the life of Peter and through the life of Peter to begin drawing the Gentiles to true faith in Christ.

Acts 10:23 says, “Then he invited them in and lodged *them*. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.” Here we see that Peter immediately began to violate the traditions of the Jews. Acts 10:28 says, “Then he said to them, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” The Jews did not invite Gentiles into their homes and they did not eat with them. The Lord had just shown Peter that He had cleansed the Gentiles and that the Christians were no longer to follow the Jewish traditions that discriminated against the Gentiles. Peter invited them into the house, ate with them and had them spend the night in the house.

The next day Peter went with the three men but he also took six other Jews with him. Peter knew that he would get opposition from the other Jews that followed Christ when he returned to Jerusalem so he prepared for that opposition in advance. Acts 11:9-12 says, “But the voice answered me again from heaven, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ “Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. “At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. “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 prepared for the opposition he knew would come from the other believers by taking these six Jewish believers with him.

Acts 10:24-27 says, “And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped *him*. But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I myself am also a man.” And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together.” Cornelius was eagerly waiting when Peter and the other men arrived at his house. In fact he had also called together his relatives and close friends. Here we see that the Lord gives us an example of how to share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ with whole extended families when we find a person that will invite friends and relatives to their home.

As Peter walked in the door, Cornelius fell down at his feet and worshiped him. Peter immediately stopped him and told him to stand up. Peter made it very clear that he was just a man and had no special powers in himself. This is a key lesson to remember. We are just the person that the Lord has chosen to be the messenger to bring His message and we have no special powers in ourselves. Ephesians 3:20-21 says, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” We are to bring glory to God and not to ourselves.

Peter talked with Cornelius and then they walked together into the house. There Peter and the six Jews who had accompanied him saw that Cornelius had gathered together a large group of relatives and close friends. Acts 10:28-29 says, “Then he said to them, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. “Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?” Peter began by reminding these Gentiles what they already knew about the Jews.

He reminded them that it was unlawful for the Jews for a man to keep company with anyone that was not a Jew. The word translated “keep company” means to join with or to fasten together. This word is used twice in 1 Corinthians 6:16-17 where we read, “Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body *with her*? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*.” In these two verses the word is translated “joined to”. Instead of being joined to a prostitute we are to be joined to the Lord. In the same way Peter said that the Jews were not to be joined together with people who were from a different nation than the Jews.

The word translated “go to” means to come to or to approach. The word is used in Luke 10:34 to describe the actions of the Good Samaritan. That verse says, “So he went to *him* and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.” Here we see that a Samaritan was very willing to come close to a Jew in need and care for him. Normally a Jew would not be as kind to a person of another nation. However, we see here that Peter had come close to a whole household of Gentiles to minister to them.

Peter said that the reason why he had come was because “God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” As a result, Peter had come without any objection as soon as he was sent for.” Here we see that Peter gives us a great example for our own lives. Peter obeyed immediately when God told him that he was to go and share the message of the death and resurrection with the Gentiles. In the same way we want to provide a good example for our children by being sensitive to the Lord and being ready to share that message whenever the Lord provides an opportunity both to people of our own culture and to people of other cultures.

Peter gives us a good example by the next question that he asked. Peter said, “I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?” Here we see that Peter took time to find out what they were ready to hear. Acts 10:30-33 says, “So Cornelius said, “Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. ‘Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.’ “So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.” Cornelius began by telling how the Lord had spoken to him and given him instructions to invite Peter to his house to answer his prayers to the Lord.

Here we see that God is concerned to answer the prayers of people who are seeking God. We saw this illustrated in the previous chapter when Ananias was sent to speak to Saul. We saw that Ananias was obedient and went. 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 see the same thing happening here with Cornelius. We also need to be ready to share the Gospel because we never know whose hearts the Lord has been preparing to hear the message of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Cornelius said in Acts 10:33, ““So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.” The word translated “well” means to speak or do well, beautifully, honorably or excellently. Paul used this word in Philippians 4:14 as he thanked the Philippians for their gift to help him. “Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.” We see that Cornelius was very thankful that Peter would come and share with him, his relatives and his close friends.

Cornelius also said that they were gathered to hear all the things that God had commanded Peter to speak. 1 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.” Here we see that the message that we are commanded to share is the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. In our next topic we will see that was the message that Peter shared with all those who were gathered at the house of Cornelius that day.

We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn that the message that God commands us to share with those who are not Christians is the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. That is the message that every person on the earth needs to hear because that is the only message that can give peace and eternal life. That is the only message that offers forgiveness of sin. For that reason we want to help our children learn to work with the Trinity by sharing that message with all those who are without spiritual life and without hope. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ.

The Lord Began Saving Gentiles

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. Cornelius said that he and those with him were all gathered together to hear the things that God had commanded Peter to speak. We will see that the message that God commanded him to speak is the message that is the most important message for every person on the earth. Notice as you read through this topic whether that is the message that Peter shared that day.

Acts 10:34-36 says, “Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. “The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—.” We see that Peter began his message by saying that he recognized that God does not show partiality. The word translated “show partiality” means one who discriminates. God is not One who discriminates. James 2:8-10 says, “If you really fulfill *the* royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.” Here God says that a person who discriminates is guilty of breaking the whole law.

We go on to see that the plan of God is to save people in every nation. God is looking for people who will fear Him. The word translated “fear” has two meanings. When it is talking about a fear of people it means to be afraid. When it is talking about God it means to have a reverence of God that causes people to be obedient to Him. 1 John 4:18-19 says, “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. We love Him because He first loved us.” We will have a fear or reverence of God when we have responded to His love that was shown us when Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins.

Isaiah 64:6 says to the person who depends on his own righteousness, “But we are all like an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” This verse says that our own efforts to be righteous are like the rags that were used to wrap the open sores of lepers. In contrast, 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.” True belief in Christ means that the righteousness of Christ is placed on us. The Father accepts us when we have the righteousness of Christ on us.

The Jews had heard how to have this righteousness through Christ. God had given that message to the Jews through John the Baptist and then through Christ. When the church began the apostles and those who became followers of Christ received that message and passed that message on to other Jews. Now Peter said that He realized that this message of peace through Christ was for both the Jews and the Gentiles. Later Paul would write in Ephesians 2:14-17, “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.” The Jews were those who were near and had been hearing that message.

The Gentiles were those who were far off and they now began to hear that message in the house of Cornelius.

Acts 10:37-41 says, “That word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.” The Gentiles in Caesarea had heard about the message of John the Baptist that he had come to prepare the way for Christ, the life and ministry of Christ, how God had anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power, the healing and ministry to other needs that Christ had performed in Galilee and Judea, how Christ had healed many that were possessed with demons and they had heard how God was with Christ. Although they had heard about all of these things, it was the Jews that had experienced these things. They had not had that opportunity as Gentiles.

Peter said that he and the others had been witnesses of all these things that Christ had done both in Galilee and Judea. Since Cornelius was a Roman centurion, he and the other Gentiles in Caesarea had also heard about the fact that Christ had died by crucifixion on a cross. However, they needed to hear the rest of the story of what had happened. It is not unusual for a person to die. That happens to everyone. The thing that made the life of Christ different was the fact that God raised Christ from the dead to show that He was satisfied with the payment that Christ had made for sin. 1 John 2:2 says, “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” The word translated “propitiation” means that which satisfies. These Gentiles needed to hear that the Father was satisfied with the payment that Christ had made for the sins of the whole world including all of the Gentiles.

Peter told those gathered at the house of Cornelius that day that God had raised Christ from the dead on the third day. He had shown Christ openly but not to everyone. Instead the Father had shown Christ to witnesses that the Father had chosen. Those witnesses had the opportunity to eat and drink with Christ after He arose from the dead. Probably Peter could remember especially that morning when Christ had invited Peter and six other disciples to eat with Him at the Sea of Galilee. John 21:12-14 says, “Jesus said to them, “Come *and* eat breakfast.” Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, “Who are You?”—knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. This *is* now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.” Peter would never forget that morning because it was after that meal that Christ had personally told Peter feed My lambs and shepherd My sheep.

Acts 10:42-44 says, “And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God *to be* Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins. While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.” Peter next made it clear what God has commanded each follower of Christ to do. One of the things that Christ commanded the disciples is written in Mark 16:15 where we read, “And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” The Gospel is the good news about the death and resurrection of Christ. Later Paul would testify in Acts 20:21, “How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Repentance toward God is turning from sin to God. Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ is coming to God through Christ.

We see that Christ is the One ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. When a person places his or her faith in Christ, that person is given spiritual life and will have their works tested to see which have eternal value and can be rewarded – 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. However, each person that lacks spiritual life will be judged for their sinful works and will experience eternal judgment – Revelation 20:11-15.

The Old Testament prophets gave witness that through the name of Christ that all those who will believe on Him would receive remission of sins. The word translated “remission” means release from bondage, forgiveness or pardon. Micah 7:18-19 says, “Who *is* a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights *in* mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” Christ is the One who made it possible for God to forgive our sin.

Peter was not finished with his message when God interrupted him. Acts 10:44 says, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.” Here we see that the Holy Spirit came on the Gentiles as a group just as He had earlier come on the Jews as a group and the Samaritans as a group the first time. As a result, Acts 10:45-48 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. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why the Holy Spirit came on each of these groups the first time as a group. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain why God accepts all who come to Him by faith.

Peter Reviewed His Vision

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to explain why the Holy Spirit first came on the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles as a group. We also saw that Peter had to learn that God treated all people equally and did not discriminate against the Gentiles or any other group. In order for Peter to learn these things God had revealed that he was to go to the house of Cornelius and explain what God told him to say. In our topic today we will see that the believers back in Jerusalem were upset that Peter had eaten with the Gentiles. As a result, Peter had prepared in advance to explain what the Lord had done.

Acts 11:1-3 says, “Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!” The apostles and all of the believers who lived in Jerusalem heard that the Gentiles had received the Word of God. Although none of the New Testament books had been written yet, the followers of Christ all recognized that the message about the death and resurrection of Christ was the Word of God. In fact Cornelius had also recognized that fact when he said, “Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God,” recorded in Acts 10:33.

When Peter arrived back in the city of Jerusalem, immediately he was confronted by the circumcision. The word translated “circumcision” was used to refer to Jews that had been circumcised according to the instructions in the Old Testament. The word translated “contended” means to make a distinction or to discriminate and was translated by the word doubting in Acts 10:20. By their words these Jewish followers of Christ were trying to separate themselves from Peter and what he had done when he went to the house of Cornelius. They made it very clear that they were against Peter for going to the house of a Gentile and especially for eating with uncircumcised Gentiles.

They showed their anger about what Peter had done when they said in the words of Acts 11:3, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!” Even though Peter had preached on the day of Pentecost and had been one of the key leaders of the early church during the first several years of the church, this action caused many of the believers to be angry. James 2:4 says, “Have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?” In this verse, the word is translated partiality. This verse shows that the accusation made against Peter by many of the followers of Christ showed that they had become judges with evil thoughts. They felt very strongly that Peter was wrong to eat with Gentiles.

We mentioned in our last topic that Peter had taken six other Jews with him that were also circumcised because Peter expected this opposition when he returned to Jerusalem. As a result, we will see that he had also brought these men to Jerusalem with him. Acts 11:4-6 says, “But Peter explained *it* to them in order from the beginning, saying: “I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. “When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.” Here we see that Peter gives us an example of the way to respond in love when other Christians accuse us for doing something with which they do not agree.

We see that Peter began explaining in order the things that had happened before he went to the

house of Cornelius. The word translated “explained” means to declare or explain something in an orderly fashion. Notice how this word is used in two other verses. Acts 18:26 says, “So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” Apollos was preaching about Christ but only knew what John the Baptist had taught about Him. Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and explained to him about the death and resurrection of Christ so that he could teach more accurately. Then Acts 28:23 says, “So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.” Here we see that Paul explained in an orderly fashion to the Jews in Rome all that the Old Testament taught about the death and resurrection of Christ.

When we are controlled by the fear of people we will become angry and argue. When we are led by the love of Christ we will realize that other people need something explained more accurately and will take the time to explain whatever needs to be explained instead of arguing. Our attitude of love and concern will cause most people to listen to what the Word of God says and then the Holy Spirit can work in their hearts and lives to give them fuller understanding. In contrast, if we argue to prove that we are right, we may win the argument but will lose the opportunity to help people grow in their understanding of the Word of God. Christ showed love even to those who disagreed with Him.

Peter began explaining all of the events in an orderly fashion beginning with his time of prayer as he prayed on the housetop in the city of Joppa. Peter said that he was also in a trance or state of amazement as the Lord spoke to him in a vision. He said that he saw an object coming down from heaven that was like a great sheet held by the four corners. Acts 10:10-11 says, “Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth.” Peter said that he saw this object come to him as it descended.

Peter said that he observed this object intently. The word translated “observed it intently” means to fix the eyes on or to gaze upon. This is the same word that is used in Acts 1:10-11 to tell how the disciples looked up into the heavens when Christ returned to heaven. Those verses say, “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.’” Peter looked at this object that looked like a sheet held at the four corners with the same intensity that he had watched Christ return to heaven. The word translated “considered” means to think about so as to understand. The word is translated “observe and look” in Acts 7:31-32 where we read, “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.” The burning bush was so amazing to Moses that he could not fully understand. Peter made it clear that he really tried to understand what God was teaching as he looked at these wild animals, creeping things and birds.

Acts 11:7-10 goes on to say, “And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ “But I said, ‘Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.’ “But the voice answered me again from heaven, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ “Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven.” Here we see that the Lord had to explain this amazing thing to Peter in the same way that Peter was now explaining it to the leaders of the church at Jerusalem. Peter made it very clear that he had never eaten anything that was common or unclean.

Peter said that the voice from heaven said to him, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” Just like the believers in Jerusalem, Peter said that he had tried to argue with the Lord. However, God showed great love to Peter and calmly explained to Peter that whatever God cleanses is not to be called common or unclean by His followers. Here we see an important key for our own spiritual understanding. The night before His crucifixion Christ had told His 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.” We can know that the Holy Spirit will teach us the things that we do not understand if we will seek His help. 1 Corinthians 2:13 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.” Here we see that the Holy Spirit teaches us by helping us learn to compare Scripture with Scripture. Instead of depending on our own understanding, we need to pray and ask the Lord to guide us to other passages of Scripture that will help us to understand what the Lord wants to teach us and help us to understand.

Peter also mentioned that the Lord had given him this vision three times. We need to realize that we will not understand many things the first time that we read them. In fact Peter later wrote in 2 Peter 3:15-16, “And consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 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.” Even Peter found it hard to understand some of the things that Paul wrote when he first read them.

To help our physical and spiritual children come to a clear understanding of what the Lord is teaching, we may need to explain them to them many times. May the Lord richly bless you as you continue to explain various lessons to help your children understand.

Peter Told of the Salvation of the Gentiles

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how to explain difficult passages to others to help them come to a clear understanding of the Word of God. We saw that Peter showed us how to be led by the love of Christ so that we take the time to explain difficult passages instead of arguing because we are controlled by fear. In our topic today we are going to see what happened as Peter took the time to explain to the leaders and the church at Jerusalem how God had shown that the Gentiles were also to receive the message of salvation.

In Acts 11:11-14 we read, “At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.’” Peter had seen the vision where God had told him not to call anything common or unclean. At the very moment that the vision was complete, three men arrived at the house where Peter was staying. Those three men had been sent by Cornelius from the city of Caesarea.

Peter had explained the details of the vision exactly as they had happened and now he said that three men had come looking for him. Peter said that the reason that he had gone with these men was due to the fact that the Holy Spirit told him to go with them. One of the more difficult lessons that Christians need to learn is to be led by the Holy Spirit. In an earlier topic on Acts 8:29 we read, “Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and overtake this chariot.” Here we see that Peter was led by the Spirit. In Galatians 5:18 we read, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”

That raises the question, how can we know that we are led by the Spirit. Two key verses to help us understand the leading of the Holy Spirit are given in Philippians 4:6-7 where we read, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Here we see that we can know the leading of the Holy Spirit when we come to God in prayer with our requests. This prayer should include thanksgiving for the fact that God will give us His peace as He leads us. God will answer that prayer in such a way that both our inner man (the heart) and the mind will experience that peace. Many Christians are driven by fear instead of being led by the peace of God because they are making natural responses to the circumstances of life instead of making supernatural responses and asking the Lord to lead them. The Lord will give us His peace as we yield to Him.

Peter knew that many of the followers of Christ might question whether Peter had been led by the Holy Spirit. As a result, Peter had taken six other believers with him to the house of Cornelius. Peter knew that these men would be able to confirm what the Lord had done in the house of Cornelius. They had all entered the house of Cornelius, the Gentile, because they all had that peace and wanted to be obedient to God.

These six men heard Cornelius tell how he had seen an angel who instructed him, “Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter.” These six men also heard Cornelius say that the angel had said that Peter would tell him words by which he and his entire household

would be saved. We saw in Acts 10:24 that the household that day also included the relatives and close friends of Cornelius. That verse says, “And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.” Here we see that the Lord had chosen to save this entire extended family as well as the close friends.

Acts 11:15-16 goes on to say, “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.’” Here we see that Peter said that the Holy Spirit interrupted his sermon because he had only begun to speak when the Holy Spirit fell on all the people that were gathered at the house of Cornelius that day.

Peter said that what happened at the house of Cornelius was the same thing that had happened to the 120 that were gathered in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. Acts 2:1-4 says, “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.” The word translated “beginning” means the first person or thing in a series. Several passages mention the fact that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. However, Acts 2:4 is the only place that it mentioned that the 120 spoke in tongues (other languages that they did not know). As a result, that was the thing that had happened only at the beginning.

Peter said that when he saw the people in the house of Cornelius speak in tongues that he remembered what Christ had said. Christ had said, “John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” John the Baptist had said in Matthew 3:11-12, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. “His winnowing fan *is* in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” Those who are baptized with the Holy Spirit receive the Holy Spirit from Christ as a gift and the down payment on their eternal salvation. Those who are baptized with fire are those who experience eternal judgment because they have not turned to Christ for salvation and experience eternal judgment as a result.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit means that Christ puts the Holy Spirit in us at the moment of salvation with the exceptions mentioned in the book of Acts where the Holy Spirit came on each group – Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles and Old Testament saints (those who had not yet heard of the death and resurrection of Christ) when that group first was baptized with the Holy Spirit. 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.” Then Romans 8:9 adds, “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.” We are given the Holy Spirit at the moment of our salvation as the down payment and guarantee of that salvation. If we do not have the Holy Spirit, we are not yet Christians.

Acts 11:17-18 says, “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?” When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.” Peter recognized that the gift that the Jews received at the beginning was

the same gift that the Gentiles had received at the house of Cornelius. The people at the house of Cornelius spoke in a language that they did not understand. Peter and the six Jews with him recognized that it was the same gift because those Gentiles praised God in the Hebrew language. The Jews knew that they were praising God and not just making sounds.

Peter said that for him to deny what had happened at the house of Cornelius would be to withstand God. The word translated “withstand” means to forbid, deny or refuse a thing and is usually translated forbid. 1 Thessalonians 2:16 says, “Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up *the measure of* their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.” In this verse, the Jews who rejected Christ forbid the believers from speaking to the Gentiles. Peter said that he could not forbid what God chose to do the first day that the Gentiles received the message of the death and resurrection of Christ.

The Jewish believers who had contended with Peter when he first began to speak to them became silent when they recognized that what had happened was the same thing that had happened in their lives the day the Holy Spirit first came on them. Then they began to give glory to God. Instead of trying to shame Peter any longer for eating with Gentiles, they began to glorify God for what God had chosen to do in the lives of the Gentiles.

That day the Jewish believers recognized that God had also granted to the Gentiles the opportunity to repent of their sin and receive the gift of eternal life. The word translated “repentance” means a change of mind and also produces a change in attitudes and actions. 1 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.” This change of mind caused the Thessalonians to turn to God from idols. The change in attitude and actions caused them to serve the living and true God. The result when any person repents of the sin of unbelief is that they receive the gift of eternal life. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to clearly explain the meaning of repentance and the fact that true repentance causes people to place their faith in the death and resurrection of Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain the meaning of repentance and faith clearly.

The Lord Spread the Church to Antioch

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand why the Gentiles spoke with tongues the first time that they received the Holy Spirit. We also saw that we want to help our children learn to clearly explain the meaning of repentance so that others will know how to turn from their sin of unbelief and come to God through Christ. In our topic today we are going to see that the church also began to spread to Gentiles in other areas. We will see what the Lord chose to do in the city of Antioch which was the third largest city in the Roman Empire.

Acts 11:19-21 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. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” We saw that after Stephen was stoned to death that a great persecution arose against the church and many of the believers fled to other areas. Acts 8:4 says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Three areas where the people fled were to Phoenicia (the coastal area north of Galilee), to Cyprus (a large island about 60 miles southwest of Antioch) and to Antioch (the third largest city in the Roman Empire and located more than 200 miles north of Galilee). The only cities in the Roman Empire that were larger than Antioch were Rome and Alexandria.

