Bible Study Notes

on the

Book of the Acts

by K. I. B.

London:
C. A. Hammond
3 & 4 London House Yard
Paternoster Row, E.C.4

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN IN THE CITY OF OXFORD
AT THE ALDEN PRESS

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FOREWORD

THE following notes on the Book of the Acts of the Apostles form part of a series of articles especially compiled for the help of the young, and for their encouragement in the study of scripture. These articles first appeared in a monthly magazine, *Glad Tidings for the Young*, which was edited for eleven years by the authoress, up to the time of her departure to be with Christ.

It is believed that these papers on the Acts, which are now issued in a collected form, will be of much service to those who give themselves to a continuous perusal of that Book. The suggestions and hints contained in the Notes form a useful introduction to the general purpose of the inspired history of apostolic times which Luke wrote. They will be found of great use in Bible classes and in private Bible Study.

Similar articles on other parts of the New Testament are available, and, if the Lord will, these also may be issued at a later date in a collected form.

W. J. HOCKING

July, 1933.

BIBLE STUDY NOTES

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" Do you believe in a regular course of Bible Study? I find I read favourite parts, while some books in the Bible I never attempt to read." This question was asked in a letter received not long ago. Should we read some books in the Bible only, or should we read all?

Let us see what the Bible itself has to say. " *Whatsoever* things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (*Romans xv.* 4); not only *some* things, but everything. In 1 Corinthians *x*, we read that the things which happened to the Israelites long ago were recorded for our sakes: " they are written for our admonition." And in 2 Timothy *iii.* we are definitely told that " every scripture is divinely inspired and profitable." (N.Tr.)

How much do *you* really know of the Bible? If you read only favourite chapters and books, you will miss many precious things in out-of-the-way corners which will never be found in that way. Look for instance at Nahum *i.* 7; Habakkuk *iii.* 17, 18; 1 Chronicles *iv.* 10; Jeremiah *xvii.* 7, 8; *xviii.* 1-6. The Bible is like a storehouse: the more we get to it, the more we shall find; it is like a mine: we must dig deep to find the treasure; it is like a well-stocked garden: we must visit every part of it to gather the fruit, and some of the sweetest flowers need looking for, if we are to find them at all.

It has been said that the New Testament is enfolded in the Old; the Old Testament is unfolded in the New. Thus we find the types in Exodus and Leviticus explained in the Epistle to the Hebrews. We read of " a lamb without blemish " in Exodus *xii.* 5; we read of the Lamb of God—" a Lamb without blemish and without spot "—in John *i.* 29-36 and in 1 Peter *i.* 19. All scripture has a message for us; every part of it speaks to us of God and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. If you were to search out in the Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi, all the prophecies which refer

to the Lord Jesus you would be surprised at the number and variety of them. In Luke *xxiv.* 27 we find it said of Him, when walking with the two going to Emmaus, that " beginning at Moses and *all* the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself." May we thus learn of Him every day. Some parts of His word we may find more helpful to us, and more easy to understand than others, but it seems plain that we cannot afford always to neglect or to leave unread any part of what God has caused to be written down " for our learning."

The Book of the Acts.

The book of Acts immediately follows the Gospels, and tells the story of the first thirty years or so after the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus; the wonderful story of the spread of the gospel in that time over almost the whole of the known world. The full story of the apostles' preaching is not given here; it will only be fully known in the day when God shall make known the secrets of all hearts. It has been said that this book should rather be called " Acts of the Holy Ghost " than " Acts of the Apostles "; and it is remarkable how few of the Twelve are mentioned by name after their enumeration in chapter *i.* 13. We read only of Peter and John, especially Peter, in the early chapters; of James, the brother of John, killed by Herod; and of the other James, not an apostle. But we do find here the inspired story of the ascended Lord working through His apostles and others by means of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

Like the Gospels, this book is historical; it is addressed to the same person as the Gospel of Luke by the same writer, and it continues that narrrative of " all that Jesus *began* both to do and to teach " by telling of what He did through His servants after His ascension. The Gospels give a fourfold picture of His life on earth, Himself the centre round Whom His disciples are gathered; they tell of His wonderful works and words, of His death and resurrection, of His ascension. This book tells of the disciples' work on earth after He has left them, after the Holy Ghost is given as He had promised, to be their power for service, their constant Guide and Teacher;

it tells of their witness to His resurrection, their preaching, the works they did in His name, "the Lord working with them" (*Mark xvi.* 20), and of the gathering in of Jews first, and then of Gentiles. The book might be described as the history of the birth and growth of the early church up to the time of Paul's imprisonment at Rome. And we should always remember that *church* in scripture means not a building made with hands, but that body of which every believer in Christ forms a part—"the church which is His body" (*Ephes. i.* 22, 23); "in whom ye also," says the apostle, "are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

The Gospels tell us of the mighty work done by the Son of God at Calvary, the book of Acts tells of the results of that completed work of redemption, of the beginning of the church on the day of Pentecost. The Gospels, except for the first two chapters of Matthew and Luke, tell the story of about three and a half years; the book of Acts covers a period of probably thirty years.

This book divides readily into three parts:

(1) Chapter *i.* tells of the Lord's ascension, and of the waiting period before the Holy Ghost was given.

(2) Chapters *ii.* to *xii.* tell mainly of the gospel going forth to Jews from Jerusalem as the centre, by means of the apostles chosen by the Lord when on earth, especially Peter. But chapter *ix.* gives the conversion and call of the great apostle to the Gentiles, and chapter *x.* tells how Peter was sent to Cornelius, a Gentile. This chapter thus marks a great transition.