Here we see that they were preaching the Word but only to other Jews until some of them came to the city of Antioch. In Antioch the believers began sharing the message of the death and resurrection of Christ with the Greek speaking people of that city. We see that the Lord chose to work in a mighty way as the believers began to share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ with Gentiles living in the city of Antioch. We read that a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Psalm 67:4-5 says, “Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations on earth. Selah. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You.” Truly there was joy in heaven as the Lord saw more Jews begin sharing the Word of God and the message of salvation with the Gentiles.

The leaders of the church at Jerusalem also responded when they heard what the Lord was doing in the city of Antioch. Acts 11:22-24 says, “Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.” The leaders in Jerusalem had watched Barnabas grow in his spiritual leadership and realized that he was a man who would be an effective teacher of those who were Gentiles and spoke the Greek language since Acts 4:36 says that Barnabas was a Levite from the country of Cyprus where the Greek language and culture was dominant.

When Barnabas arrived in Antioch and saw how the Lord had showed His grace to the Greeks in the city of Antioch he rejoiced with great joy. He immediately began to encourage these new believers in their spiritual growth. A purpose is something that is determined. This word is used of God in Ephesians 1:11 where we read, “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.” Barnabas encouraged the believers in Antioch to determine in their hearts

to continue with the Lord.

We learn about three characteristics of the godly character of Barnabas. He was a good man. The word translated “good” means that which is honorable or excellent. We saw in chapter nine that Dorcas was full of good works. Barnabas was also a man full of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 6:3 we read, “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.” We see that the seven chosen in Acts were full of the Holy Spirit. Then Acts 6:5 says, “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.” In these two verses we see that Stephen was a man full of the Holy Spirit and faith. These same characteristics were present in the life of Barnabas.

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.” Barnabas had introduced Saul to the leaders in the church at Jerusalem about ten years earlier. At that time Saul was only in Jerusalem for fifteen days. Then 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.” Although Barnabas had probably not seen Saul during those ten years, Barnabas did not forget Saul. He knew that Paul would be an ideal partner to help these Greeks who were new believers in their spiritual growth. As a result, Barnabas left for Tarsus to try and find Saul.

The Lord led Barnabas to Saul and they returned to the city of Antioch. There they taught the new believers for an entire year. During this time they taught a great many people because there were many who had become followers of Christ. In fact so many became followers of Christ and had their lives so changed by what they were learning that those who rejected Christ called them Christians. The word “Christian” was originally used as a term to mock and make fun of those who followed Christ because it meant “little christs” or followers of Christ. Since this term was used to make fun of Christians, Peter later wrote in 1 Peter 4:16, “Yet if *anyone* suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.” Instead of feeling ashamed when people call us Christians, we should glorify God that our lives are so changed that the people who see us would call us “little christs”. That name is actually a real compliment when it is spoken about us because people realize that our lives are so different.

We see that one of the ways that these new Christians changed was that they became concerned for Christians in other places. Acts 11:27-30 says, “And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.” A number of Christians came from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of these men was a man named Agabus. In Acts 21:10-11 we see that he made another important prophecy.

Agabus made an important prophecy while visiting Antioch. He said that the Holy Spirit had shown him that there would be a great famine. Ephesians 2:19-20 says, “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*.” The prophets in the Old Testament gave us the written Word of God. Before the New Testament was written, certain prophets predicted events

that would happen in the near future. Both the apostles and the prophets provided the foundation upon which the church is built.

The event that Agabus prophesied was fulfilled a short time later during the reign of Claudius Caesar. He was the emperor of Rome from 41-54 A.D. In the Old Testament one of the requirements given to prophets was that every single prophecy that a prophet prophesied had to come true. Deuteronomy 18:22 says, “When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” In the Old Testament false prophets whose prophecies did not come true were to be put to death. Here we see that the prophecy made by Agabus came true during the reign of Claudius Caesar.

When the disciples in Antioch heard about the coming worldwide famine they became concerned for the Christians that lived in Jerusalem. Those Christians had sold their lands and possessions to help believers from other places learn to share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. Now these Christians in Antioch saw an opportunity to share with those Christians so they could buy food during the famine. We see that each person gave according to his ability. Some had more that they could share and others had less but they all gave according to their ability. This is one of many key examples of the giving of Christians in the New Testament. They gave because their hearts were controlled by the love of Christ.

Then the church at Antioch sent this gift to the elders at Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. Here we see that the men who had helped these Christians in their spiritual growth were the ones the church selected to take their gift to Jerusalem. We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to give to the Lord according to their ability because giving brings blessing to both those who give and those who receive. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to give to help others.

The Church Saw James Killed and Peter Imprisoned

In our last topic, we saw how the Lord caused the church to spread to the Greek speaking people in the city of Antioch. We saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the desire of the Lord to spread the message of the death and resurrection of Christ to the people of all nations. It was in the city of Antioch that the followers of Christ were first called Christians. In our topic today we are going to see that new persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem began to develop.

The persecution of the church in Jerusalem in the earlier chapters came from the Jewish religious leaders. In our topic today we will see that persecution started to come from the Roman government. After the time of the birth of Christ, Herod the Great tried to kill Christ when he was a young child. Matthew 2:16 says, "Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men." Then one of the sons of Herod the Great named Herod Antipas ruled Galilee at the time of the death of Christ. Luke 23:8 says, "Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long *time* to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him." The Herod mentioned here was Herod Agrippa I, a grandson of Herod the Great. Herod Agrippa I ruled Jerusalem from 37-44 A.D and like the other members of the family was very fearful.

Here we see that Herod Agrippa I began to persecute the church. Acts 12:1-3 says, "Now about that time Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread." The word translated "harass" means to harm, do evil or mistreat. Stephen used this word twice in his sermon in Acts 7 to talk about the way that Pharaoh mistreated the Jews when they were in Egypt. Then in Acts 14:2 the word is translated poisoned. That verses says, "But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren." Here we see that the first thing that Herod did to harass the church was to kill James, the brother of John, with the sword.

Herod was trying to get the Jewish religious leaders to speak well of him and speak for him to the Roman Emperor. He saw that when he killed James that these religious leaders were very pleased. As a result, Herod arrested Peter as well. Just like his grandfather before him, Herod Agrippa I was willing to kill innocent people in order to hold on to political power and try to gain additional power. Jeremiah described the heart of man very well in Jeremiah 17:9 where we read, "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" This Herod did not even recognize the sinfulness of his own heart. He was willing to kill innocent people in order to increase his own power. Through the years the world has seen many similar rulers who will do whatever it takes to try to control other people. Unless an individual repents of the wickedness of his or her heart, such individuals will one day experience the judgment of God on their lives and that judgment will last for eternity.

Since Herod Agrippa I was doing what he did to try and gain favor with the Jewish religious leaders, he realized that he should wait until the Days of Unleavened Bread came to an end before he killed Peter. The Days of Unleavened Bread began each year with the Passover. Exodus 12:13-15 says, "Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you *are*."

And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt. So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.” Herod knew that this was an important feast for the Jewish religious leaders and so he thought that it would be best to wait until after this week to kill Peter.

As a result, Acts 12:4 says, “So when he had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.” Herod wanted to make sure that Peter did not escape during this time so he ordered four squads of soldiers to guard him. A normal Roman squad used to guard a prisoner had four soldiers in the squad. Two of these soldiers would be chained to the prisoner, one on each side. The other two soldiers would stand outside the door of the cell to make certain that the prisoner could not escape. Since the Romans had four night watches, one squad would guard a prisoner in this way during each watch of the night. Herod really wanted to make certain that Peter could not escape.

The plan of Herod was to bring Peter out to the people as soon as the Feast of the Passover was over. Here we see that Herod was a ruler that was controlled by fear. He had seen that the Jewish religious leaders were pleased when James was killed and he was sure that they would be even more pleased if Peter was killed. As a result, Herod wanted to make this a public event and execution in order to gain favor with these Jewish leaders. However, Herod did not know either the peace of God or the plan of God.

In Acts 12:5-6 we read, “Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison.” Herod was very confident that Peter would not escape. Acts 12:10 says, “When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.” In addition to the regular security and guard posts inside the prison, we see that there was also an iron gate that would stop anyone who got past all of the guards.

Herod had strong Roman soldiers and a very secure prison. However, he did not know that there was one weapon that he could not fight. We see that constant prayer was being offered to God for Peter by the people of the church. Ephesians 6:12-13 says, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” One of the things to notice about the spiritual armor mentioned in Ephesians 6 is the fact that most of the armor is defensive and that spiritual defense is very different from that of the world.

The defensive armor includes truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation. Ephesians 6:17-18 say, “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” Here we see that as Christians we have two weapons that the Lord has given us to fight spiritual battles. The first of these is the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the

division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” This is important because the Word of God has power that our words do not have.

However, the most important weapon for spiritual battle is the second weapon which is prayer. The early church realized that it had no power to stop Herod from killing Peter just as he had killed James. However, they knew that the Lord has all power and authority. As a result, we see that the early church realized that the one thing that they could do was pray for the Lord to work instead of trying to depend on their own wisdom or strength. We will see how the Lord answered their prayer in our next topic. Here we see a key lesson that every Christian needs to learn for today. Mark 10:27 says, “But Jesus looked at them and said, “With men *it is* impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.” Without Christ we can do nothing – John 15:5. With Christ we can do all things – Philippians 4:13. Until Christians learn this important fact, we will accomplish nothing. The world has absolutely no understanding of the power of prayer.

We also see that Peter could have complete peace even though Herod was planning to kill him. The night before Herod planned to kill Peter, he was sound asleep. He had no fear because he was prepared for whatever the Lord chose to allow to happen in his life. Peter understood the meaning of Psalm 31:14-15 which says, “But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, “You *are* my God.” My times *are* in Your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me.” He knew that the Lord would deliver him in one of two ways. Peter knew that the Lord could choose to deliver him by taking him to heaven as He had done with James. He also knew that the Lord could deliver him out of the prison. Peter had complete peace and was sound asleep because he knew that either way the Lord would deliver him. Peter had two chains that were attached to the two soldiers that were in the cell with him. There were also two guards out in front of the door of his cell to prevent anyone from trying to free him.

Here we see a key lesson that we want to show our physical and spiritual children by our example. We can experience the peace of God in any situation when we are depending on the Lord instead of trying to depend on our own strength or wisdom. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to experience the peace of God.

The Church Saw Peter Delivered

In our last topic, we saw that Herod Agrippa I began to persecute the church. He saw that when he killed James, the brother of John, that the Jewish religious leaders were very happy. As a result, we see that the next person that he arrested was Peter. We saw that the early church had constant prayer for Peter. In our topic today we are going to see how the Lord answered that prayer.

We saw in our last topic that Peter was sleeping between two soldiers the night before he was to be put to death. At the same time the church was in constant prayer for Peter. In Acts 12:7-10 we read, “Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by *him*, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, “Arise quickly!” And his chains fell off *his* hands. Then the angel said to him, “Gird yourself and tie on your sandals”; and so he did. And he said to him, “Put on your garment and follow me.” So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.” Sometime during the night an angel sent from the Lord stood beside Peter. This caused the prison to be filled with light.

However, Peter had such peace that the light did not even wake up Peter. As a result, the angel had to hit Peter in the side to even awaken Peter. Peter had such peace as he faced death that he was in a very sound sleep. The angel told Peter to get up quickly. Immediately the two chains that were attached Peter and his two guards fell from the hands of Peter. The angel then told Peter to get dressed and tie on his sandals. Here we see that the Lord had put all of the guards to sleep so soundly that none of them woke up even though the cell was filled with light and the ends of the chains attached to Peter fell to the floor. After Peter was dressed, the angel told Peter to put on his coat and follow the angel. Peter thought he saw a vision and did not realize what was happening.

Peter actually thought that he was seeing a vision in his sleep. However, he got up and followed the angel. They walked past the place where the first and the second guard were standing. The Lord had also put these guards into a very sound sleep. There was a large iron gate that separated the prison from the street of the city. The heavy iron gate moved on its own without anyone even touching it. As a result, Peter and the angel just walked through where the gate had been and were now on the street in front of the prison. The angel walked down one street with Peter and then departed. Suddenly Peter realized that he was not just seeing a vision. It had really happened and he was now free and was outside of the prison. The Lord had sent an angel to set him free.

Acts 12:11-12 says, “And when Peter had come to himself, he said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and *from* all the expectation of the Jewish people.” So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.” We see that Peter was surprised when he realized that three things had happened. First, he realized that the Lord had sent his angel. Peter had seen the Lord work in many different ways including a similar event when an angel opened the prison and told the apostles to go back and speak in the temple in Acts 5:19-20.

Second, Peter realized that the Lord had delivered him from the hand of Herod. This was

probably much more of a surprise than the fact that the angel had let him out of prison. Herod had already killed James. Many years later Paul spoke to Herod Agrippa 2, the son of this Herod. Paul told that son and his sister, Bernice, in Acts 26:17-18, "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.'" Paul did not mention the fact that the Lord had earlier delivered Peter from their own father and the Jewish people.

Third, we see that the Lord delivered Peter from all the expectation of the Jewish people. With the killing of James and the arrest of Peter, the Jewish religious leaders thought that Herod was now a strong supporter of their efforts to destroy the leaders of the church. Instead they would learn the next day that God had stopped the plans of both Herod and the Jewish religious leaders to get rid of Peter. Peter would later write in 2 Peter 2:9, "*Then* the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment." Peter certainly knew how the Lord had delivered him from those who were seeking to destroy his life.

When Peter fully realized that he was out of prison, he started thinking where to go. After thinking for a moment Peter was sure that he would find some Christians at the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Colossians 4:10 says, "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)." Here we see that this particular Mary was a relative of Barnabas. The fact that Peter knew that there would be Christians praying at the home of Mary meant that she was well known in the church at Jerusalem.

When Peter got to the house of Mary he knocked on the door. Acts 12:13-15 says, "And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of *her* gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel." Rhoda had asked who was knocking at the door. When Peter answered Rhoda recognized the voice of Peter. Rhoda got so excited when she recognized the voice of Peter that she forgot to open the door. Instead she ran into the house where the people were praying for Peter and told them that Peter was at the door.

Apparently those praying did not like to have their prayers for Peter interrupted as they told Rhoda, "You are beside yourself." The word that is translated "You are beside yourself" means to not be in your right mind. This probably tells us about the way that the Christians were praying for Peter. They were probably praying that Peter would be faithful as he was put to death rather than praying that the will of the Lord would be done in the life of Peter. Here we see that the Lord still had more work for Peter to do and so the Lord had answered their prayers in an unexpected way by releasing Peter from the prison. This is an important lesson for us to learn about prayer. We need to pray that the Lord will carry out His will. We do have a wonderful promise in Romans 8:26-27 which says, "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*." The Lord did answer their prayer according to His will.

Rhoda kept insisting that Peter was at the door even though those in the prayer meeting told her that it was his angel. Meanwhile Acts 12:16-17 says, "Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished. But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And

he said, “Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren.” And he departed and went to another place.” Since no one had opened the door, Peter just kept knocking. Finally someone did open the door and let Peter into the house. Those who were gathered for prayer for Peter were astonished when they saw that it was actually Peter that had been knocking at the door.

The people were all excited and probably everyone started asking questions at the same time. Peter knew that the time was short because they would soon find him missing at the prison. As a result, Peter held up his hand and motioned for everyone to be quiet. Then Peter explained to those present how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. This is important. We need to help people understand how the Lord works in our lives. Peter had earlier done this when he explained how the Lord led him to the house of Cornelius. Acts 11:12-14 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. “And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, ‘who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.’” Here Peter told them what the Lord had done in bringing him out of the prison.

Peter told those present to go tell James and the rest of the brethren. This is not James, the brother of John because we read in verse two that he had been put to death. Instead this is James, the half-brother of Christ. This James is first mentioned 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?” In Acts 15 we will see that this James had become the key leader in the church in Jerusalem. He later is the one who wrote the book of James. After telling what had happened, Peter left and went to another place.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the fact that the Holy Spirit will also cause our prayers to be in agreement with the will of God because we do not always know how to pray either. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn how the Holy Spirit works with our prayers.

The Church Saw God Judge Herod

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn that the Lord may choose to answer our prayers in ways that we do not expect. We also saw that the Holy Spirit understands our prayers and prays for us so that our prayers are in agreement with the will of God instead of our own will. This is why God sometimes answers our prayers in a very different way than we expect. We also saw how Herod persecuted the leaders of the church. In our topic today we will see how the Lord judged Herod because of the fact that he did not give glory to God.

In our last topic, we saw how an angel led Peter out of the prison. In Acts 12:18-19 we read, "Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there*." When morning came the Roman soldiers realized that Peter was no longer in the prison. The word translated "stir" means confusion of mind or great confusion. Here we see that the soldiers were very upset when they realized that Peter was no longer in the prison.

The soldiers had a good reason to be very upset. The Roman law said that if a prisoner escaped that the soldiers who were guarding that prisoner would receive the punishment that the prisoner was supposed to have received. Acts 16:27 says, "And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself." Here we see that the jailor in Philippi was ready to commit suicide because he thought that the prisoners had fled and that he would receive the punishment that the prisoners in that prison were to receive. This makes it easy to understand why the soldiers were very upset.

When Herod heard that Peter was gone he immediately ordered a search for Peter. Peter knew that would happen and that is why he had gone to another place after telling those gathered at the house of Mary what the Lord had done. As a result, those who were searching for Peter could not find him. Then Herod examined the guards. Since they did not know that the Lord had released Peter, the guards had no idea what had happened to Peter. In his anger, Herod immediately gave the command that the soldiers should be put to death. Then Herod left Judea and went to Caesarea. The city had a beautiful harbor and was located on the Mediterranean Sea. Caesarea was actually the Roman capital for that region and had been named in honor of Augustus Caesar. The city had a large number of Roman soldiers stationed in that city and many of the other people that lived in the city were Greeks.

After Herod arrived in the city of Caesarea he had some visitors come to see him from the cities of Tyre and Sidon. Acts 12:20-23 says, "Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's *country*. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God." Here we see that Herod had been angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon for some time.

Tyre and Sidon were seacoast cities north of Caesarea that were located in what is the present country of Lebanon. The Phoenicians who lived in these two cities had made their living for hundreds of years by sending their trading ships throughout the Mediterranean Sea. The people

of Galilee had to depend on the ships from these two cities to bring them the things that they needed from other countries. However, the cities of Tyre and Sidon were very dependent upon the area of Galilee for food. As a result, the visitors came to Caesarea because Herod was very angry with them and they were afraid that he would cut off their food supply.

They began their visit by making friends with Blastus because he was the personal aide of Herod. They told Blastus that they wanted to have peace with Herod. This led to an official meeting with Herod. On the day arranged for that meeting, Herod arrived at the meeting wearing the clothes that were usually worn by a king. This was the same kind of clothing that Herod Agrippa I put on Christ when he and his soldiers mocked Christ. Luke 23:11-12 says, “Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked *Him*, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other.” Here we see that Herod Agrippa 2 acted and wanted to be treated like he was a very important king.

His other actions that day also showed the pride that controlled Herod. Herod sat on his throne and made a speech to the people that had come to him from Tyre and Sidon. Many years earlier, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon demonstrated the same pride. Daniel 4:30-33 says, “The king spoke, saying, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?” While the word *was still* in the king’s mouth, a voice fell from heaven: “King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling *shall be* with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.” That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles’ *feathers* and his nails like birds’ *claws*.” Here we see that God judged Nebuchadnezzar for his pride because he had been warned to repent and did not.

In the same way we see the great pride of Herod. In order to make peace with Herod and assure their food supply, the people of Tyre and Sidon were shouting, “And the people kept shouting, “The voice of a god and not of a man!” Here we see that the pride of Herod caused him to enjoy these words and he did not try to stop the people from their shouting. However, God brought judgment on him just as he had many years earlier brought judgment on Nebuchadnezzar. Verse 23 says, “Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God.” The Lord sent an angel to bring immediate judgment to Herod. Romans 1:21-23 says, “Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.” In his pride, Herod accepted the glory that belongs only to God.

We also see the way that Herod died. We read that he was eaten by worms and died. According to Josephus who was a historian during that period of time these worms caused Herod to suffer with terrible stomach pains before he died five days later. This is a warning that mankind cannot take the glory that belongs only to God and not experience the judgment of God.

Acts 12:24-25 says, “But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.” Here we see that regardless of what was happening with the political leaders, the Lord caused the teaching of the Word of God to increase. This is a key to remember. The Lord is the One who causes the Word to spread and multiply. In Acts 6:1 and 6:7 we see that the Lord caused the number of disciples to multiply. In Acts 9:31 the Lord caused

the number of churches to multiply. Here we see that the Lord also caused the Word to grow and multiply. The plan of the Lord will be carried out and no political leader can stop His plan.

Paul and Barnabas had delivered the gift to the church at Jerusalem to help them during the time of the famine predicted by Agabus. The word translated “fulfilled” means to fill up or to complete. The word translated “ministry” means service and especially the service of carrying out the commands of others. In Acts 20:24 Paul used this same word as he spoke to the elders at Ephesus. Acts 20:22-24 says, “And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” In Acts 20 Paul made it clear that he was carrying out the ministry or service that the Lord had for him. Here we see that Barnabas and Saul were carrying out the ministry that the Lord and the church at Antioch delegated to them. In the same way we are to carry out the service that the Lord commands us to do.

Barnabas and Saul also took Mark with them as they returned to Antioch. Here we see that they were going to begin showing him how to minister among the Gentiles. In the same way we also want to show our physical and spiritual children how to minister among various ethnic groups. Cross cultural ministry is best learned by seeing the example of someone who is carrying out a ministry to different cultures. We prepare our children so that they are able to expand their ministry to various cultures by giving them an example to follow. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to minister to other cultures.

Christ Led the Church to Expand Its Vision

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to carry out the ministry that the Lord has for them. The Lord has prepared each of us for a unique ministry. We also saw that the Lord judged Herod for his pride. As a part of their ministry Saul and Barnabas took Mark with them back to the city of Antioch. This gave them the opportunity to show him how to minister to different cultures. Today we will see how the Lord expanded that ministry to other places beyond the city of Antioch.

Barnabas and Saul had been the leaders that had helped the church at Antioch in its early development. However, that leadership team expanded as additional men became a part of that leadership team. Acts 13:1 says, “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.” Here we see that the leadership team in the city of Antioch now included five men. One of the things that we notice is that none of these men were from the city of Antioch. We mentioned in an earlier topic that Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. It is not uncommon in large cities to have church leadership teams from many different backgrounds and cultures.

We see that these men are called prophets and teachers. We saw in a previous topic that Agabus was a prophet. He had come from Jerusalem to the city of Antioch and told the Christians in Antioch that there would soon be a famine. As a result, the church at Antioch collected a gift to help the Christians in Jerusalem and sent it to the leaders of the church by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. In the case of Agabus he predicted an event that would happen in the near future. He predicted another event in Acts 21:10-11 where we read, “And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.’” Until the New Testament was complete, there was a need for individuals who could predict events that would happen in the near future as Agabus did in these passages.

In Acts 15:32 we see that prophets had other ministries as well. That verse says, “Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.” 1 Corinthians 14:29 says, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.” Then 1 Corinthians 14:32-33 adds, “And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” Ephesians 3:5-6 says, “Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” Taking all of these passages, we see that prophets encouraged, strengthened, and had their spirits in subjection so that they brought peace and not confusion. Prophets together with the apostles also revealed how the Jews and Gentiles are one in the church. In fact the apostles and prophets together provided the foundation for the church as Ephesians 2:20 says, “Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*.”

We see that the leadership team in Antioch was very diverse. We saw in Acts 4:36 that Barnabas was a Levite from Cyprus. The word translated “Niger” means black so it is possible that Simeon was from Africa. Lucius was from the city of Cyrene in North Africa. Manaen had been brought up with Herod, the tetrarch. Herod the tetrarch was the Herod mentioned in

the Gospels so Manean had grown up in the home of Herod the Great who tried to kill Christ as a baby. Saul had grown up in the city of Tarsus. As you can see this leadership team had great variety in their backgrounds.

Acts 13:2-3 goes on to say, “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.” The word translated “ministered” is different than the normal word translated ministered. This word is only used three times in the New Testament. Hebrews 10:11 says, “And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.” In this verse, the word talks about the Old Testament priests. Romans 15:26-27 says, “For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.” We see that this verse talks about the fact that the gift of the Macedonians for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem is called an act of worship. Here in Acts 13 the context shows they were praying. The leadership team was worshiping the Lord in prayer and fasting.

It was while they were praying and fasting that the Holy Spirit said, “Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” The word translated “separate” means to set apart or to appoint. Here we see that the Holy Spirit told the leadership team to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which God had called them. We will see throughout the rest of the book of Acts that this work involved taking the Gospel to the Gentiles.

The leadership team at Antioch did three things before they sent Barnabas and Saul out for the work that the Lord had for them. They fasted. This meant that they did not eat so that they could devote this time to prayer. They prayed. This time in concentrated prayer was very important as Barnabas and Saul would face many new situations as they traveled to various cities of the Gentiles and would need great wisdom from the Lord as they faced many different situations. They laid their hands on them. 1 Timothy 4:14 says, “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.” The laying on of hands was a way that the leaders of the church have shown their support and identification with a person that was called to a special ministry by the Lord. Once the leadership team had done these three things they sent Barnabas and Saul out to the work God had called them to do.

Acts 13:4-5 says, “So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as *their* assistant.” A key thing to notice is the fact that Barnabas and Saul were sent out by the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:18 says, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” The law drives people because the law shows people when they are guilty of sin. Galatians 5:1 says, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” In contrast, the Holy Spirit leads people. 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.” Here we see that the Holy Spirit sets us free to serve one another in love.

Barnabas and Saul then left Antioch and went first to Seleucia. Seleucia was about 16 miles from the city of Antioch and served as the harbor for the city of Antioch because it was close to the mouth of the Orontes River. There they went on board a ship and sailed to the island of Cyprus. 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 the very first place where Barnabas and Saul went when the Holy Spirit called them to a special

work was right back to the island where Barnabas had lived. In many large cities the first place where people go when the Holy Spirit sends them out is back to the area where they grew up so that they can share the Gospel with relatives and friends. That is the first place the Lord led Barnabas and Saul.

Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. It was only about a two day boat trip from Antioch. The island also had a large Jewish population. As a result, as Barnabas and Saul visited the various cities the first place that they went was to the Jewish synagogues. This was important for two reasons. First, Paul wrote in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." Barnabas and Saul always gave the Jews the first opportunity to respond to the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. Second, there were also many Gentile proselytes in every city who attended the Jewish synagogues to learn more about the Old Testament. Acts 13:43 says, "Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God." In every city the greatest initial response to the message of the death and resurrection of Christ came from these Gentile proselytes.

Barnabas and Saul also took along John as their helper. As we mentioned in an earlier topic, John was the nephew of Barnabas. Barnabas and Saul realized the importance of showing both physical and spiritual children how to serve the Lord. John was like a spiritual son to Barnabas and Barnabas wanted to show him how to become effective in ministry to other cultures. Nearly 40 individuals are listed who traveled with Paul at various times in his ministry. Paul realized that the best way to train younger Christians for ministry was by example. May the Lord richly bless you as you also take younger Christians with you and show them how to minister.

Christ Stopped the Opposition of a Sorcerer

In our last topic, we saw that the Lord wants us to help our physical and spiritual children understand how the Holy Spirit guided the leadership team in the church at Antioch to send out Barnabas and Saul to take the Gospel to other places. We saw that the Lord spoke to the leadership team of the church during a time when they were praying and fasting. We saw that as Barnabas and Saul went to each city that they began in each city by sharing the message of the death and resurrection of Christ in the Jewish synagogues. Today we will see what the Lord did as Barnabas and Saul met opposition in Paphos.

Barnabas and Saul had begun their ministry in the city of Salamis near the eastern end of the island of Cyprus. When they came to Paphos they were at a city on the western end of the island and the city that was the Roman capital of the island. Acts 13:6-8 says, “Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name *was* Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.” Here we are introduced to a man by the name of Bar-Jesus who was a magician or wise man. He was called by the name of Elymas which is the Arab word for magician.

The word translated “sorcerer” means a wise man or a magician. The word is used six times in the New Testament. Four times it is used in Matthew 2 to speak of the wise men from the east that came to visit Christ after his birth. The other two times the word is used are both in these verses. A magician or wise man could follow either good or evil. In Matthew it spoke of wise men that followed God and went to see Christ as a young child. However, we see here that Elymas is called a false prophet so he used his knowledge to practice evil. We met a similar man in Acts 8:9-10 where we read, “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.” Here we see that Simon had also used his knowledge to practice evil.

The Roman governor or proconsul named Sergius Paulus wanted to have Barnabas and Saul explain the Word of God to him. We read that he was an intelligent or prudent man. The word translated “intelligent” means having understanding, wise or educated. We read that he gave Barnabas and Saul a special invitation to explain the Word of God to him. However, Elymas did everything possible to resist and oppose the things that Barnabas and Saul were explaining from the Word of God. Because Elymas was a false prophet, he was serving Satan.

We see what happened in Acts 13:9-11 where we read, “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? “And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.” And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.” We notice several things in these verses. We see that Saul begins to use the name of Paul. Saul was a Jewish name and was the name of the first king of Israel. However, Paul is a Roman name and is the name that Paul used for the rest of ministry as the rest of his ministry would be primarily to the Gentiles.

From this point on we will see that Paul became the leader of the team instead of Barnabas. Verses 13 says, “Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in

Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.” However, the most important thing that we see, in these verses, is what the Lord did in the life of Elymas. Paul was full of the Holy Spirit as he spoke to Elymas. Paul gave a short description of the ungodly character of Elymas. Paul told Elymas that he was full of deceit. The word translated “deceit” means guile, deceit or craftiness. It is the opposite of the character of Christ. 1 Peter 2:22 describes the character of Christ and says, “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth”

Paul also told Elymas that he was full of all fraud. The word translated “fraud” meant that he was evil both in his thinking and in his acting. In addition, Paul told Elymas that he was the son of the devil. In John 8:44 Christ told the Jewish religious leaders, “You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not* stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it.” We see that Paul said the same thing to Elymas in this verse.

Then Paul told Elymas that he was an enemy of all righteousness. The word translated “righteousness” means that which is acceptable and approved by God. Here we see that Elymas was an enemy of everything that is acceptable and approved by God. Finally Paul told Elymas that he was continually perverting the right ways of God. The word translated “pervert” means to plot to turn a person aside from the saving purposes and plans of God. Paul later warned the elders in Ephesus that they would have to deal with individuals like Elymas. Acts 20:30 says, “Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” Here we see that the reason people speak perverse things is due to the fact that they are trying to get people to follow them instead of following God.

Then Paul told Elymas that the Lord would bring a temporary judgment on him for his sin. Paul told Elymas, “And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.” Paul knew what this temporary judgment was like because he had experienced it in his own life. Acts 9:8-9 says, “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.” Suddenly Elymas had to think about something completely different than trying to keep Sergius Paulus from placing his faith in Christ. Instead he had to begin searching for someone who would lead him by the hand.

We see that no person can prevent the work of the Trinity when the Trinity is drawing someone to Christ. In John 16:8 Christ said about the Holy Spirit, “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” Earlier in John 6:44 Christ had said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.” The Holy Spirit and the Father had both fulfilled their work in the ministry of evangelism. Now it was time for Christ to carry out His ministry in evangelism. Luke 19:10 says, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Now we see that Christ carried out His work of evangelism in the life of Sergius Paulus.

Acts 13:12-13 goes on to say, “Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord. Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.” Here we see that Christ had finished His work of seeking and now the proconsul believed and was saved. Paul and Barnabas had worked with the Trinity by explaining the Word of God. The Holy Spirit convicted the proconsul as he thought about the Word of God. The Father chose to blind Elymas to draw the proconsul to Christ. Then the proconsul was astonished at the teaching of the Word of God.

This is a key reminder for us in the work of evangelism. Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Then Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Each member of the Trinity carries out His work in the ministry of evangelism when the Word of God is taught. Paul and Barnabas had done what the Lord tells each of us to do. They had shared the Word of God and then the Trinity had worked through that Word. God fulfilled His Word in Isaiah 55:11 which says, “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.”

After Paul, Barnabas and Mark finished their ministry on the island of Cyprus, they sailed from there and came to the city of Perga in Pamphylia. Perga was about 200 miles northwest of the city of Paphos on Cyprus so it would have taken them a few days to sail to that city. That city was also the capital of the Roman province of Pamphylia. Notice that Paul and Barnabas were visiting the key cities in each of the areas where they traveled. That was true throughout the ministry of Paul as we see the various cities mentioned in the book of Acts. At Perga we also see that Mark decided that he was going back to Jerusalem. His reason for leaving and going back to Jerusalem is not given but it would later have an impact on all three men as we see in Acts 15:36-41. However, we see that at this point that it did not affect this trip because Paul and Barnabas knew that they were called by God for this work of ministry and they continued to carry out the work that God had called them to do. We also want to show our physical and spiritual children the importance of carrying out the work that the Lord has called each of us to do in our own service for the Lord. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to carry out the work that the Lord has called you to do.

Paul Was Given the Opportunity to Speak in Antioch of Pisidia

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to minister by taking them with us as we serve the Lord. We saw the example of Paul and Barnabas as they took Mark with them as they shared the message of the death and resurrection of Christ on the island of Cyprus. We also saw how Paul and Barnabas continued to carry out the work to which the Lord had called them even after Mark returned to Jerusalem. Today we are going to learn how the Lord provided the opportunity for Paul to speak in the Jewish synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. This Antioch was located in the mountains of what today would be the southern area of the country of Turkey.

There were Jews scattered throughout many of the cities of the Roman Empire. In order to survive as a people even though they were scattered among the nations, the Jews had decided that any time there were ten or more Jewish men in a city that they must build a synagogue. Throughout the week the synagogue was used as a place where the Jewish children were taught to read the Old Testament. Then on the Jewish Sabbath the synagogue was the place where the Jews gathered to read the Old Testament and worship God. Each Sabbath seven to nine men would read passages from the Old Testament as a part of their worship of God. As a result, the first Sabbath Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch of Pisidia they went to the Jewish synagogue to worship God.

Acts 13:14-15 says, “But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.” The rulers of the synagogue were the elders who gave leadership to each synagogue. The ruler of the synagogue was the lead elder in a synagogue. These rulers had the men that had previously been appointed for that Sabbath read their various passages from the Law and the Prophets (what we call the Old Testament). Then after the seven to nine men had read, the rulers of the synagogue said to Paul and Barnabas since they were Jews that were visiting their synagogue, “Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.” After the reading of the various parts of the Law and the Prophets, it was normal to have men explain some passage to those gathered. If there were visiting Jews, they were often given the opportunity to explain an Old Testament passage to those gathered in the synagogue that day.

Acts 13:16-19 says, “Then Paul stood up, and motioning with *his* hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: “The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. “Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness. “And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment.” Paul responded to their invitation and got up to speak.

Paul began his message by recognizing the two groups that were in the synagogue that day. The first group was those who were Jews by birth and Paul referred to them as the men of Israel. The second group was called you who fear God. Those who fear God is the title that the Jews gave to the Gentiles that attended the synagogue to hear the reading of the Old Testament so that they could learn about God. They were also known as proselytes. We read more about this second group in verses 42 and 43 say, “So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and

Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.” Throughout the rest of the book of Acts we will see that this second group, the God fearing Gentiles, responded and wanted to learn more about Christ in each of the synagogues that Paul visited as he traveled to different cities.

Paul began this message by talking about the people of Israel when they were in the land of Egypt. He reminded the Jews that God had chosen their fathers. God had chosen Abraham when his family worshipped idols. 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.’” Then he reminded the Jews that God had exalted His people when they were in Egypt. Numbers 33:3-4 says, “They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians. For the Egyptians were burying all *their* firstborn, whom the LORD had killed among them. Also on their gods the LORD had executed judgments.” The Lord was the One who brought them out of Egypt.

Paul reminded the Jews that God had put up with them while they were in the wilderness. God had provided for them in the wilderness even when they had rebelled against God. Deuteronomy 29:5 says, “And I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet.” After bringing the people of Israel through the wilderness God had given them victory over the nations in the land. Joshua 24:11-13 says, “Then you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho. And the men of Jericho fought against you—*also* the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Gergashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. But I delivered them into your hand. I sent the hornet before you which drove them out from before you, *also* the two kings of the Amorites, *but* not with your sword or with your bow. I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.” Paul said that God had given them a land with all of the food that they needed.

Paul went on to say in Acts 13:20-22, “After that He gave *them* judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the *son* of Jesse, a man after My *own* heart, who will do all My will.’” Here we see that Paul gave a quick review of the land of Israel under the judges and the first two kings.

Paul said that Israel had judges for about 450 years. Then Israel asked for a king and God gave them Saul. However, Saul was not obedient. 1 Samuel 13:13-14 says, “And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him *to be* commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.” Saul was removed as king because he was not a man after the heart of God that desired to please God.

Then God raised up David to be their king. God spoke to David when he wanted to build a house for God and said in 2 Samuel 7:15-16, “But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.” God had found

David a man after his own heart. When David sinned, he confessed his sin to the Lord and asked for forgiveness. God said that David had carried out His will. As a result, God gave Him a promise.

Paul reminded the Jews of that promise in Acts 13:23-25 where we read, "From this man's seed, according to *the* promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus—after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'Who do you think I am? I am not *He*. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.'" Here we see that Paul told the Jews in the synagogue that day that God had kept his promise to David. In fact God had raised up a Savior for Israel. That Savior was Jesus. Since all Jews wanted to visit Jerusalem at least once in their lifetime for the Passover, it is possible that there may have been a few Jews from Antioch of Pisidia in Jerusalem at the time that Christ was crucified.

Paul said Jesus came after John the Baptist had predicted His coming. Some of the Jews had probably heard about the preaching of John the Baptist as he came before Christ to prepare the way for Christ. The message of John the Baptist had been widely heard among the Jews. The message of John was summarized in Matthew 3:2-3 where we read, "and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'" For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight.'" Here we see that Paul began with the Old Testament to give a background for introducing the death and resurrection of Christ. In the same way we want to show our physical and spiritual children how to use the Old Testament to introduce Christ. With Jews or Gentiles familiar with the Old Testament, we may start from different places in the Old Testament. For individuals who have no background we may encourage our children to start with Genesis. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to introduce Christ to others.

Paul Spoke About the Death and Resurrection of Christ

In our last topic, we saw that Paul gave us an example of the way to help our physical and spiritual children learn to introduce Christ to others by starting with the Old Testament. With people who are familiar with parts of the Old Testament we can begin with the parts they know to introduce Christ. With those who know nothing about the Old Testament we can begin with the book of Genesis to give a background of where sin came from and why we have a need for One to save us from our sin. In this topic we are going to see how Paul built on the foundation of the Old Testament to introduce the death and resurrection of Christ.

Acts 13:26 says, “Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent.” Paul began this section of his sermon the same way that he began the first part of the sermon. Paul wanted both groups present to know that he was speaking to all of them. Paul spoke to the Jews by saying, “Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham.” Then he made it clear that he was also speaking to the Gentiles as he said, “Those among you who fear God. He told both groups present that day that the word of this salvation had been sent to all of them. Paul wanted everyone in the synagogue to know that Christ died and rose again for everyone present.

As a result, Acts 13:27-29 says, ““For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*. And though they found no cause for death *in Him*, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took *Him* down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb.” Here we see that the people of Jerusalem did not know the descendent that came from David to fulfill the promise made to David. This was true of both the people and the rulers.

In addition, neither the people nor the rulers understood what the Prophets had written about Christ. Isaiah 8:13-15 says, “The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; *Let Him be* your fear, and *let Him be* your dread. He will be as a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, as a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken, be snared and taken.” Isaiah wrote that Christ would be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both Israel and Judah. These and many other verses in the Old Testament pointed forward to Christ. Even though the people of Israel and some Gentiles heard the Prophets read in the synagogues every Sabbath they did not understand what the prophets wrote about Christ. Instead the Jewish religious leaders fulfilled those prophecies by condemning Christ to death.

When Pilate told those same religious leaders that he found no fault in Christ, they asked Pilate to put Christ to death. John 19:5-7 says, “Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And *Pilate* said to them, “Behold the Man!” Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, “Crucify *Him*, crucify *Him*!” Pilate said to them, “You take Him and crucify *Him*, for I find no fault in Him.” The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.” That day more than 30 Old Testament prophecies about the death of Christ were fulfilled and then Christ died. The body of Christ was then taken down from the cross and placed in a tomb.

Paul went on to say in Acts 13:30-32, “But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses

to the people. And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers.” Peter had earlier said to the Jews in Jerusalem in Acts 3:14-15, “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.” Here we see that Peter and Paul said that it was God that raised Christ from the dead.

Both Peter and Paul also said that they and others were witnesses to the resurrection of Christ. Peter said in Acts 2:31-32 said, “He, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.” Paul later wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:4-8, “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. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” Both Peter and Paul made it very clear that there were many witnesses of the resurrection.

Paul pointed out the fact that most of these witnesses were those who came with Christ from Galilee to Jerusalem. Here Paul said that he and Barnabas were sharing this good news about the resurrection of Christ with the people that day. He said that God had fulfilled the promise that He had made to the fathers. These promises had been made to Israel through the Old Testament writers.

We go on to read about some of these Old Testament promises about the resurrection of Christ. Acts 13:33-37 says, “God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’ And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’ Therefore He also says in another *Psalm*: ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption.” Here we see several of the promises that had been made to the people of Israel during the time when their fathers had lived.

Paul said that God had fulfilled these promises in Christ and that they as the children of those who had received the promises could know that God had raised up Jesus from the dead. Then Paul quoted Psalm 2:7 which says, “‘I will declare the decree: the LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’” In the Old Testament Christ is often called the Angel of the Lord or the Lord of hosts. This is the one place in the Old Testament where Christ is called the Son. In Hebrews 1:5 we see this verse quoted in relationship to the birth of Christ. That verse says, “For to which of the angels did He ever say: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You’?” And again: “‘I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son’?” Then in Hebrews 1:8 we see that the Father calls Christ God when that verse says, “But to the Son *He says*: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom.’”

God had promised the Jews that His Son would rule forever and ever. That is why this statement in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia is so important. This verse makes it clear that the Father would make it possible for Christ to rule forever by raising Christ from the dead. The next two verses are also quotes from the Old Testament and point to the fact that Christ would not see corruption. The word translated “corruption” speaks of the fact that the body would decay after death. Isaiah 55:3 says, “Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you—the sure mercies of David.” The everlasting covenant is the New Covenant and the blood which Christ shed on the cross

made it a blood covenant (everlasting covenant).

Psalm 16:10 says, “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” This was an Old Testament promise that the Father would raise Christ from the dead. The angel announced this resurrection to the women in Mark 16:6-7 where we read, “But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.” Paul made it clear in Acts 13:36-37 that David was not speaking about himself when he made that statement.

David served his own generation according to the will of God. Then David fell asleep. 1 Kings 2:10 says, “So David rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David.” Here we see that David did die and that he was buried. In contrast, the One that God raised up from the dead saw no corruption. On the Day of Pentecost Peter said in Acts 2:27, “For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. Then Peter said in Acts 2:31, “He, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. Here, in these verses, we see that Paul points out that same fact in his first recorded sermon in Acts. Both men wanted to make very certain that every person understood the full impact of Christ’s resurrection. Both men quoted from Psalm 16:10 to show that Christ fulfilled the Old Testament.

We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain clearly the importance of the resurrection. As they hear us speak regularly of the resurrection of Christ, they will realize that it is an important message to us. Then we can help them to understand why it is an important message for all people. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain the importance of the resurrection.

Paul Saw Many People Show an Interest

In our last topic, we saw that Paul showed us the importance of helping our physical and spiritual children understand the importance of the death and resurrection of Christ. We also were reminded that Peter emphasized these same things in his first recorded sermon in the book of Acts. We saw that we want to help our children learn to explain the importance of the resurrection to others so that they can share the Gospel clearly with others. In this way they will be equipped to minister to people throughout their lives. In our topic today we are going to see that many people were very interested when they heard that Christ fulfilled the promises in the Old Testament.

In Acts 13:38-41 we read, “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: “Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.” In these verses, we have the conclusion of Paul’s sermon as he preached in the synagogue in the city of Antioch of Pisidia. Paul had been sharing with the people in the synagogue the message of the death and resurrection of Christ.

This phrase “let it be known to you” is a command and is used several times in the book of Acts. Peter used this phrase as he spoke to the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:10. That verse says, “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.” Then Paul used this same phrase as he talked to the Jewish leaders in the city of Rome. Acts 28:28 says, “Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” Here Paul used that same phrase as he spoke to the Jews in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia. The Jews were very familiar with the Old Testament. In each of these passages they are being confronted with the fact that they must now make a choice.

Here in Acts 13:38 we see that the Jews were being confronted with the fact that the only way that they could receive forgiveness of sins was through Jesus Christ who paid the penalty for their sin by His death and resurrection. Hebrews 9:22 says, “And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.” The Jews knew from the Old Testament that blood must be shed as a covering for sin. Those who had true faith in God eagerly looked forward to the One that would come to take away sin. As a result, this was an exciting message for those Jews who were eagerly looking for the coming of the Promised One. This message also caused great interest among the Gentiles.

Paul went on to explain that all who believed in Christ, the One who was the promised descendent of David, are justified. Paul also reminded the people that no one could be justified by the law of Moses. The law of Moses only showed people that they were guilty of sin. The word translated “justified” means to declare righteous or to make righteous. As a result, this statement by Paul showed that Christ is much greater than the Law. The Law condemns while those who believe in Christ are made righteous. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Christ took our sin and the Father looks at us through the righteousness of Christ.

Many Jews thought that they were justified by the fact that they were circumcised and tried to

keep the law. Most of the Gentiles that attended the Jewish synagogues were not circumcised and did not follow the dietary regulations given in the law. As a result, there was still a barrier even between the Jews and those Gentiles that attended a synagogue. Paul would later explain in Ephesians 2:14-16, “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.” Suddenly those Gentiles heard that through Christ it was possible to receive forgiveness of sins. That was good news for the Gentiles.

That was a warning to the Jews that thought that they were justified because they were circumcised and tried to keep the law. Habakkuk 1:5 says, ““Look among the nations and watch—Be utterly astounded! For *I will* work a work in your days *which* you would not believe, though it were told *you*.” Paul told the Jews that were depending on their own efforts and those who would reject Christ they would be amazed as they saw how God would work. He said that even though they saw what God would do that they would still not believe. Paul realized that both the Jews and the Gentiles needed to think and talk about the things that Paul had spoken before the Father would draw them to Christ.

Acts 13:42-43 says, “So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.” Here we see two very different responses by the Jews and the Gentiles. Many of the Jews politely listened to Paul and left the synagogue after he finished speaking. For these Jews it was just another sermon which they heard and ignored. In John 16:8-9 Christ said, “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.” Religious people that are depending on their own efforts for salvation do the same thing today. Often they are not convicted of their sin of unbelief.

In contrast, we see that the Gentiles begged to hear more the next Sabbath. Here we see that the Holy Spirit was convicting the Gentiles. In John 6:44 Christ said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.” The Father was drawing the Gentiles. In Luke 19:10 Christ said, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” The Son was seeking and wanted to save all who would listen. The fact that the Gentiles begged to hear more the next Sabbath was a clear indication that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, were all working in the hearts of many Gentiles to draw them to Christ.

We also see that part of the Jews and devout proselytes wanted to talk more with Paul and Barnabas. The phrase “devout proselytes” was a title given to those Gentiles who had been circumcised and were also trying to follow the Jewish law. Such Gentiles were converts of Judaism and were given the same rights as the Jews in the synagogue. In Matthew 23:15 Christ said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.” We have mentioned that many Gentiles attended the synagogues in the various cities of the Roman Empire. Most of these Gentiles liked what they learned from the Old Testament but were not willing to be circumcised. The scribes and Pharisees would do everything possible to convince these Gentiles to be circumcised and try to keep the Jewish law. Those who became devout proselytes were law keepers just like the Jews. Many Jews and devout proselytes left the synagogue with the other Jews but did want to talk to Paul and Barnabas.

The Jews had left the synagogue and many of them had gone home. However, part of the Jews

and devout proselytes wanted to learn more. As a result, they followed Paul and Barnabas either that day or later in the week to learn more about the things that Paul had said in the synagogue. The word translated “followed” means to go with a person, to follow or to become a disciple. The word is used twice in Matthew 9:9 where we read, “As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, “Follow Me.” So he arose and followed Him.” The rich young ruler spent time talking with Christ in Matthew 19:16-22 and was invited to follow Christ but chose to follow his money instead. Here we see that Paul and Barnabas talked with these people and also invited them to follow Christ.

The word translated “persuaded” means to share words that would encourage a person to believe. This word is used twice as Paul talked with King Agrippa in Acts 26. Acts 26:26-28 says, “For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.” Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”

Then the word is used twice in Acts 28:23-24 as Paul talked to the Jews in the city of Rome. Those verses say, “So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.” We see that of those who were persuaded that some believed and some did not believe. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to help others understand that they have a choice that must be made. Some will believe and some will reject the ministry of the Trinity. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to help others realize that they have a choice that they must make.

Paul Turned to the Gentiles

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to explain to others that every person faces a choice that must be made. We saw that some will make the choice to believe and others will make the choice to reject. The difference is in their hearts. Some are being convicted by the Holy Spirit and are being drawn by the Father to the Son who seeks and saves. Others are rejecting the work of the Trinity in their lives. In our topic today we are going to see how various people responded as they thought about that choice.

People in the city of Antioch of Pisidia had been talking about the things that Paul and Barnabas had shared in the synagogue the previous week and the things that they had said as they talked with them during the week. Acts 13:44-45 says, “On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.” Whether people were in agreement or not with the things that Paul and Barnabas had said, they had certainly been talking about those things. As a result, almost the whole city showed up at the synagogue the next week to hear the Word of God. The Word of God is living and powerful whether people agree with the Word or not. The Trinity also works to convict, draw, seek and save as people discuss the Word.

As a result of the talking that had gone on during the week, almost the whole city came to the synagogue the next Sabbath. The word translated “envy” meant either zeal for a person or thing or envy against a person or thing. James 3:14-16 says, “But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there.” In these verses, the word is twice translated envy. That attitude would certainly describe the way that the Jewish leaders felt when they saw the large group of Gentiles that came to the synagogue that day.

The Jews began contradicting and blaspheming the things that Paul was saying to the people. The word translated “contradicting” means to speak against. The word translated “blaspheming” means to speak evil of or to revile. They were opposing the teaching that Paul was giving as he spoke. Acts 13:46-48 says, “Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. “For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” These verses are key verses because Paul told the Jews that they would turn to the Gentiles.

The word translated “grew bold” means freedom to speak or to speak with boldness. Paul asked other Christians to pray for him that he would be able to speak boldly. Ephesians 5:18-20 says, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—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, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” This is a key lesson that we want to show our children and others by our example. As we pray for boldness to speak the Word of God, the Lord will give us His boldness to share the Word of God with others.

Paul and Barnabas told the Jews that it was necessary for them to share the Word of God with the Jews first. Peter had earlier said the same thing to the Jews in Acts 3:25-26 where we read, "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." Paul said that it was necessary for them to speak to the Jews first. However, he said that as Jews they had chosen to reject that message from the Word of God. Paul warned those Jews that they had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life.

Then Paul made the statement, "Behold, we turn to the Gentiles." God had told the Jews through Isaiah in Isaiah 49:6, "Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'" The Father had called and sent Christ to restore the preserved ones of Israel. At the same time He had also given Christ to be a Light to the Gentiles. In fact it was the plan of God that His salvation should be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. Here we see that it has always been His plan for His salvation to go to the ends of the earth. Most of the Jews had failed to accept that message and certainly had not taken that message to the ends of the earth.

However, Paul realized that God had chosen him and those who would follow him to take the message of the salvation that God had provided to the ends of the earth. At the time that the Lord had sent Ananias to open the eyes of Saul, the Lord said to Ananias in Acts 9:15-16, "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.'" That is why Paul and Barnabas could say that they were turning to the Gentiles because they were being obedient to the command that God had given to Paul.

The Gentiles were filled with joy when they heard that Paul and Barnabas were turning to the Gentiles. The word translated "glad" means to rejoice exceedingly. Even when the Gentiles went to the Jewish synagogues to hear the Word of God read, they could not feel that they were fully accepted by God because they were not circumcised. Now they were filled with glory to God because Paul had shared with them the message that they could receive forgiveness of sins. We see that as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. The word translated "appointed" means to appoint, to assign or to ordain. Paul used that same word to describe the message that Ananias gave to him in Damascus. Acts 22:10 says, "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.'" Those who are appointed to eternal life are those that God chose before He even created the world.

Acts 13:49-52 goes on to say, "And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." God had His plan and that plan was to spread the message of the death and resurrection of Christ throughout that region. Here we see that nothing can stop the plan of the Lord.

The Jews in Antioch of Pisidia realized that they would never stop the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles by themselves. As a result, they stirred up two groups of Gentiles. First, they stirred up the devout and honorable women. The word translated "devout" means those who worship. The word "translated" honorable means those who are wealthy or influential. These may have been influential Gentile women who came to the synagogue to worship because they liked to hear the reading of the Old Testament. They also stirred up the chief men or leaders of

the city.

These influential women and men were able to develop persecution against Paul and Barnabas. In fact this persecution became so strong that Paul and Barnabas were expelled from their region. This was not the first time and certainly would not be the last time that Paul was forced to leave a certain area. Paul and Barnabas just shook the dust off their feet against them. When Christ sent out the twelve He told them in Luke 9:5, “And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them.” The Jews would shake the dust off their feet when they returned to the land of Israel to show that they were unwilling to bring even the dust of a Gentile area into the land of Israel. Here Christ said that this action would be a testimony against the Jews when they rejected the message of Christ.

Meanwhile we see that there was a much different attitude among the new Christians. These included both Jews and Gentiles. We see that those who had believed in Christ were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. The word translated “filled” means to make full, to complete or to fill to the top. The word “translated “joy” means great gladness. These disciples were filled with great joy. This same thing had happened in Samaria. Acts 8:8 says, “And there was great joy in that city.” They were also filled with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18 says, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.” Christians will be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit when they are walking in fellowship with Christ.

We want to show our physical and spiritual children what it means to walk in fellowship with Christ so that they can also be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit even when they face opposition or persecution from others. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to experience that joy in their lives.

Paul and Barnabas Preached in Iconium

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn why Paul and Barnabas told the Jews that they were turning to the Gentiles. We also saw that those Jews and Gentiles who turned to the Lord and believed in Christ and His death and resurrection were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. Paul and Barnabas were finally expelled from the region of Antioch of Pisidia but they then went to the city of Iconium. In this topic we will see how the message of the death and resurrection spread to Iconium and the surrounding area.

Paul and Barnabas came to the city of Iconium. Acts 14:1-2 says, “Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.” Paul and Barnabas had been expelled from the region of Antioch of Pisidia. Iconium was about 80 miles southeast of Antioch. The first place Paul and Barnabas went in each city was to the synagogue. That was the place where they could meet both Jews and Gentile proselytes who wanted to learn more about the true God.

In this synagogue Paul probably spoke the same things that he had spoken in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. However, Paul received a much different response to the message of the death and resurrection of Christ than he received when he first spoke in Antioch. Here we see that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. That meant that those who believed in this city had a background of the Old Testament. Christ said in Luke 24:44-45, “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.” That background would make it easier for them to grow in their understanding of Christ because of the many verses in the Old Testament that teach about Christ.

We do see that the response of the unbelieving Jews in Iconium was the same as the response of the unbelieving Jews in Antioch. We see that these unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds. The word translated “poisoned” means to harm, to hurt or to cause to become bitter. This same word is used in Acts 18:9-10 where the Lord told Paul, “Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” In these verses, the word is translated hurt. Here we see that it only takes a small group who reject the message about Christ to get a lot of people angry and upset. Those who reject Christ have done this in many countries.

However, it took these Jews a long time to turn the minds of the Gentiles against the Christians. Acts 14:3-5 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. But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them.” We see that Paul and Barnabas were able to stay a long time in this city. This was important because it gave them enough time to help those who had repented and placed their faith in Christ to really grow in their faith.

Throughout the time that Paul and Barnabas were in Iconium they continued to speak the Word of God boldly. Since we first read about Barnabas in Acts 4, Barnabas probably told the Christians in Iconium what the Christians in Jerusalem had done when Peter and John were

threatened by the Jewish religious leaders in that city. 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.” Paul and Barnabas demonstrated that same boldness in Iconium and it gave the new Christians in that city an example to follow as they began to experience opposition.

The Lord was also confirming the message of Paul and Barnabas in another way. We see that the Lord, “Was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.” The Lord did a similar thing to what He had done in the city of Jerusalem a few years earlier. Acts 5:12 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.” There was a large number of Jews in the city of Iconium. In 1 Corinthians 1:22 we read, “For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom.” Since there were many Jews in this city, the Lord chose to bear witness to the word of His grace by granting signs and wonders to be done by the hands of Paul and Barnabas.

We see that the Jews who were poisoning the minds of the Gentiles by the things that they were saying about Paul and Barnabas caused the people of the city to become divided. One group joined the group in opposition to the message of the apostles. The other group believed the message of Paul and Barnabas about Christ. We need to understand why the message of forgiveness of sin brings division. That division is first seen back in Genesis 4:2-5 where we read, “Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.” Cain depended on his own efforts to please God. Abel came to God by faith with a blood covering for sin. God accepted the offering of Abel. Cain was angry when his own works were not accepted. Those who depend on their own works often oppose Christ. Their own works cannot save from sin.

Finally the unbelieving Jews had poisoned minds of enough Gentiles that they were ready to try and kill Paul and Barnabas. We can see that this attempt to kill the apostles came from the Jews because stoning was the Jewish way of killing those that they accused of blasphemy against God. Paul understood that fully because 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.” Paul had held the coats when the unbelieving Jews stoned Stephen.

The unbelieving Jews got both the Gentiles and the rulers of the city to join them in this attempt to injure and then stone Paul and Barnabas. The word translated “rulers” spoke of the leaders of the city. Many times the rulers of a city will oppose those who place their faith in Christ because they feel it will hurt their business. This is illustrated in Acts 19:24-26 where we read, “For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: “Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands.” The

gods of this world such as idols, pleasure, entertainment and many other things provide much income to those who have businesses related to these gods.

However, someone found out about the plans to injure and stone Paul and Barnabas. Acts 14:6-7 says, "They became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. And they were preaching the gospel there." Here we see that Paul and Barnabas had to flee for their lives. Hebrews 6:17-18 says, "Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it *is* impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before *us*." In the world many religions fight other religions. As true Christians we see that as Christians we can flee to God because our refuge is the hope that is set before us. Two things strengthen our hope. Those are the message of the resurrection and the message of the return of Christ. That is why we can have hope in the Lord and do not need to fight the way the world fights.

Paul and Barnabas just fled to the cities of Lystra and Derbe and the region around those cities. They kept right on preaching the Gospel in that region which was in a different Roman province even though Lystra was only about 18 miles from Iconium. This city had a much smaller Jewish population than Iconium. Paul and Barnabas give us a wonderful example for our lives and for the lives of our children. Even though they faced opposition and even possible death, they did not stop preaching the message of the Gospel. We want to provide that same example for our children. When we share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ, there will be opposition from those who depend on their own works to try and be acceptable to God. No works can save any person. As a result, we want to show our children by our example how to show love even to those who would oppose the message of the Gospel. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to show love to those who oppose the Gospel.

Paul Was Stoned to Death in Lystra

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand why people oppose the message of forgiveness of sins through Christ. We saw that those who strongly oppose are depending on their own efforts to try and be accepted by God. As a result, they oppose those who teach that we must come to God through Christ. The Jews in Iconium planned to injure and stone Paul and Barnabas. They became aware of those plans and fled to Lystra. In our topic today we will see that Jews come from Iconium to Lystra and convinced the people there to stone Paul.

After Paul and Barnabas arrived in Lystra, they met a man that had been crippled his entire life. Acts 14:8-10 says, “And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother’s womb, who had never walked. *This* man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, “Stand up straight on your feet!” And he leaped and walked.” In these verses, we see that Paul and Barnabas saw an opportunity to show kindness to a man in need. How you would feel if you had never been able to walk from the time that you were born? This man heard Paul as he was speaking.

Paul fixed his eyes on this man. The word translated “seeing” means to know by seeing, to notice or to know and is usually translated by the word know. Paul knew as he carefully observed this man that he had faith to be healed. As a result, Paul said to the man with a loud voice, “Stand up straight on your feet!” Immediately the man leaped and walked. This is a very similar situation to the man that Peter healed in Acts 3. Acts 3:6-8 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.” This man also leaped and walked.

Paul had been talking to a group of people. He had spoken to this man with a loud voice. As a result, everyone that was close at all saw this man as he leaped and walked. This caused those people to respond. Acts 14:11-13 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!” And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.” The people that saw what had happened became very excited. They began to shout in their Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” The people of that city had a story or tradition that two gods named Zeus and Hermes had once visited their city. Their story said that the temple in their city had once been a small house that was turned into that temple by those two gods because the couple living in that house had shown kindness to them.

The people were shouting in Lycaonian that these gods had come back for another visit looking like men as they had done the first time. They decided that Barnabas must be Zeus. They thought that Paul must be Hermas because he was the main speaker. Their story or tradition said that the people had ignored these gods the first time they came as men so the people of Lystra did not want to repeat the same mistake. The people brought oxen to their temple to offer as a sacrifice and garlands (something like a necklace) to put on Paul and Barnabas.

Acts 14:14-16 says, “But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. 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.” Usually when the Jews tore their clothes it was to show great sorrow. At times it was also done to show anger when the Jews said someone was guilty of blasphemy against God. Here it was to show great sorrow.

As we can see from the actions, the people of Lystra were idol worshipers and had no knowledge of the Old Testament. As a result, Paul and Barnabas began by speaking about the Creator. They made it very clear that they were humans and not gods. They had the same feelings as the people of Lystra. Paul told the people of Lystra that they should turn from the useless idols that could not help them and turn to the living God who could help them. Paul later wrote that was what the Thessalonians had done. 1 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.” Repentance is turning from whatever a person is following to the living God.

Paul told the people of Lystra that the living God is the One who made the heaven, the earth, the sea and everything in them. Here we see that Paul helped these people to understand that the living God is the Creator of all things. Paul said that in the past God had allowed people to walk in their own ways. Joshua 24:15 says, “And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” God allowed people to choose whether or not to follow Him.

However, Paul said that God never forgot the people that He had created on the earth. God gave the people a witness to remind the people that He created them. Romans 1:20 says, “For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.” The things that God did were done to help the people of the world but they also left people without any excuse. God is the One who sent the rain from the heavens to water the plants and provide food for the people. He is the One that caused the crops to be fruitful and the trees to give their fruit. Paul said that God is the One who provided everything that we have to eat. God is the One who made it possible for people to have joy and gladness.

Acts 14:18-20 says, “And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them. Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul *and* dragged *him* out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.” Even with all that they said it was difficult for Paul and Barnabas to keep the people of Lystra from offering sacrifices to them. However, that would soon change.

We go on to see how quick people are to change. Paul and Barnabas had a hard time preventing the multitudes from offering sacrifices to them. However, the Jews from Antioch and Iconium heard that Paul and Barnabas had traveled to Lystra. Then a group of Jews from these cities also came to Lystra. There Jews were able to turn the people of Lystra against Paul and Barnabas. In fact they even persuaded the people of Lystra to stone Paul. Here we are reminded of the greatness of the anger of the Jews who rejected Christ. They were willing to do

anything possible to stop the preaching of Paul.

The Jews and the people of stoned Paul. Then they dragged him out of the city because they supposed that he was dead. The word translated “supposing” means to think or to suppose and usually refers to things that are not actually true but the people think it is true. This word is used in Acts 17:29 where we read, “Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.” Here we see that the people of Athens thought or supposed that God is like gold, silver or stone. Paul made it clear to the people of Athens that God is not like an idol made of gold, silver or stone.

We read that the disciples gathered around Paul after he had been dragged out of the city. This teaches us another important lesson. Most of the people in Lystra had first thought that Paul and Barnabas were gods but quickly changed their minds as they listened to the Jews from Antioch and Iconium. However, there were some people that had listened when Paul explained the meaning of repentance. They then had the opportunity to learn about the death and resurrection of Christ and had placed their faith in Christ as the One through whom they could come to God. Here we see that they were now following Christ even though most of the people of the city had rejected Christ.

As these new disciples gathered around Paul, we read that Paul got up from the place where he had been dragged. He then went with the disciples back into the city. Paul and Barnabas along with the new disciples realized that Paul could not stay in Lystra and so the next day he and Barnabas left that city and went to the city of Derbe. Here we see that God still had work for Paul to do and so the Jews had not accomplished their goal even though they had stoned Paul. We can use this passage to help our physical and spiritual children realize that God will give them life until they have completed the purpose that the Lord has for them on this earth. The Lord had a purpose for each Christian to complete and will give us life to complete that purpose. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand the purpose that God has for them.

Paul Demonstrated the Process of Biblical Church Development

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that God will give them life until they have completed the purpose that He has for them on this earth. We also saw how quickly people change. That change was shown as the people changed their minds when Paul and Barnabas said that they were not gods and listened to the Jews who came from Antioch and Iconium and then joined those Jews in stoning Paul. That did not stop Paul and Barnabas and the next day they went on to the city of Derbe. In our topic today we are going to see how to help our children understand the process of Biblical church development.

Each of the major churches in the book of Acts demonstrates five stages of Biblical church development. Understanding this process of Biblical church development and learning how to apply that process in our own lives will help us to understand how to carry out the purpose that God has for us in our own lives. Acts 14:21-23 says, “And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” We will see that these verses give us a summary of the first four stages of Biblical church development.

In the book of Acts we see that the first stage in the development of every church was the preaching of the Gospel. Unless this stage continues, a church will eventually die because all of the other stages are built on this foundation. In fact any time any of the stages are discontinued, that church begins to die. In Acts 11:19-21 we read, “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. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” Here we see that in Antioch they preached about the Lord Jesus and many believed and turned to the Lord. True churches will never develop unless they are built on the foundation of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. The goal of the first stage is to see people make true decisions for Christ which includes repentance of sin and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The second stage in the development of every church in Acts is explained in the statement that they made many disciples. This involved gathering Christians in groups. The various forms of the word “disciple” are used 274 times in the New Testament. However, the verb form is used only four times. Those four uses of the verb help us to understand what happens to develop mature disciples during the second stage. The first use of the verb form is 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.” Here the word is translated instructed. This verse gives the definition of a mature disciple. He is like the head of a household (a disciple has one or more spiritual children). He had a treasure (a mature disciple knows Christ and knows the Word of God). He is able to bring things out of that treasure (able to teach others). He is able to teach new things (He is continuing to learn). He is able to teach things old (He is able to teach the basics of Christianity).

The second place the verb form is used is Matthew 27:57 which says, “Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus.” Here we see that the man who buried Christ had become a disciple. The

third use is in Matthew 28:19-20 which says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age. Amen.” Here we have one command “Make disciples”. Then we have three participles that show us how to carry out that command – going, baptizing and teaching. As we are going, we are to make disciples (disciple to Christ); Baptizing those who come to true faith in Christ (this is identification with Christ – Romans 6:3-4); Teaching them how to obey all that Christ commanded (disciple to maturity in Christ).

The fourth place the verb form is used is here in Acts 14:21. Putting the four uses of the verb form together we see that the purpose that God has for every Christian is to “Make Disciples”. A mature disciple is defined in Matthew 13:52. A disciple is illustrated in Matthew 27:57. As Christians, we are commissioned to make disciples in Matthew 28:19-20. The making of disciples was continually practiced in the early church – Acts 14:21-23. In the second stage of Biblical church development we see that the goal is to develop stable Christians.

The third stage of Biblical church development is given in Acts 14:22 and we could call this church beginnings and leadership development. We see that when Paul and Barnabas finished their ministry in Derbe, they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch – the three cities where they had faced great opposition. Verse 22 tells us that their primary focus as they revisited these cities was to help the disciples mature and prepare them for spiritual leadership. This involved three things. First, they were strengthening the disciples. The word translated “strengthening” means to establish more or make firm in the faith. Second, they were exhorting them to continue in the faith. The word translated “continue” mean to remain, to hold fast or to abide. In fact it is a strengthen form of the word “abide” used in John 15:5 where we read, “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.” We want to help Christians learn to abide in Christ. This is a key part of the process of qualifying people for spiritual leadership. Third, they were preparing the disciples for much tribulation. Paul had been stoned by people from these cities so they and all future Christians need to expect much persecution.

The fourth stage of Bible church development is given in Acts 14:23. We could call this stage church organization. First, we see that they appointed a team of leaders in every church. Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-12 share how we qualify men for spiritual leadership. In fact one of the most important ministries of every church planter and then every church leadership team should be the qualifying of additional men for church leadership. Titus 2:3-5 tells how women qualify additional women for leadership among the women. Second, just as the leaders in the church at Antioch did before they sent out Paul and Barnabas, they then spent time in prayer and fasting. Third, they commended these new leaders to the Lord in whom they believed. The word translated “commended” means “to place before or to entrust”. Acts 20:32 says, “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” Paul and Barnabas also entrusted these new leaders to the Lord and expected Him to work through their leadership. We see the fifth stage of Biblical church development when Paul returns to this area in Acts 16:1-5.

Acts 14:24-28 says, “And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.” Here we see Paul and Barnabas preached the Word as they traveled back toward Antioch, the city from which the Lord had sent them out in Acts 13:1-3.

Antioch was the place where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work to which they were called. The word “commended” means to deliver, to commit or to give someone for their use. God had called Paul and Barnabas and the church had prayed and given them to the Lord for the ministry that the Lord had for them. Now when they returned to the church they gathered the church together to tell the church what God had done through their ministry. 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 a report of what God has done gives everyone an opportunity to give glory to God for the way that He has worked through the lives of those who have served Him in other places.

Paul and Barnabas also told how the Lord had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. Paul later wrote in Romans 15:8-9, “Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy, as it is written: “For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name.” Because of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas Gentiles in many cities could give glory to God for His mercy.

We also want to help our children learn to give glory to God for the opportunity that the Lord gives them to share the Gospel in other places and to become partners together in the ministry of Biblical church development. As they learn to pray that God will give them such a ministry, the Lord will provide open doors wherever they live the rest of their lives to be partners together with the Lord so that more people can place their faith in Christ and give glory to God for His mercy. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand how the Lord can use them in Biblical church development.

Certain Jews Taught It Was Necessary to Circumcise

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand the process of Biblical church development. We saw that Paul and Barnabas had demonstrated that process in the various cities where they had been led by the Lord. That process of Biblical church development was followed in the development of each of the main churches that developed in the book of Acts. Paul and Barnabas then came back and reported to the church at Antioch what the Lord had done. Then Acts 14:28 says that they stayed in Antioch for a long time (about a year). Today we are going to learn about one of the things that happened during that year that Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch.

During the year that Paul and Barnabas were back in Antioch, Acts 15:1-2 says, “And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.” These men who came from Judea were all Jewish. As Jews, they had been circumcised when they were eight days old. They had kept the Jewish law including all of the feasts and ceremonies. These were things that were true of all of the early Jewish Christians. Acts 21:19-21 says, “When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children nor to walk according to the customs.” The Jewish Christians were Jewish and continued to practice circumcision because that was commanded for all descendents of Abraham.

However, in Antioch and the cities where Paul and Barnabas had gone most of the new Christians were Gentiles. Acts 15:5 says, “But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.” Paul was not the only Pharisee that had become a Christian. Here we see that other Pharisees had also believed. They and all of the other Jews continued to practice circumcision and keep the Old Testament law as we saw in the previous paragraph. We will see in this chapter and in Acts 21:20-26 that the Jews were never forbidden to do these things. We will also see that the decision made in this chapter meant that none of the Gentiles were required to do these things.

Later false teachers known as Judiazers who rejected the decision made in this chapter continued to try and require the Gentiles to be circumcised and keep the Law. Acts 15:18-22 says, “Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath. Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.” Here we see that the whole church at Jerusalem including those who had been Pharisees came to agreement about this statement even though there had been much dispute when the discussion first started.

As a result, the Jews mentioned in Acts 15:1 were not false teachers. Rather they would be Jews who were untaught about what was required for the Gentiles since the decision had not yet been made by the Jerusalem Council. Only those who continued to teach these teachings after the Jerusalem Council would be Judiazers and false teachers. We do see that their teaching in Antioch did cause much confusion and led to the Jerusalem Council. Acts 15:2 says, “Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.”

The word translated “dissension” means strife, conflict or sedition. Acts 23:7 says, “And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.” The word translated “dispute” means mutual questioning, dispute or discussion. Other than verses 2 and 7 in this chapter the only place this word is used in the New Testament is in Acts 28:29 where we read, “And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.” Here we see that the church had many questions that they needed to answer for themselves.

Acts 15:3 says, “So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren.” The church at Antioch sent Paul, Barnabas and some of the other believers to Jerusalem. We see that they were sent to talk to the apostles and elders about this question. In order for there to be true unity in the church between the Jews and the Gentiles this question had to be decided by the apostles together with the leaders of the church from which these Jewish teachers had come. That is why the church at Antioch sent these men as official representatives of the church at Antioch.

As Paul, Barnabas and the others traveled to Jerusalem, they reported to the churches along the way how the Gentiles were turning from the worship of idols to the worship of the true God. This exciting report about what the Lord was doing among the Gentiles brought great joy to the other Christians throughout the regions of Phoenicia and Samaria. Many of the Christians in Phoenicia and Samaria were not Jews and so many of them did not follow the law. As a result, the question of whether Gentiles had to be circumcised was a very important question for the people in these churches.

Acts 15:4-5 says, “And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.” The word translated “were received” means to accept or to receive gladly. The whole church, the apostles and the elders all gave a warm welcome to the men who came from the church in the city of Antioch. This word is used in Acts 2:41 where we read, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*.” Here we see that many of these Jews in Jerusalem had earlier gladly received the message of the death and resurrection of Christ on the day of Pentecost and had become followers of Christ.

Paul and Barnabas gave a report to the church at Jerusalem telling all that God had done with them as they took the Gospel to the Gentiles. This report was probably similar to the report that Paul and Barnabas had earlier given to the church at Antioch. Acts 14:27 says, “Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.” The report of Barnabas was probably especially important to the church at Jerusalem because Acts 11:20-22 says, “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. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great

number believed and turned to the Lord. Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.” Barnabas was well known to the church at Jerusalem and had a good reputation in that church.

The report of Paul and Barnabas was well received by most of the people in the church in Jerusalem. However, some of those who had become Christians in the city of Jerusalem had been Pharisees before they placed their faith in Christ. The men who had come to Antioch from Jerusalem had probably been a part of this group of Pharisees that had placed their faith in Christ. Here we see that the former Pharisees were in agreement about what they believed and taught about the salvation of the Gentiles. However, the report of Paul and Barnabas was in disagreement with what these former Pharisees believed and taught.

The former Pharisees had two key misunderstandings about salvation for both Jews and Gentiles because of their background as Pharisees. First, they believed that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Second, they believed that it was important to command all Gentile believers to keep the law of Moses. This teaching meant that they taught faith plus works (circumcision and keeping the Law) were necessary for salvation. In contrast, Paul later wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” In these two verses we see that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone and that no works are included. We will see that this is the decision that was affirmed by the Jerusalem Council in this chapter. This decision was guided by the Holy Spirit. Acts 15:28 says, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.” We will see how the Holy Spirit guided the entire church to this conclusion in our next two topics.

It is very important to help our physical and spiritual children clearly understand the decision of the Jerusalem Council. This is necessary in order to help them know how to clearly explain the Gospel to those who are not yet Christians. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children clearly understand this decision.

The Jerusalem Council Included Much Discussion

In our last topic, we saw why it is important to help our physical and spiritual children understand the decision of the Jerusalem Council. First, we saw that the Pharisees who had become Christians thought that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Second, we saw that those Christians who previously had been Pharisees believed that it was important to command all Gentile believers to keep the law of Moses. In this topic and the next topic we will see the way that the Holy Spirit guided the leaders gathered at the Jerusalem Council to a very different decision. That decision made it clear that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone.

In Acts 15:6-9 we read, “Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: “Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 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.” In these verses, we see that the Jerusalem Council included all of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. They were not seeking to impose their own opinions. They were not seeking to force others to follow their own convictions.

Instead of their own opinions or convictions, they wanted the will of God made clear through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Acts 15:28-29 says, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” Here we see that the Holy Spirit did lead all of the men gathered to the same decision. That decision took much time because there was much dispute and many opinions when the leaders first began talking. The word translated “dispute” means discussion, dispute or questioning one another. This is the same word used in Acts 15:2 where we read, “Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.” There was definitely not agreement when the discussion first started so they wanted to know the will of God.

The leaders let everyone else talk first before the leaders began to speak. Finally Peter began by telling about the conversion of the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius recorded in Acts 10. The men gathered all knew that God had chosen Peter to take the Gospel to the house of Cornelius so that the Gentiles could hear the Gospel and believe. The Gentiles at the house of Cornelius had not been circumcised. They had not been keeping law. They had not been observing the Jewish feasts and ceremonies. Instead they did hear the Gospel and repented of their sin of unbelief. The Lord told Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:7, “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.”

God knew the hearts of the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. He knew that they had repented and placed their faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As a result, God gave them the Holy Spirit just as God had done for the apostles and the other Jews who believed on the Day of Pentecost. God did not make a distinction between the way that He saved the Jews and the Gentiles. Instead God purified the hearts of the Gentiles by faith just as He had done with the Jews.

Acts 15:10-12 says, "Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they." Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles." Here we see that Peter asked the leaders why they were putting God to the test by trying to add additional requirements for the Gentiles. Peter said that the law had been like a yoke to both those gathered there that day and also to their fathers. Peter said that none of them had been able to fully obey the Law. Peter said that God had saved the Gentiles by His grace. He also reminded each of the leaders gathered there that day that they had also been saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The law had never saved any Jew.

After Peter had finished speaking, the whole multitude gave Barnabas and Paul the opportunity to tell what the Lord had done among the Gentiles through their ministry. The word translated "listened" means to hear so that there is understanding. Each person wanted to know how the Holy Spirit was leading. These men were Jews and in 1 Corinthians 1:22 we read, "For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom." Then 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?" Since Jews do require a sign, Barnabas and Paul chose to tell about the miracles and wonders that God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

After the murder of James, the brother of John, by Herod you remember that Herod also imprisoned Peter. When the angel brought Peter out of the prison he went to the house of Mary where many were praying for him. He told those gathered in Acts 12:17, "But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place." That is the James that is mentioned here. He was the half brother of Christ and the one that wrote the book of James. We see already in chapter twelve that he had become the leading elder in the church at Jerusalem. Here we see that this James now became the final speaker who summarized all that had been said and shared what the Holy Spirit led him to say.

Acts 15:13-18 says, "And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things.' Known to God from eternity are all His works." James invited the entire multitude to listen so that there would be understanding by all of them.

James reminded those gathered that Simon Peter had shared how God had first visited the Gentiles when the Lord sent Peter to the house of Cornelius. God had sent Peter there because it was the plan of God to take from the Gentiles a people for His name. God promised through many of the Old Testament prophets that the day would come when the temple of David would be rebuilt. In that day the Gentiles will also be included among those who worship the Lord. Amos was one of the Old Testament prophets who wrote about this plan of God when he wrote in Amos 9:11-12, "On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does this thing." The Gentiles did not have to become Jewish proselytes. Here

James makes it clear that both Jews and Gentiles will share in the future what the Lord has for all who follow Him.

God had clearly shown Peter that he was to be the first to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. The Lord has used both Barnabas and Paul to reach out to the Gentiles in Antioch. Later God had also sent Barnabas and Paul to the work while the Lord had called them. Galatians 2:9 tells us that this ministry to the Gentiles had already been recognized by the key leaders of the church. That verse says, "And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised." This verse tells us that James, Peter and John had already recognized that Barnabas and Paul had been called to the Gentiles when Barnabas and Paul visited Jerusalem in Acts 11:30 and Acts 12:24-25.

Now James began his summary by his statement in Acts 15:18, "Known to God from eternity are all His works." We will see in the next topic the rest of the answer of James but here we want to see that the plan for the salvation of the Gentiles and Jews from eternity has been to save all who are saved by grace alone through faith alone totally apart from any works. Later Paul wrote in Romans 3:28-30, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith." The eternal plan of God was to provide salvation and forgiveness of sins through the blood that Christ shed on the cross.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to fully explain why salvation is totally apart from any works of the law. That salvation is the result of the grace of God. He even gives us the faith to believe so that there are no works about which any person can boast. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain the decision to which the Holy Spirit led the Jerusalem Council.

The Jerusalem Council Was Led by the Holy Spirit

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles is by grace alone through faith alone and totally apart from any works of the law. We also saw that James, the half brother of Christ, was the one who had become the leader of the church at Jerusalem and that he was the one who summarized how God had this plan for the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles from eternity. Today we will see the conclusion of the summary of James and the decision of the whole Jerusalem Council and the way that the Holy Spirit led them.

In Acts 15:18-21 we read, “Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” The plan of God for the salvation of all who would believe was determined by God from eternity.

Then James went on to explain what the Holy Spirit had revealed. The word translated “trouble” means to cause trouble or to annoy. Although this dispute had been caused by Jewish Pharisees that had become Christians, James realized that all of the Jews were zealous for the law. When Paul visited the church many years later James and the other elders told Paul in Acts 21:20, “And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law.” As a result, James realized that all of the Jews would be tempted to try and get Gentiles to obey the law. The elders spoke of the decision in this chapter when they told Paul in Acts 21:25, “But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.” These four things go back long before the law and God had revealed His will about each of these things prior to the call of Abraham.

Idols are the works of man’s hands and show that mankind is depending on his own works. Genesis 4:3-5 says, “And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.” By faith Abel brought a blood offering as a covering for his sin. In contrast, Cain invented religion and idol worship by trying to bring the works of his own hands to God but God did not respect or accept his offering because that would have been salvation by works.

Blood and things strangled were clearly identified by God as things to be avoided when God told Noah in Genesis 9:3-4, “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.” God was actually protecting Noah and all mankind from all of the diseases carried by the blood. God also gave a positive principle that forbid sexual immorality before sin ever came into the world. God told Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:24, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” God gave this instruction to Adam who had no father or mother to leave because it was a principle that was for all mankind. Sexual immorality is very destructive to any marriage whether a couple is Christian or not.

Both the Jews and the Gentiles were familiar with these four things although they have been continually violated by both groups. The Jews were familiar with the early chapters of Genesis because the Old Testament and particularly the books written by Moses were read in the synagogues every Sabbath. The Gentiles were familiar with the things written in the first eleven chapters of Genesis because all people are descendents of Noah and mankind did not divide and go different directions until after the languages were changed in Genesis eleven. Although there are great variations in the stories about the creation of man, the origin of sin, the flood and other things in those first eleven chapters, the things mentioned in those chapters appear in the stories passed down by the fathers in cultures throughout the world. In fact Romans 1:19-20 says, "Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." James and the elders were recognizing the eternal plan of God by mentioning these four things which could cause division between the Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Acts 15:22-23 says, "Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings." Here we see that not only the apostles and elders but also the whole church came to true unity about this question as they were led by the Holy Spirit. This is a real example of the unity of Jews and Gentiles for which Christ prayed the night before He was crucified. John 17:20-21 says, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." The whole church was now in agreement that the Gentiles were not under the law. The church at Jerusalem also sent Judas and Silas with Paul and Barnabas to take this letter back to the church at Antioch.

Then we are given a copy of what the church wrote in the letter that they sent. Acts 15:24-29 says, "Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law"--to whom we gave no such commandment--it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." This is a key to understanding the fact that Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ and we are to learn how to function as one body.

The church at Jerusalem recognized several things in this letter. They recognized that the people who were troubling the Gentiles had come from the church in Jerusalem. They recognized that these people were unsettling the souls of the Gentiles. They recognized that these people were teaching things that had not been taught by the apostles and other leaders of the church. The word translated "troubling" means to agitate, to stir up, or cause to become anxious and fearful. The word translated "unsettling" means to overthrow or to cause to go bankrupt. Here we see that these individuals had been causing the Gentile Christians to be upset in their thinking and emotions so that they were becoming emotionally drained or emotionally empty.

The church at Jerusalem wrote that they had not taught the things that these Judaizers were

teaching. Those were things that these individuals were adding to Christianity because of their own background. The church at Jerusalem said that they had all met together and that the Holy Spirit had brought them into agreement. As a result, they had chosen men from the church at Jerusalem to come with Barnabas and Paul to bring this letter to Antioch. They also said that they considered Barnabas and Paul beloved brethren. They realized that these two men had risked their lives in order to faithfully serve the Lord Jesus Christ by taking the Gospel to the Gentiles.

The two men that the church at Jerusalem sent with Barnabas and Paul were Judas and Silas. They said that these two men would share the same message that they had written in this letter. Then the church said that the Holy Spirit had led them to make the decision that is reported in this letter. The Holy Spirit had led them to avoid placing any burden on the Gentiles that would come from the law that was given to Moses. They said that the Holy Spirit guided them to request that the Gentiles abstain from the four things that God had spoken and shown either to Noah or to those who had lived before the flood. The word translated “abstain” means to refrain from or to avoid. Paul used this word in 1 Thessalonians 5:22 where we read, “Abstain from every form of evil.” Then Peter used this word in 1 Peter 2:11 which says, “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” The apostles and elders realized that any form of evil will cause a Christian to feel fear, guilt or shame.

Both false teaching which unsettles the soul and fleshly lusts will cause a Christian to feel guilty. The leaders of the early church realized that the Holy Spirit wanted to set Christians free from the consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve. From this point on those who would continue to teach Gentiles they had to be circumcised and keep the law would show that they were false teachers or immature Christians who were deceived. The leaders also realized that they wanted to help Gentile Christians reverse the effects of the sin of Adam and Eve by removing their fear, guilt and shame. We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to be free from the consequences of original sin so that they do not continue to live with fear, guilt and shame. May the Lord richly bless you as you help other Christians learn to understand this freedom in Christ.

The Lord Multiplied Ministry Teams

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that we have been set free from the law. In other topics we have seen that we have been called to freedom. 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.” Here we see that the freedom that the Lord gives makes it possible for Christians to serve one another in love. In this topic we will see that the decision of the Jerusalem Council brought great joy to the Gentile believers.

In Acts 15:30-32 we read, “So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.” Paul and Barnabas along with the other men from Antioch traveled together with Judas and Silas back to Antioch. When they arrived in Antioch they gathered all of the Christians together to read the letter and shared the report of what had happened at the Jerusalem Council.

Then the letter from the church at Jerusalem was read to all of the Christians gathered together in Antioch. Most of these Christians were Gentiles. These Christians heard the words of Acts 15:23b-29 which say, “The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “*You must* be circumcised and keep the law”—to whom we gave no *such* commandment— it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” All of the Christians in Antioch rejoiced over the great encouragement that was offered by this letter.

Then after the Christians in Antioch had heard the letter, Judas and Silas were asked to speak to the Christians at Antioch. We see that these two men are called prophets. The Greeks used the word “prophets” to speak of those who they felt had the ability to interpret the oracles or hidden things of God. In the New Testament church before the New Testament was written this word was used to speak of certain men who would predict future events (Acts 11:27-28). However, “prophets” was used mainly to speak of those men who were moved by the Holy Spirit to speak, to instruct, to comfort, to encourage, to rebuke or to stimulate those who heard what they said. Here we see that this is what Judas and Silas did as they spoke to the Christians. We see that these men did much teaching to encourage and strengthen the Christians in Antioch.

Acts 15:33-35 goes on to say, “And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there. Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.” Judas and Silas stayed for a period of time helping to encourage and strengthen the Christians in Antioch. When Judas got ready to return to Jerusalem, the church at Antioch sent greetings with him back to the apostles in Jerusalem. Here we see that they realized the importance of fellowship with others.

However, Silas decided that he would stay in Antioch for a longer period of time. That meant that Silas, Barnabas and Paul all continued to teach in Antioch. However, we also read that there were many others teaching and preaching the Word of the Lord in Antioch. Here we see that the church at Antioch gives us a real picture of a healthy reproducing church. In Acts 13:1-2 we read, "Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." At the time that the Holy Spirit led the church to send out Barnabas and Paul for the work that the Lord had for them there were five men teaching in Antioch.

In these verses, we see that two of the five were sent out for the work which the Lord had for them. However, we see here just a few years later that there were now many others also teaching and preaching the Word of the Lord. A healthy church will be a church that is continually developing additional godly leaders who are able to teach and preach the Word of God. 2 Timothy 2:2 says, "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." A godly leader will develop Timothys who can in turn develop a third generation (faithful men) and fourth generation (others also) of godly spiritual leaders.

We also see that godly spiritual leaders are able to both teach and preach the Word of God. The word translated "teaching" means to give instruction. Colossians 1:28 says, "Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Here we see that the goal of teaching is to present each person perfect (mature) in Christ. The word translated "preaching" means to bring good news and is used particularly in the New Testament to talk about the good news of the kingdom of God and the salvation that can only be obtained through Christ. Acts 8:35 says, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him." Here we see that when a person shares the message of salvation that can be obtained through Christ that the person is preaching the Gospel whether that person is talking to one person or to a large crowd. Godly spiritual leaders both preach and teach. They know how to do both whether they are talking to individuals or larger groups.

Acts 15:36-41 goes on to say, "Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they are doing." Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches." After a short time Paul suggested to Barnabas that they revisit all of the cities that they had visited since the letter from the Jerusalem Council was also written to the Gentiles in those areas. Paul realized the importance of reading that letter to all Christians wherever they were located.

Barnabas immediately wanted to take John Mark with them again. Barnabas reached out to give people a second opportunity. Paul felt that would not be a good idea to take Mark since John Mark had left them on their previous trip. Paul probably felt that his departure on the previous trip had hindered their ministry. Both men had a good point but both showed a wrong attitude. The word translated "contention" means a sharp disagreement. Instead of speaking the truth to one another in love, this time they spoke with sharpness. A key thing to notice is that God did work in spite of the disagreement. Later Paul recognized that Mark did have a profitable ministry (2 Timothy 4:11) because Barnabas gave him a second opportunity. As a

result of the disagreement, two teams were formed to revisit the cities instead of just one team.

Barnabas took Mark and they went to the island of Cyprus which was the first place that Barnabas and Paul had gone on their previous trip. On their previous trip Barnabas and Paul had visited the various cities on the island of Cyprus from one end of the island to the other. It was important for the letter written after the Jerusalem Council to be shared with those who had become Christians on this island because there were a large number of Jews on this island. It would have been easy for those of Jewish background to try and impose the law on the Gentile Christians. As a result, those Jews who had become Christians needed to know the decision of the Jerusalem Council.

Meanwhile Paul chose Silas to replace Barnabas on his team. This team then went through the areas of Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the churches. Those who had become Christians in these areas were mostly Gentiles. It would have been easy for them to be deceived by false teachers. Acts 15:1 says, "And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'" This teaching in Antioch had led the church to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and elders. This led to the Jerusalem Council. However, Paul realized that false teachers would quickly arise who would try to teach this false teaching wherever churches were established. Paul knew that all of the churches that they had established either already were experiencing this false teaching or soon would face this false teaching. As a result, Paul and Silas went to the cities where churches had been established to strengthen the Gentile Christians and share the letter written at the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council.

In the same way we need to prepare our physical and spiritual children to explain the decision of the Jerusalem Council because this false teaching of law keeping is still taught in many places. Once we come to Christ we are no longer under the law. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip others to explain the freedom we have in Christ.

The Lord Spread the Gospel to Europe

In our last topic, we saw that we want to equip our physical and spiritual children so that they can teach clearly the decision of the Jerusalem Council. In our topic today we see that Paul and Silas were traveling through the area of Galatia and explaining the decision of the Jerusalem Council to the churches that had been established in that region. As they traveled through this area, we are going to see that the Lord led them to add Timothy to the team when they came to the area of Lystra and Derbe.

In Acts 16:1-3 we read, “Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.” In these verses, we see that Timothy joined the team with Paul and Silas.

Paul and Silas were delivering the message that said that Gentiles were not under the law and did not need to be circumcised. However, Timothy had a Jewish mother and a Greek father. In addition, we have no evidence that his father had become a Christian. 2 Timothy 1:5-6 says, “When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also. Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” These verses only mention the faith of Timothy, his mother and his grandmother.

Timothy had already been having a real ministry for the Lord. We see that he was known by the other Christians in Lystra and Iconium in addition to the Christians in Derbe. The distance between the cities of Derbe and Iconium was more than forty miles. The fact that Timothy already had a good report in these other cities meant that he was busy serving the Lord. However, the Jews also knew that his father was a Greek.

Paul and Silas were delivering the letter from the church in Jerusalem to both the Jews and the Gentiles regarding the fact that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised or keep the Jewish law. God had told Abraham in Genesis 17:13-14, “He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.” Earlier Paul had not circumcised Titus because he was a Gentile – Galatians 2:1-3. Here Paul does circumcise Timothy because he was partly Jewish. Paul understood clearly that circumcision had nothing to do with salvation but it was very important to the Jews because of the promises that God gave to the Jews.

Ephesians 2:13-18 says, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” Paul realized the need to demonstrate this unity both to the Jews and to the Gentiles. Timothy provided an example of unity for the Jews while Titus provided an example

for the Gentiles.

We see that Paul and Silas added Timothy to their team so that he could be prepared and equipped to carry on the ministry of expanding the Gospel to the end of the earth. Paul knew that the best way to train Timothy for expanded ministry was by example. Later Paul showed that he trained the elders at Ephesus and other places this same way. Acts 20:20-21 says, "How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Here we see that Paul regularly trained future leaders to share the Gospel by taking them with him both publicly and in the homes of those who were not yet Christians.

Acts 16:4-5 says, "And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily." In each city where Paul and Barnabas had established churches, Paul and Silas now were able to tell the people in these churches about the decision of the Jerusalem Council. Those Jews who had become Christians knew that they could continue to practice circumcision because of the fact that was a part of their Jewish promises that related to the covenant that was given to Abraham. Those Gentiles who had become Christians knew that they did not need to be circumcised or keep the law because they were Gentiles and not under the covenant made with Abraham. They only needed to obey those things that God had taught Adam and Noah long before the call of Abraham. Both Jews and Gentiles could understand the fact that they had been made one through the cross of Christ.

We see that this message had a powerful impact. First the churches were strengthened in their faith. Second, the churches now were multiplying so fast that they were increasing in number daily. 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." In this verse, the churches multiplied in Judea, Galilee and Samaria. As the Gospel spread into Gentile areas God caused this multiplication to increase so that the number of churches increased daily.

In fact in Acts 16:6-10 we see that God showed Paul and the team that the Gospel was to spread to the continent of Europe. Those verses say, "Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them." Here we see how the Lord led Paul and the team to begin to spread the Gospel in Europe.

They completed their ministry of strengthening and encouraging the churches that had been established in Phrygia and Galatia. As they traveled west, the team wanted to go south into the Roman province of Asia. However, the Holy Spirit made it very clear that they were not to go into Asia at this time. On his next trip Paul did spend three years in Ephesus which was the major city of Asia. Acts 19:8-10 says, "And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." On that trip the Gospel spread throughout the Roman province of Asia. The fact that the Holy Spirit prevented them from going to Asia at this time was to

fulfill the plan of the Lord to spread the Gospel to Europe.

As they continued to travel west, we see that the team tried to go north into the region of Bithynia. Again the Holy Spirit did not allow them to go north so they just continued to follow the road west until they came to the city of Troas. Here we see the importance of learning to be led by the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:18 says, "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." When we are led by the Spirit, we experience the peace of God in our lives. Paul later wrote in Philippians 4:6-7, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." When we are led by the Spirit we will pray for guidance and the Holy Spirit will give us His peace. He will give us peace about what not to do and also peace about what He wants us to do.

They came to Troas which was a city that had water on three sides. They either had to cross the water or turn back. There the Holy Spirit gave Paul a vision during the night in which a man of Macedonia was begging them to come to Macedonia which was the land on the other side of the water which divided Asia and Europe. When Paul had seen the vision, immediately the team had peace that God was leading them to cross over to Macedonia.

We also see that there is a change by the writer from "they" to "we". Since Luke is the writer of the book of Acts, Troas was the place where Luke joined the team. Here we see another way that the Lord was leading them as He led them to expand the team. We want to help our physical and spiritual children also learn to be led by the Holy Spirit. We will help them learn to be led as we show them by our example the importance of praying about decisions until the Lord gives us His peace. Then when He gives us His peace we act on that peace and begin to do what the Lord is leading us to do or going where the Lord leads us to go. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children by your example what it means to be led by the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Allowed Persecution in Philippi

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to be led by the Holy Spirit. That will only happen as they see how we are led by the Holy Spirit. We need to provide them an example as we pray for the Lord to lead us and seek His peace about what He wants us to do. As our children learn to pray and seek the peace of the Lord, they will also learn to be led by the Lord. In this topic we will see that the Lord allowed Paul and Silas to experience persecution in the city of Philippi.

In Acts 16:11-15 we read, “Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. 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. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.” Here we see that Paul and the team sailed from Troas to Macedonia.

The boat made a stop at the island of Samothracia. Then the boat sailed to the coastal city of Neapolis. From that city they went inland ten miles until they came to the city of Philippi. Philippi was the most important city in the Roman province of Macedonia. It was also a Roman colony. The fact that it was a Roman colony meant that part of the people living in this city had come from Rome. Cities that were Roman colonies had certain rights because they were free cities. This meant that they had the right of full ownership of their land, they were exempt from the Roman tax and they were self governing so that they were not under the Roman ruler of the province. We also see that it was a city that had very few Jews because there was no synagogue in the city. If there were ten or more Jewish men in a city they were required to build a synagogue.

As a result, when it was the Sabbath Paul and the team could not go to the synagogue because there was no synagogue in that city. In cities without a synagogue the Jews in such a city would have a place of prayer where they could meet to pray, read from the Old Testament and discuss what they read. In Philippi that place of prayer was an open place outside of the city by the riverside. Paul and the team with him went to this place. When they arrived they found that it was Jewish women who met there probably due to the lack of Jewish men in the city. As a result, Paul and the other team members were invited to speak to the women that were gathered there.

One of the women there named Lydia was a business woman from the city of Thyatira in Asia. That was the area where the Lord had not allowed the team to go before they arrived at Troas. The city of Thyatira produced a beautiful purple dye for dyeing cloth. Because purple dye was very expensive, purple clothing was usually only worn by the rich or those who were royalty. We also read that she worshiped God. This probably meant that she was a Gentile proselyte instead of a Jew and came to the place of prayer because she wanted to learn more about God. When she heard Paul and the team explain how God had sent Christ to die for sin and the Father showed that He was satisfied with that payment for sin by raising Christ from the dead, the Lord opened her heart to the Gospel and she placed her faith in Christ. In addition her whole household believed and they were then all baptized. Then she persuaded the team to stay at her

house.

Paul and the team began going to that place of prayer to spend time in prayer. One day as they went they were met by a slave girl. This slave girl had a spirit of divination. This meant that she was possessed with demon spirits. Those demon spirits made it possible for the girl to make a large amount of money for her masters by fortune-telling. This type of activity was very common among the Gentiles but was forbidden for the Jews. Deuteronomy 18:10-12 says, "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." These things were forbidden for the Jews because they involved demon influence and demon possession.

This girl followed Paul and the rest of the team and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." She did not just do it that day. Instead she kept doing it for many days. Finally Paul took action. The word translated "greatly annoyed" means to be displeased or troubled. The only other place in the New Testament where this word is used is in Acts 4:1-2 where 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." In these verses, we see that the chief priests and Sadducees were greatly disturbed because Peter and John were teaching the people about the resurrection of Jesus.

Paul and Silas were certainly the servants of the Most High God. They were telling the people how to have salvation and forgiveness of sins. However, Paul realized that this slave girl was actually in bondage to Satan and his demons. Paul understood the greatness of that bondage and wanted to set the girl free. As a result, one day Paul finally said to the demon in the girl, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour." Although the girl was still a slave to her human masters, she had been set free from the bondage of Satan and his demons. Christ said in John 8:36, "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." Christ had set this slave girl free from her bondage to Satan and his demons.

However, that did not make the masters of the girl happy. Acts 16:19-24 says, "But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks." Here we see that her masters were controlled by the love of money.

In 1 Timothy 6:10 we read, "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." Here we see that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. That was certainly true in the lives of the masters of this slave girl. They did not care that they were destroying her life to make money for them. As a result, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them to the magistrates (Luke was Gentile and Timothy was part Gentile so they were not included). Then the masters said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." Here we see that the first

accusation that the masters made against Paul and Silas was that they were Jews. This statement was designed to stir up the prejudice of the people. Acts 18:2 says, “And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.” About that very time the Roman emperor had expelled all Jews from Rome.

The masters accused Paul and Silas of teaching customs that were not lawful for the Romans to follow. Their goal was to stir up the people so that they would get immediate action from the magistrates. Every Roman colony had two magistrates who were to serve as judges. The masters did not want a trial and so they stirred up the people so that they could persuade the magistrates to punish them immediately without a trial. Here we see an example of the consequences of the love of money. In this case they were ready and willing to break the law and get the magistrates to break the law to get revenge.

The magistrates wanted to please the people instead of obey the law and have a trial. As a result, the magistrates immediately tore off their clothes and ordered an immediate beating with rods. The Jewish law said that prisoners could be beaten with no more than 40 stripes. In contrast, the Roman law had no such limitation. We read that Paul and Silas were beaten with many stripes. Then the magistrates ordered them to be thrown into the prison and told the jailor to make certain that they did not escape.

In order to prevent any escape, the jailor put Paul and Silas in the inner prison and fastened their feet in stocks. Here we see that the Lord allowed Paul and Silas to suffer a very severe beating and then have their feet placed in stocks so that it was impossible for them to get comfortable that night. We will see in the next topic that the Lord allowed this to happen in order to save an entire household. This is a reminder that the Lord promises to work all things for good to them that love God. This is an example of the fact that the Lord is able to accomplish His purpose in every situation that we face in life. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that the Lord can even use the things that they suffer to draw others to Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand why God allows suffering in our lives.

The Lord Saved a Roman Soldier and His Household

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand that the Lord is able to work through every situation to accomplish His purpose. We said that the Lord allowed Paul and Silas to experience a severe beating in order to give an entire family the opportunity to hear how to become Christians and follow Christ. We will learn more about that family in our topic today.

How would you feel and what would you do if you had been severely beaten and then had your feet placed in stocks so that you could not get comfortable? Paul and Silas were in that situation. Acts 16:16:25-27 says, "But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself." Instead of complaining and groaning about their suffering, Paul and Silas chose to express their praise to God.

We see that Paul and Silas were doing two things as they suffered from the severe beating that they had received and could not get comfortable because their feet were in stocks. The word translated "stocks" means a log or board in which the feet and hands were placed and fastened. First, we see that they were praying. Second, we see that they were singing hymns to God. A key thing to notice here is that hymns are songs of praise that are sung to God. In the middle of their suffering Paul and Silas were singing praise to God. However, God was not the only One that was listening as they sang praises to God. We see that the other prisoners were also listening to them. They were even using this opportunity to witness to the other prisoners by prayer and praise to God.

We also see that God chose to show His power. Suddenly there was a great earthquake. This earthquake did several things. First, it caused the foundations of the prison to be shaken. Second, it caused all of the doors of the prison to open. Third, it caused the chains of all of the prisoners to be loosed. All of the prisoners were actually free to leave the prison because there was nothing holding them any longer. However, the other prisoners had been listening to Paul and Silas and we see that none of them left the prison. The Lord was working in their hearts as well.

Meanwhile, the earthquake had also awakened the jailor. He saw the doors of the prison and immediately thought that the prisoners had fled. He knew the consequences if prisoners were allowed to escape. Acts 12:19 says, "But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed there." The jailor knew that he would be put to death if the prisoners escaped. Since he thought they had probably already escaped, the jailor drew out his sword and was ready to commit suicide.

Acts 16:28-31 says, "But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Here we see that Paul quickly called to the jailor before he had time to commit suicide. Paul called with a loud voice to make sure that the jailor heard him since Paul was in the inner prison. Paul told the

jailor not to harm himself. Then he told him that the prisoners were still all in the prison.

The jailor immediately called for a light and he ran into the prison as quickly as he could. He was still filled with fear. As a result, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. The word translated “trembling” means to be terrified or to shake. It is the word that was used to describe Moses when he saw the burning bush and heard God call to him from heaven. Acts 7:31-32 says, “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.” The jailor had this same kind of fear as he fell down in front of Paul and Silas.

Then we see that in addition to the prisoners that the jailor had also been listening as Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns to God. Through their prayers and singing the jailor knew that he needed to be saved. The first thing that the jailor did was to bring Paul and Silas out of the prison. Then the jailor asked them, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The word translated “Sirs” is used 748 times in the New Testament. Of those 667 times the word is translated “Lord” and talks about God or Christ. Slaves would also use this title to address their master and then a dozen times it is translated sir. As a result, we realize that the jailor had learned many things that night from the prayers that Paul and Silas prayed and the hymns that they sang to God.

The jailor wanted to know how to be saved. The word translated “saved” is usually used to talk about salvation. The first time that this word was used in the New Testament was when an angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in Matthew 1:21 and said, “And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” Ephesians 2:8 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” In both of these verses we see that the primary use of the word is in relation to salvation from the penalty for sin.

Paul and Silas answered his question with the statement, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” The word translated “believe” is used 264 times in the New Testament and means to be persuaded of and to place confidence in. This was a favorite word of John as he wrote the Gospel of John and his final use in that Gospel is John 20:30-31 where we read, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” Here Paul and Silas also promised the jailor that his whole household would also be saved if they believed.

We see the results of that statement in Acts 16:32-34 where we read, “Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.” After a major earthquake no one is ready to sleep. Instead people are thinking about the issues of life and death. Then Paul and Silas shared the word of the Lord with the jailor and with all of the people that were in his house. This probably included slaves and guests who may have been visiting the jailor and his family. The jailor also took the time to wash the wounds of Paul and Silas from the severe beating that they had received.

We see that the jailor as well as all of the others that were in the house with his family were saved and baptized that night. Paul and Silas took the time that night to clearly present the Gospel to those in the house of the jailor so that there was clear understanding by all even though most of those present in the house that night may have had no background of the Old

Testament. Romans 1:19-20 says, "Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." Here we see that God reveals Himself through His creation. Although the creation does not help people to understand the message of salvation, creation does show that there is a God who has eternal power and shows His divine nature. This causes people to recognize the need to know God and caused this household to listen and understand as Paul and Silas explained the message of the death and resurrection of Christ that night.

After the jailor brought Paul and Silas into his house, he had a meal prepared for them. We also see one of the immediate results of salvation. We see that the jailor rejoiced. Happiness depends on what is happening around you and that happiness can change in a moment if what is happening around you suddenly changes. In contrast, joy is the result of what is happening within your life. Peter explained the greatness of this joy as he talked about the great joy that we can experience as Christians as we wait for the coming of the Lord. 1 Peter 1:8-9 says, "Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of your souls." The jailor and his entire household could be filled with joy because of the fact that they no longer had to fear death. Instead they could look forward to the coming of the Lord.

We see that the jailor and his entire household all believed and placed their faith in the death and resurrection of Christ that very night. We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to explain to entire families how they can have forgiveness of sin and receive the gift of eternal life. That means that we want to help our children learn to explain the Gospel very simply and clearly so that each person who hears will be able to understand the meaning of repentance from the sin of unbelief and what it means to place our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to explain clearly the message of salvation.

Paul Confronted the Roman Leaders

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the fact that the Philippian jailor and his entire household repented of their sin of unbelief and placed their faith in Christ that same night. Sometimes we will see a whole household become Christians at the same time as we clearly explain the Gospel to them. We saw that this is what happened that night following a great earthquake. That earthquake also freed Paul and Silas from the stocks and opened the prison. In this topic we are going to see what happened the next day.

In Acts 16:35-36 we read, “And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go." So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace."” We saw in our last topic that the city of Philippi had experienced a great earthquake that had opened the prison the previous night. A major earthquake like that certainly had to have a major affect on all of the buildings in the city. As a result, the leaders of the city probably had many concerns that next day.

The magistrates then sent officers to the jailor with instructions to let Paul and Silas go. By morning the magistrates had time to think about what they had done the previous day. As magistrates the two magistrates were the judges who held trials for those who were accused of crimes. Paul and Silas had been accused of teaching customs that were not lawful for Romans to receive. However, the magistrates had not had a trial to see if these accusations were true. Instead they had beaten Paul and Silas severely and thrown them in prison without a trial. Now the great earthquake during the night quickly made them realize that they had broken the law instead of upheld the law.

As a result, the magistrates sent the officers to tell Paul and Silas they could leave. They probably did not want to take the risk of being accused of breaking the very laws that they were supposed to uphold. The officers came and told the jailor to let these men go. The jailor then came to Paul and Silas and told them that the magistrates had said that they could leave the prison. They were free to depart. The jailor told them that they could depart in peace. Instead of just leaving the prison and going on their way, Paul did something that was very unusual for him.

Acts 16:37-38 says, “But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out." And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.” Here we see that Paul spoke to the officers that had been sent from the magistrates. Paul said that they would not be leaving the prison immediately. Instead Paul gave the officers a message to take back to the magistrates.

Paul said that the magistrates had beaten them in public so that many of the people in the city would have heard about the beating. They had also thrown Paul and Silas into the prison. However, Paul also said that they had been beaten and thrown in prison when they had not been convicted in a trial. Paul also said that they were Romans. Suddenly the officers were probably very fearful when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens.

To beat a Roman citizen was a very serious crime especially since Paul and Silas had not been

given a trial. Acts 22:24-29 says, "The commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?" When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman." Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" He said, "Yes." The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "But I was born a citizen." Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him." Here we see that the Roman commander was filled with fear because he had even bound a Roman citizen. They had not even started to beat Paul here.

After Paul had told the officers from the magistrates that they were uncondemned Romans, Paul said that there was no way that the magistrates were going to release them secretly. Paul said that the only way he and Silas would leave would be if the magistrates personally came and got them out of the prison. At first this seems like a very unusual action for Paul. However, he was not doing it for his own sake. Instead he was doing it for the sake of the new Christians in Philippi. Lydia and her household, the jailor and his household and the others who had become Christians had only been Christians for a very short time. If Paul and Silas would have left privately, the people would have felt free to persecute these new Christians. They would have had no protection in the city of Philippi. Paul and Silas did not want that to happen to the new Christians.

Here we see that Paul had a great love and concern for new Christians in every city where he shared the Gospel. He was very willing to suffer persecution himself and he understood that all Christians will suffer persecution. In fact Paul wrote years later in 2 Timothy 3:12, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." Paul realized that it takes time for new Christians to grow and so he chose to send this message to the magistrates that the only way that they would leave would be if they magistrates came themselves and took them out of prison.

Acts 16:39-40 says, "Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city. So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed." The magistrates probably came very quickly when they heard that Paul and Silas were Romans. To give a beating to a Roman citizen was a very serious crime. It was even more serious if it was done without a trial. Such a crime could have an impact both on the magistrates and on the city of Philippi. The magistrates could have been removed from their position as magistrates. The city of Philippi could have had its privileges as a Roman colony taken away. That would have caused further problems for the magistrates and so they quickly came to the prison.

The word translated "pleaded" usually means to beseech, to comfort or to exhort. However, it can also mean to beg or to try to appease by a request. That is the way that the word is used in these verses. The magistrates actually were begging Paul and Silas to leave the prison. The word translated "brought them out" means to lead out. It is the word used in Acts 5:19-20 where we read, "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.'" We see that the magistrates were eager to get Paul and Silas to leave the city because the magistrates knew that they had broken the law and were in danger of losing their positions as magistrates.

It was important for the new church in Philippi that the magistrates personally came and

brought Paul and Silas out of the prison because it told the people of the city that the two men had done nothing wrong. Paul and Silas caused the magistrates and the rest of the people of the city to realize that they needed to treat the new Christians with respect because the beliefs of the Christians were not wrong. The magistrates brought Paul and Silas out of the prison and then requested that they leave the city.

Paul had cast a demon out of the girl that had been telling fortunes because she had been following them for many days and saying that they were the servants of the Most High God. That was why her owners had caught Paul and Silas and brought them to the magistrates. Even though the magistrates had beaten them without a trial, we see that Paul and Silas still showed a submissive attitude and left the city after they took the time to encourage those who had become Christians in Philippi.

When Paul and Silas left the prison they went to the home of Lydia. There the other brethren that had become Christians came to see them before they left the city of Philippi. Most of these other brethren had probably become Christians during the time that the girl with the demon had been following Paul and Silas. Even though she had followed them for many days, it still meant that the rest of these Christians had not been Christians for a very long period of time. Paul and Silas realized the need to encourage these Christians before they left the city. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” Paul and Silas wanted to encourage the brethren and let them know that they were loved before they left Philippi.

In the same way we also need to realize the importance of encouraging our physical and spiritual children because it is a blessing to all Christians when they are encouraged. We see in the verses mentioned above that getting together and encouraging one another in the Lord helps to stir up our desire to love and do good works. We provide an example for our children as we encourage them in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you regularly encourage your children.

The Development of the Church in Thessalonica

In our last topic, we saw that we want to encourage our physical and spiritual children so that they know that they are loved. We also saw that such encouragement is a blessing to all Christians. Paul and Silas took time to encourage the new Christians in Philippi before they left the city because they wanted them to know that they were greatly loved. When Paul and Silas left Philippi they took the road that led to the next large city in the region of Macedonia.

Acts 17:1-4 says, "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas." The largest city in the region of Macedonia was the city of Thessalonica with a population of almost 200,000. That was the city to which Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke headed when they left Philippi.

The city of Amphipolis was about 30 miles from Philippi so that was probably where they stayed for a night. Then the city of Apollonia was about 30 miles further so they probably also stayed in that city for a night. However, their goal was to go to the city of Thessalonica which was about 40 miles further. This city had a larger Jewish population than Philippi so when they reached Thessalonica they immediately located the synagogue of the Jews. In every city where he went Paul always began with the Jews. Romans 1:16 says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." Paul and the team with him always began at the synagogue for two reasons. First, they wanted to give the Jews the opportunity to hear the Gospel. Second, in every synagogue there were God fearing Gentiles who wanted to learn more about God that attended the synagogue to hear the Old Testament read and explained.

We see, in these verses, exactly how Paul presented the Gospel to the Jews in the synagogues. The word translated "reasoned" means to discuss, speak or reason with. Paul reasoned with the Jews but showing them what the Old Testament Scriptures had to say about the Christ. The word translated "Christ" means the Anointed One and was used by the Jews to speak about the promised Messiah, the Son of God. Here we see that Paul used the Old Testament to explain and demonstrate what the Old Testament taught about the fact that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead. Once he had shown them what the Old Testament said about the Christ then he explained to them that Jesus is the Christ.

This gives us a real key for working with the Trinity in evangelism. We are to discuss or explain what the Bible teaches about the death and resurrection of Christ. Then we discuss the various questions that people have. We also show from the Bible what it says about the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who fulfills the promises that God gave in the Old Testament. Romans 10:17 says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." John 16:8-11 says that the Holy Spirit convicts or convinces of the sin of unbelief, the fact that Christ is the Righteous One and the fact that Satan had already been judged by the resurrection and that those who continue to follow him will share in his judgment. John 6:44 says that the Father is the One who draws people to Christ. Then in Luke 19:10 Christ said, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." We read and explain the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit convicts. The Father draws and the Son seeks and saves. We

work with the Trinity as we read and explain the Scriptures and each member of the Trinity also does His work.

After three weeks of Paul explaining what the Scriptures taught about the death and resurrection of the Christ, we see that the Scriptures were doing exactly what God says that His Word will do. Isaiah 55:11 says, "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it." We see that some of the Jews were persuaded by the Word of God that Jesus is the Christ. However, we see that a great multitude of the devout Greeks were persuaded. In addition, many of the women of influence also believed and joined with Paul and Silas. Here we see that when the Word of God is clearly explained that the Lord works in the hearts of those who hear and can draw many to Himself.

However, Acts 17:5 says, "But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people." The word translated "envious" can mean to be zealous when it is used in a good sense or it can mean to boil with anger or envy when used in an evil sense. Here we see that the word is used in an evil sense. The Jews that did not believe burned with envy because so many people were following Christ.

As a result of their envy, these angry Jews went to the marketplace. There they found some men who were looking for an opportunity to do evil. These men gathered a mob and set the whole city in an uproar. This mob then went and attacked the house of Jason. They wanted to find Paul and Silas and bring them out so that the mob could do evil to them. However, they did not find Paul and Silas in the house.

Acts 17:6-9 says, "But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king--Jesus." And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go." When the leaders of this mob did not find Paul and Silas in the house they dragged Jason and some of the others who had become Christians to the rulers of the city.

Then the mob cried to the rulers of the city, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too." The word translated "that have turned upside down" means to stir up rebellion or tumult. Acts 21:38 says, "Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?" Here the word is translated "stirred up a rebellion". This means that the mob was accusing Paul and Silas of stirring up rebellion all over the world. Then the mob said that Jason had harbored them by allowing them to stay at his home. We see that the mob was trying to make a charge against Paul and Silas that would cause the rulers to arrest and imprison Paul and Silas.

We see that in the next charge that the mob made against Paul and Silas. Their next accusation was, "These are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king--Jesus." Although this mob had been recruited by the Jews, the mob accused Paul and Silas of breaking the decrees that Caesar had made. Here we see that these Jews did the same thing that the Jews in Jerusalem had years earlier done to Christ. John 18:33-35 says, "Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?" Here we see that the Jews accused Christ of claiming to be the King of the Jews.

The answer of Christ is important to understand because we need to help every Christian understand what Christ said. In John 18:36-38 Christ answered, "Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all." We need to help every Christian understand that we are not talking about the kingdoms of this world. Instead we are talking about the kingdom of God and the battle is a battle for truth and not a battle for power. That is a very different kind of battle.

Both the rulers of the city of Thessalonica and the crowd gathered that day were troubled by the accusations that the mob brought against Paul and Silas. The word translated "troubled" means to agitate or stir up. The rulers of the city did not investigate the charges. Instead they required Jason and the rest of the Christians to provide a bond (taken security) to guarantee that Paul and Silas would leave the city. This meant that Jason and the other Christians had to make Paul and Silas leave the city or the bond (money) that they had given to the rulers would be forfeited.

This put the new Christians in a similar situation to those in Philippi. Paul and Silas had to leave the city even though the new Christians wanted to learn more about Christ. The Lord allowed this to happen so that Paul would write I and 2 Thessalonians to answer the questions of these new Christians. Many the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand how the Lord worked to get Paul to write I and 2 Thessalonians.

The Importance of Searching the Word

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand why Paul and Silas were accused of turning the world upside down. We saw that this meant that they were accused of stirring up rebellion. As a result, Paul and Silas were forced to leave the city of Thessalonica. We also saw that God used that to cause the Christians in Thessalonica to send someone with their questions to Paul. Paul wrote the books of I and 2 Thessalonians to answer the questions of these new Christians. In this way we see that God even used the plans of evil men to complete His plan to get these books written so that the questions of many new Christians have been answered through the years since that time.

In Acts 17:10-12 we read, “Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 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.” The new Christians in Thessalonica waited until it was night and then sent Paul and Silas out of the city so that the mob in the city would not see them and kill them. Instead of sending them along the main road, they sent them to the city of Berea which was not on the main road. This was also an important city and there were enough Jews in this city that this city also had a synagogue.

As they did in each city Paul and Silas first went to the synagogue to share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ with the Jews and devout Gentile proselytes that gathered in the synagogue. The Jews in Berea had a different attitude than the Jews in Thessalonica. The word translated “fair-minded” means readiness of mind or eagerness. The word is used twice in 2 Corinthians 8:11-12 where we read, “But now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.” In verse 11 the word is translated readiness and in verse 12 a willing mind. This word shows that the Jews in Berea had an open mind and were ready to actually see what the Old Testament taught about Christ.

We read that the Jews in Berea searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. The word translated “searched” means to examine, to investigate, to judge or to question. Peter used this word when he spoke to the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:9-10 which says, “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.” In these verses, the word is translated judged. We see that the Jews in Berea carefully examined the Old Testament Scriptures to see if what Paul and Silas were saying was true.

This careful examination of the Old Testament Scriptures led many Jews in Berea along with many honorable women and men who were Greeks to believe. Here we see a key lesson. Any time people will examine the Word of God with an open mind that really desires to understand what God says, the Lord will work in their hearts and lives and many will believe. This is why evangelistic Bible studies with small groups who are searching to know the truth are so effective.

However, the day came when the Jews in Thessalonica heard that Paul was teaching the Word

of God to the people in Berea. Acts 17:13-15 says, "But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there. So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed." The Jews from Thessalonica did the same thing in Berea that they had done in Thessalonica. They stirred up the crowds. The new Christians immediately sent Paul away from their city and had some of the new Christians take him to Athens. However, Silas and Timothy were able to stay in Berea and keep teaching for a period of time. When Paul sent the men from Berea back to that city he asked them to send Timothy and Silas as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Paul was walking around the city of Athens while he waited for Silas and Timothy to rejoin him. Athens was the religious center for Greece and had idol worship of every kind. As Paul walked around the city he saw that the city was given over to idols. This caused his spirit to be provoked within him. Acts 17:16-17 says, "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. The word translated "provoked" means to make sharp or to arouse to anger.

The only other place that this word is used in the New Testament is 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 where we read, "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil." Here we see that love is not provoked. This is important to help people understand. We are to hate sin but love the sinner. Paul hated the sin of idolatry. However, he loved the people who were in bondage to Satan through those idols. As a result, even though Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy, he could not keep silent because he loved people and wanted to see them set free from the bondage of Satan.

To meet the people and have the opportunity to share the Gospel with them, Paul quickly found two places where he reasoned with the people. The word translated "reasoned" means to discuss together or to compare different thoughts. This word is used twice in Acts 19:8-9 where we read, "And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus." In these verses, we see that when Paul first went to Corinth that he reasoned for three months in the synagogue and then he began reasoning daily in a school that was available during the hot hours of the day when people stopped their work for a few hours.

In Athens Paul reasoned both in the synagogue and in the marketplace. The marketplace provided a place for daily contacts with the people of the city. In Acts 17:18-21 we see what happened in the marketplace. Those verses say, "Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbling want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing."

Religion and philosophy were closely related to each other in Athens. The Epicurean philosophers believed that there was a god but that he did not get involved with people. They

felt people ceased to exist when they died so they lived for pleasure. The Stoic philosophers taught human self sufficiency so they focused on self discipline so they could reach a point where they experienced neither pleasure nor pain. The teachings of both groups had spread throughout much of the Roman Empire. The men of both philosophies called Paul a babbler because he preached Jesus and the resurrection. They said that Paul seemed to be talking about strange gods. The word translated “babblers” meant a seed picker and was used by the Greeks to describe a person who had no philosophies of his own but took ideas from other religions.

The people in Athens liked to spend all of their time talking about new philosophies and ideas. As a result, they took Paul to the Areopagus. The Areopagus was a court on Mars’ Hill where people would defend their philosophies and teachings. There they asked Paul to explain his new teaching. They said that they wanted to hear about this new teaching. Paul was not teaching about living for pleasure. Paul was not teaching about self sufficiency or self discipline. The philosophers said that Paul was saying things that sounded strange to their ears. The Epicureans were especially confused when Paul talked about the resurrection since they believed that people ceased to exist when they died. Many people today are like the Greek philosophers. They want to hear many different teachings so that they have much knowledge. However, such people often do not want to believe any of the teachings that they hear.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that they may meet people in their lives who are very similar to the Greek philosophers. We are going to see in the next topic that Paul had to begin with the Creator to help these philosophers with no Biblical background. However, we will see that he ended with the resurrection of Christ. We will also need to show our children how to begin with the Creator when they are talking with people that have no background of the Bible. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to understand the backgrounds of various people.

Sharing the Gospel With People With No Background

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to share the Gospel with people that have no background of the Bible. In Athens Paul talked in the marketplace to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. They had no background of the Bible and so their religions were formed from their philosophies and ideas. In our topic today we are going to see that these philosophers took Paul to the Areopagus, a court on Mars' Hill, where people could talk about their various ideas and philosophies. We will see that Paul realized that he had to begin with the Creator.

Acts 17:22-25 says, "Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands." Paul began by telling the people of Athens that he realized that they were very religious. In fact the city of Athens was filled with idols because of the many different religions. Paul also showed that he had been observing what the people believed as he walked around the city and observed their various idols. He said that he had even found an altar that had this written on it, "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD". The people of Athens had built this altar in case there was a god that did not have an idol in their city.

Instead of condemning the people for their idol worship, Paul had found a bridge to begin to talk to the people about the God that they did not know. This is a key example for our own lives when we meet people with no Biblical background. We need to find a bridge instead of build a barrier. Paul said that he was going to tell them about the One that they worshiped even though they did not know who that was. He began by telling that that God is the One who is the Creator of the world and of everything in the world. Here we see that Paul actually began with the first chapters of Genesis even though the Greeks had no knowledge of the Old Testament. He also said that the Creator is the Lord of both the heaven and the earth. Since He is the Creator, He does not live in temples that have been made with hands. Paul immediately explained the difference between the Creator and something that is created such as an idol.

Then Paul went on to explain the difference between the worship of the Creator and the worship of anything else. Acts 17:25-29 says, "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising." Paul made it clear that the Creator is not like the idols that are the work of man's hands.

Instead the Creator is the source of all life. He is the One who has given breath to every person. He is the Creator of all things. Paul also pointed out the fact that all people have come from one blood. This was a statement about the fact that all people and nations have come from Adam regardless of where each particular group of people lives on the earth. This was important in Greece because the Greeks thought that they were superior to all other people (as do the people of many other nations). Because we all come from one person that means that we

are all equal and that no group of people is superior.

Paul said that God also determined when each nation would become powerful and when it would fall. He said that God is the One who has set the boundaries where each group of people lives. God did all of these things so that all people would recognize that they have a need for God. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, "He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end." It is the desire of the Creator that all people would seek to know Him. In fact Paul said that God is not very far from any of us. This statement refuted the ideas of the Greek philosophers who said that we cannot know God.

Paul then reminded the people gathered that day of the things that two of their own poets had said. Epimendes said, "In Him we live and move and have our being." This particular Greek poet recognized that the Creator is the source of all life and that we must depend on Him for all things. Aratus said, "For we are also His offspring." Since their own poets recognized that we were created by God, Paul said that we should not think that we can make the Divine Nature from silver or gold or stone. Such idols are shaped by the hand of man and come from the mind and thinking of man. It is impossible for them to even be compared to the Divine Nature of the Creator of all things.

Paul went on to say in Acts 17:30-31, "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." The word translated "ignorance" means lack of knowledge of divine things or moral blindness. 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." Here we see that spiritual blindness is the result of the lack of spiritual life and comes from a lack of knowledge of divine things. That is why God did not judge Adam and all others immediately but put off His judgment for a period of time. He put off that judgment until Christ could take that judgment in our place and for our sin.

Then Paul said that God now commands every man to repent. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 explains the meaning of repentance when that verse 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." Repentance is turning to God from idols to serve the living and true God. Paul said that the day is coming when God will judge the world in righteousness. He will judge the world by the One that He has ordained. He showed who He has ordained by raising Him from the dead. Those who have repented by turning to God from idols by placing their faith in the One who is righteous are made right with God and do not need to fear that day of judgment.

In 1 Timothy 2:5-6 we read, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." Then John 5:26-27 says, "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man." Jesus Christ is the only One who can be the Mediator between God and man because He paid the penalty for our sin by shedding His blood for our sin. God has given Christ the authority to carry out judgment against all those who reject His payment for sin. God gave assurance of this fact to all people by raising Christ from the dead.

When Paul mentioned the resurrection of the dead, the people there that day made one of three responses. Acts 17:32-34 says, "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." So Paul departed from

among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.” Some people mocked when they heard about the resurrection of the dead. Greek philosophy did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and so many of those who mocked were probably philosophers. They did not want to hear any more.

However, there were others who wanted to hear more. These were people to whom the idea of the resurrection was such a new idea that they had to hear more in order to come to a true understanding. Many people today also need to hear more about the death and resurrection of Christ before they can understand and believe. God is working in their hearts as the Holy Spirit convicts (John 16:8-11), the Father draws (John 5:44) and the Son seeks and saves (Luke 19:10). We want to continue over time to explain the Word of God to such individuals until they come to a true understanding of the Gospel. Paul knew that these individuals needed time to think and so he departed to let them think.

Finally, there was a third group. This was the group that the Lord had been working in their hearts. The word translated “joined” means to join or to firmly fasten together. We read that this group believed in the fact that Christ is the Righteous One who could take away their sin. This group included a man by the name of Dionysius who was a member of the Areopagus court. This would be a person who had heard many philosophies but the Lord worked in his heart and he recognized that Paul had shared the message that would give life. There was also a woman named Damaris who believed. In addition we see that there were also several others who believed.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that when they share the Gospel with people, especially people with no background of the Bible, that they will also experience these same three responses. Some will mock, others will want to hear more and some may be ready to believe. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to share the Gospel with people who have no Bible background.

The Development of the Church in Corinth

In our last topic, we saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children how to share the Gospel with people who have no background of the Bible. We saw that Paul had to begin with the Creator and the creation to begin to build a foundation. He began with the Creator and ended with the death and resurrection of Christ. We want to help our children understand the importance of teaching about the death and resurrection of Christ to all with whom they share the Gospel. In this topic we will see that Paul left Athens and went to the city of Corinth and will see how the Lord laid the foundation and developed the church in that city.

In Acts 18:1-4 we read, “After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.” Paul went from Athens to Corinth which was the largest city of Achaia or Southern Greece.

We see that Paul found a couple by the name of Aquila and Priscilla. The word translated “found” can mean to find without previous search (by chance) or to find by enquiry when it talks about people. As a result, we do not know whether Paul met them in the marketplace, the synagogue or some other place. Aquila had been born in Pontus, a Roman province in what is today in northeastern Turkey along the Black Sea. However, he and his wife, Priscilla, had been living in Rome. They had come to Corinth from Rome because the Roman Emperor, Claudius, had commanded all Jews to move from Rome. It is possible that they had become Christians either in Pontus or in Rome because there were people from both places in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9-10) nearly 20 years earlier. From the book of Romans we learn that a church had been established in Rome probably by people who had been in Jerusalem on Pentecost.

Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers which was the trade of Paul and probably the trade by which he had made his living for at least several years. Because they had the same trade we see that Paul stayed with them and worked with them making tents to support himself. Working together making tents gave them many hours to discuss together the life and teachings of Christ as well as His death and resurrection. If they were already Christians, this gave Aquila and Priscilla the opportunity to learn much more about His teachings. If they were not yet Christians, they became Christians as they talked together. However, Aquila and Priscilla also learned the importance of spending time together with individuals to help them learn to understand the life, death, resurrection and teachings of Christ. That will be seen by what they do in their later ministry.

At the same time that Paul was working with Aquila and Priscilla he spent time every Sabbath reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout Greeks who attended the synagogue. Here we see that Paul was laying the foundation for the churches that would be established in the city of Corinth and the surrounding region. During this time we see that many Jews and many devout Greeks were persuaded. The word translated “persuaded” means to believe, to trust or share words that cause a person to be persuaded. This word is used twice in Acts 28:23-24 where we read, “So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. And some

were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.” Paul used the Old Testament to explain the things that he taught about Christ.

Acts 18:5-7 says, “When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue.” We see that Silas and Timothy caught up with Paul and rejoined him in Corinth.

After they arrived we see that Paul was compelled by the Spirit to solemnly testify to the Jews in the synagogue that Jesus is the Christ. Later Paul would use this same word as he wrote to the church in Corinth when he said in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” We see that Paul was urged by both the Holy Spirit and by the love of Christ to tell the Corinthians that Jesus is the Christ. This solemn testimony that Jesus is the Christ caused the Jews to realize that they had to make a choice either to accept or reject Jesus.

We see that many of the Jews opposed and blasphemed Paul when he solemnly testified that Jesus was the One who fulfilled all of the promises about Christ in the Old Testament. Then Paul spoke to those Jews and said, “Your blood *be* upon your *own* heads; I *am* clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” This was similar to what Paul and Barnabas had said when they said in Acts 13:46, “Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.” Then Paul left the synagogue and stopped teaching in the synagogue. Instead he started teaching in the house of Justus who lived next door to the synagogue. Justus was a Gentile since this is a Roman name. He was also a worshiper of God. He was probably one of the devout Gentiles who had believed in Christ as Paul had reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and devout Gentiles each Sabbath.

However, not all of the Jews rejected the message about Jesus. Acts 18:8-11 says, “Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized. Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” One of the Jews who did believe was Crispus. He was the one that had been the leader in the synagogue. We see that he believed on the Lord along with his entire household. This was probably very upsetting to the Jews that had rejected.

In addition, we read that many Corinthians believed as they heard the teaching of Paul. Many of these were probably devout Gentiles who had been attending the synagogue to learn about the true and living God. When these Corinthians believed, they were baptized as a testimony of their belief in Christ. This probably caused the unbelieving Jews to become more upset because the Jews had lost their control over these people. 1 Corinthians 8:1 says, “Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.” The Corinthians had been following idols. The Jews had depended on their knowledge of the Old Testament. In contrast, we see that love edifies (builds up). As a result, these new Christians were now beginning to learn to be led by the love of Christ instead of being driven by the fear of people.

Paul had previously been forced to leave several cities because he was faithful in preaching the Gospel. The Lord chose to encourage Paul as people began to turn to Christ in Corinth. That was a great encouragement to Paul because 1 Corinthians 2:2-3 says, “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. To encourage Paul, the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision. The Lord told Paul, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” Here we see that the Lord assured Paul that he did not need to be fearful. Paul was told not to be silent. Instead he knew that he could speak boldly for Christ. The Lord had many people in the city of Corinth that He was going to draw to Himself as Paul faithfully taught the Word of God. The Lord assured Paul that no one would hurt or attack him in this city.

For the next year and six months we see that Paul and the team continued to faithfully teach the Word of God in the city of Corinth. Instead of depending on their own words, Paul and those with him understood the truth of Hebrews 4:12 which says, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” The Word of God will do what we can never do through our own efforts because God says that His Word is living and powerful. Our words may appeal to the mind. In contrast, we see that the Word of God discerns the thoughts and the intents of the heart. That is why 1 Corinthians 14:25 says, “And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.” The Word of God will reveal the secrets of the heart.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to work with the Holy Spirit in evangelism. That will happen as we show them how to share the Word of God instead of sharing their own opinions. Then the Holy Spirit can convict, the Father can draw and the Son can seek and save. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand why the Lord worked in the lives of many people in Corinth.

The Return of Paul to Antioch

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how the Lord developed the church in the city of Corinth. We saw that the Lord is the One who calls people to Himself and the Lord assured Paul that He had many people in the city of Corinth. That encouraged Paul and He was faithful to share the Word of God in the city of Corinth for the next year and a half. During that time the Lord drew many people to Himself. In this topic we are going to see how the Lord protected Paul and then led him to return to Antioch.

The Jews had not been able to try and stop Paul. However, Acts 18:12-16 says, "When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters." And he drove them from the judgment seat." The total time that Gallio served as proconsul was less than a year. As a result, when he became proconsul the Jews saw their opportunity to try and stop Paul.

The Jews who had not become Christians rose up against Paul. They brought him to the judgment seat to Gallio and accused him saying, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." The judgment seat was a large stone platform in front of the house where the proconsul lived. It was in the marketplace so it was the place where they would try public cases. Here we see that the Jews accused Paul of persuading people to worship God in a way that was against the law. The Romans allowed the Jews to follow the Jewish law and so this claim of the Jews meant that Paul was not following the Jewish law and so he should be stopped from teaching. Apparently Gallio did not even want to get involved in listening.

As Paul started to open his mouth to speak, Gallio told the Jews that it would be necessary for him to listen if the Jews had accused Paul doing something evil. He said he would have had to listen if they accused Paul of wicked crimes. Gallio said that those were things where it would be necessary for him to listen to the Jews. However, he said that since they were only bringing a question about words or names in their law that he did not plan to listen to them. They had not spoken of any crime that Paul had committed. Instead they only had a disagreement about words. When it says that he drove them from the judgment seat, Gallio made it clear that he had dismissed the case and was not going to listen to the Jews any further.

The Greeks then saw the opportunity to show their prejudice against the Jews. Acts 18:17-18 says, "Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things." In Acts 18:8 we saw that Crispus had been the ruler of the synagogue. That verse says, "Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized." After Crispus became a Christian, the Jews appointed another man as the ruler of the synagogue. Here we see that Sosthenes was the one who had become the ruler of the synagogue. He was the one who would have led the other Jews to accuse Paul before Gallio.

Since Gallio dismissed the case and made it clear that he was not going to get involved in their charges against Paul, other Greeks saw this as an opportunity to act out their prejudice against the Jews. Once Gallio dismissed the charges, the Greeks made an attack on Sosthenes and beat

him right in front of the judgment seat. Gallio may have also felt prejudice against the Jews because he did not stop this beating of Sosthenes. The name Sosthenes is used one other time in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 1:1 we read, "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother. Since this man was sending greetings with Paul to the church in Corinth, it means the Corinthians knew him and so it is possible that sometime after this beating by the Greeks that the Sosthenes mentioned here in Acts later became a Christian.

Acts 18:18-22 says, "So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch." Since Gallio had stopped the Jewish opposition to Paul, he was able to stay in Corinth for an additional period of time.

Several weeks or months later Paul left the city of Corinth and prepared to return to Syria and particularly to the city of Antioch. We see that Priscilla and Aquila also left Corinth to travel with Paul. We see that Paul left this couple in Ephesus so that they could begin to share the Gospel with people in that region. This means that the church in Corinth as well as the other churches that Paul had helped to establish in the surrounding area had developed the leadership needed so that the people that had been involved in the establishment of the church at Corinth with Paul could also leave that area.

We also see why Paul left Corinth at this time. We see that Paul had taken a vow. This was probably a vow to show his thanks to the Lord for the protection that the Lord had given him in Corinth. As a result of that vow, Paul had let his hair grow. This probably means that this was a Nazirite vow. Numbers 6:5 says, "All the days of the vow of his separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the Lord, he shall be holy. Then he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow." Here we see that those with a Nazirite vow did not cut their hair until the vow was complete. We see that Paul had his hair cut off at Cenchrea. Cenchrea was the harbor on the west of Corinth and was nine miles from Corinth.

Numbers 6:18 tells us what a Jew was to do when he cut off his hair following a Nazirite vow. That verse says, "Then the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offering." Here we see that the hair was to be burned on the altar at the tabernacle. When the temple was built, the altar was then at the temple. When a person finished his vow away from Jerusalem, he was to take the hair to Jerusalem within thirty days to burn it. As a result, this explains why Paul did not spend a period of time in Ephesus when he stopped at that city on the way to Jerusalem.

When Paul, Aquila and Priscilla reached Ephesus, Paul left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus to begin to share the Gospel with others in that city. Ephesus was one of the five largest cities in the Roman Empire. Paul also went into the synagogue at Ephesus and reasoned with the Jews. In this city Paul received a positive initial response from the Jews because they wanted him to stay with them longer. Since Paul had just shaved his head at Cenchrea a few days earlier, the Jews could see that he had just completed a vow. They understood why he wanted to get to Jerusalem in time for the next feast. In 1 Corinthians 9:20 Paul later wrote, "And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I

might win those who are under the law.” This also gave him the opportunity to meet the Gentile proselytes that came to that synagogue to learn about the Old Testament.

Paul told the people in the synagogue goodbye and told them that he would return to them again if that was the will of God. Here we see an important thing about all of the decisions that we make as Christians. We need to make it clear that we will do something if it is the will of God. In Acts 16:6 we saw that the Holy Spirit had forbidden Paul to go to Asia several years earlier. That verse says, “Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.” Since Ephesus was the capital of Asia, the Lord had shown him that it was not the will of the Lord to go to Ephesus at an earlier time. We saw that was the plan of God so that the Gospel would spread to Europe at that time.

Then Paul sailed from Ephesus to the city of Caesarea. From there he went to the city of Jerusalem and greeted the church in that city. This also allowed him to complete the last part of his vow as it made it possible for him to burn the hair that had been shaved off at Cenchrea at the time that his vow was completed. After this very short visit to the city of Jerusalem, Paul then returned to Antioch and spent a period of time in that city. Here we see that Paul again returned to the church from which the Lord sent him to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Paul realized the importance of keeping this church informed so that they could continue to pray for him. In the same way we also need the prayers of others for us as we take the Gospel to other places.

Our physical and spiritual children learn from our example. Paul also gives us an example to follow in our own lives. He took every opportunity to share the Gospel with others. In Ephesus he went to the synagogue and shared with the Jews even though he was on his way to Jerusalem and could not stay to share more. However, he told the people there that if was the will of the Lord that he would return. May the Lord richly bless you as you seek to do the will of the Lord in your own life.

The Ministry of Aquila and Priscilla

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to seek the will of God for their lives day by day. We also saw that Paul took a vow and went to Jerusalem before going to Antioch. On the way from Corinth to Jerusalem, Paul stopped at Ephesus for a short time. Paul left Aquila and Priscilla in the city of Ephesus to begin to share the Gospel in that area. In our topic today we are going to see how Aquila and Priscilla served the Lord before Paul returned to the city of Ephesus.

In our last topic, we saw that Paul went to Antioch. Acts 18:23 says, “After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.” Here we see that Paul did not spend a long time in the city of Antioch. Instead he soon left to strengthen the churches that the Lord had used him to establish on previous trips. First, we see that Paul went to the region of Galatia. This was the area where the cities of Lystra, Derbe and Iconium were located.

We see that as Paul traveled through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia that he was strengthening the disciples. The word translated “strengthening” means to establish, to make firm or to strengthen more. Paul realized that this was a very important part of his ministry once he led people to Christ. Acts 14:22 says, “Strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Paul realized that the Christians would face much opposition and so they needed to be encouraged and strengthened. Acts 15:41 says, “And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.” Here we see that Paul also spent time strengthening the churches. Now as Paul started his third trip from Antioch the first thing that he did was visit the churches previously established to strengthen the churches.

Meanwhile, we also see that Aquila and Priscilla were busy in the city of Ephesus. One day a Jew by the name of Apollos came to the city of Ephesus. In Acts 18:24-26 we read about the background of Apollos when those verses say, “Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John.” We see, in these verses, that Apollos was a Jew. We also see that he had been born in the city of Alexandria, Egypt. Alexandria was one of the five largest cities in the Roman Empire and had a large Jewish population during the time of the New Testament.

Apollos was a very eloquent man. The word translated “eloquent” means a highly educated person who was very familiar with history, literature and the arts and who was a skilled speaker. We also see that Apollos was mighty in the Scriptures. This phrase spoke of the fact that Apollos had a very good understanding of the Old Testament. Apparently Apollos had the same kind of Biblical training as a child that Timothy had received. 2 Timothy 3:15 says, “And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” The fact that Apollos was mighty in the Scriptures meant that he had spent much time studying and learning from the Old Testament.

We see that Apollos had come to the city of Ephesus. We also see that he had been instructed in the way of the Lord. The phrase “the way of the Lord” is used several times in the Old Testament. God said about Abraham in Genesis 18:19, “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to

do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.” Here we see that the way of the Lord meant to do righteousness and justice. In Judges 2:21-22 God said, “I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the Lord, to walk in them as their fathers kept them, or not.” In these verses, we see that God wanted to test Israel to see if they would keep the ways of the Lord.

From these verses we see that the way of the Lord means to follow the God and be obedient to Him. Proverbs 10:29 says, “The way of the Lord is strength for the upright, but destruction will come to the workers of iniquity.” We see that those who choose to follow God and be obedient to Him will be given strength by the Lord. Taken together these verses show us that Apollos was a man of godly character and was depending on the Lord for his strength.

We also see that Apollos was fervent in spirit. The word translated “fervent” means to be hot or to have a zeal for what is right and good. In fact Romans 12:11 used this word when that verse says, “Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” This verse is in the middle of several verses that describe godly followers of the Lord. We even read that Apollos spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord. Here we see that Apollos was a very good teacher of the Old Testament. However, he was very limited in what he knew about Christ because we read that he only knew about the baptism of John. John the Baptist came before Christ to prepare the way for Him. The message of John is summarized in Matthew 3:2-3 where we read, “And saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!' For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.'” John prepared the way for Christ but he knew nothing about the death and resurrection of Christ. The same was true for Apollos.

This is why Acts 18:26-28 says, “So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.” Apollos was a wonderful speaker and he also had great boldness as he spoke about the Lord. However, he could only share what he knew and so all that he could teach about Christ was the need of people to prepare their hearts for His coming.

Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos speaking boldly in the synagogue. They realized that he knew nothing about the death and resurrection of Christ. As a result they took him aside. The word translated “took aside” means to take a person to oneself and eat with or to take a person into your home. We see that Aquila and Priscilla just invited Apollos to come and spent time with them in their home. This passage gives us an ideal example of how to correct a person that loves God but does not have proper understanding of Scripture. Instead of criticizing his teaching, Aquila and Priscilla just invited him into their home so that they could explain to him that Christ had come and teach him about the death and resurrection of Christ.

We see that they explained to him the way of God more accurately. This word is used in Acts 28:23 where we read, “So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.” In these verses, we see that Paul explained what the Law and the Prophets taught about Christ from morning until evening. It is probable that Aquila and Priscilla spent even more time explaining the teachings of Christ and teaching Apollos about His death and resurrection. Since Paul had spent much time working with them, Paul had taken the time to explain many things to Aquila and Priscilla. They now shared these same things with Apollos and spent time

answering his questions. This is what is meant when we are commanded to make disciples. We are also to take much time explaining and answering the questions of new Christians that need help in their spiritual growth and understanding.

Later Apollos wanted to travel to Corinth. The brethren who had become Christians in Ephesus through the ministry of Aquila and Priscilla wrote a letter to the church at Corinth. They encouraged the Christians in Corinth to receive Apollos and give him opportunities to teach the Word of God. We see that when Apollos taught the Christians in Corinth that he greatly helped them in their spiritual growth. Titus 2:1 says, "But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine." Because of the help of Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos had also been equipped to teach sound doctrine.

In addition, we also see that Apollos was able to speak publicly to the Jews that did not believe in Christ. We have seen that he was able to teach accurately what the Old Testament taught. Because of the help of Aquila and Priscilla, he was now able to explain accurately what the Old Testament taught about Christ. He was also able to show the Jews from the Old Testament that Jesus fulfilled the promises that the Old Testament gave about the Messiah. He was able to back up everything that he taught from the Old Testament so that it was the Word of God and not his opinions.

This is the same way that we want to equip our physical and spiritual children to teach the Word of God to others. We want to help them learn to understand the Word of God so completely that they can back up from Scripture each of the things that they teach so that they teach others the Word of God and not their own opinions. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to accurately teach the Word of God.