(3) Chapters *xiii.* to *xxviii.* describe the work of Paul among the Gentiles, and his three great missionary journeys starting from Antioch; but in the last eight of these sixteen chapters, Paul is a prisoner, and the book closes with his arrival and imprisonment in Rome.

It has been well said that this book is supplementary to the Gospels and introductory to the Epistles, the one shewing Christ on earth, the other Christ in heaven; thus it forms a link between them. Five at least of Paul's Epistles were written during the period of which this book tells, and others

while he was in prison at Rome. The great truth brought out for our learning is that Christ now ascended has sent down the Holy Spirit to be to His servants their strength, their Guide, their power for service. Without Him we can do nothing.

"Everywhere it is the Lord Jesus exalted on high, yet actively working by the Holy Spirit below, whether in the service of individuals, in no way confined to apostles, or in the assembly."

Acts 1: Chosen Witnesses.

We read in the Book of Proverbs of one who wrote to his son that he might make him "know the certainty of the words of truth." When Luke in his Gospel first wrote to his friend Theophilus, it was in order that he might "know the certainty" of those things wherein he had been instructed; and it would seem that the same purpose directed him also when writing in the book of Acts to the same Theophilus, inspired as we know by the Holy Spirit, so that what he wrote was not only for the instruction and assurance of his friend, but for all believers everywhere. For in continuing the narrative begun in the Gospel, he goes back to speak again of the Lord Jesus showing Himself in resurrection to His chosen apostles, giving full proofs to them that He was indeed alive from the dead, being seen of them forty days, speaking with them, giving them last commands and instructions as to what they are to do when He has left them, and then ascending to heaven in their sight. Thus the theme of the first eleven verses is the Lord Jesus in resurrection and ascension; this is the new starting point of the dealings of God. These two great facts, of which the apostles were eye-witnesses, form the basis and foundation of all that follows, two things of which they constantly spoke.

Before leaving them, He commanded them to wait at Jerusalem for the promised gift from the Father of which He had told them, when they should be baptised with the Holy Ghost. This could not be till after His departure (*see John xvi.* 7). Even then they understood the new position so little that they asked Him the question found in

verse six. But how wonderful to think that we may come to Him with any question! For the importance is not in the question, but in His answer to it. The times and seasons for earthly restoration to Israel were not for them to know, nor for us to know. Their part was to wait in obedience for the promised power, that so they might be His witnesses not only in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, but "unto the uttermost parts of the earth." The time of His rejection, of His absence, is not the time for restoring the kingdom in manifested power, but a time of testimony. So it is still, and we too are to be witnesses to Him.

It is remarkable that Luke, the only one of the four evangelists to describe the Lord's ascension (though Mark mentions it), should do so twice over. But in Luke *xxiv.* it is given as the completion of His life on earth; while in Acts *i.* we have the risen Christ ascending to heaven as the starting point of that which was to follow, the work to be begun and carried on by the Holy Ghost in and through men of like passions with ourselves. For the Gospels show Him in His life on earth with His own around Him, but the book of Acts shows Him in heaven, while the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven on His ascension works through believers on earth. Thus the first eleven verses are a kind of introduction, laying the foundation of all the rest: i.e., Christ in heaven now the centre, His resurrection and ascension the subject of their testimony.

And so when they had seen Him go, and had heard from the angels of His coming again, they went back to Jerusalem from Olivet, there to wait for the promised power; and while they waited they prayed. The eleven were together in an upper room, and with them were others too, all united in prayer and supplication, altogether about one hundred and twenty. The Holy Ghost was not yet given in power for testimony, but the Lord after His resurrection had opened their understanding to understand the scriptures, and now Peter standing up in the midst shows from the Old Testament scriptures that as they now are but eleven, not twelve, another must be chosen to bear witness with them of the Lord's resurrection. That he might be a qualified witness, it was needful he should be

one who had been of their company, as Peter said, " all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day that He was taken up " (*verse* 21). Two such men were found among them ; and then they prayed to the Lord who alone knows the hearts of all, to show which of the two He had chosen. The decision was shown by lot, according to the old Jewish manner, of which the wise man said, " the lot is cast into the lap ; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." Here for the last time in scripture we have the use of this choosing by lot, among this company of believing Jews who were soon to be guided and led in all things by the Holy Spirit in their midst ; for the waiting time was nearly over, and the chosen witnesses on the day of Pentecost were all to be " filled with the Holy Ghost." The lot fell upon Matthias ; he was numbered with the eleven apostles, and we find him taking his place as a witness among them in later chapters (*ii.* 14 ; *vi.* 2). For Paul was never one of the Twelve ; his place as an apostle was a special one, he was a chosen vessel to bear " witness unto all men " (*ix.* 15 ; *xxii.* 14, 15).

Still the Lord wants witnesses, those who can tell what they know of Himself, His work, His mighty power and love and all that He has done.

Acts ii : The Promise Fulfilled.

The Lord had prepared His disciples for a mighty work ; He had promised that for this work they should be endued with power from on high ; and they waited in Jerusalem as He had told them until the power was given. The first four verses of Acts *ii.* tell of the fulfilment of His promise in the coming of the Holy Ghost, and the signs that marked that tremendous event ; the rest of the chapter gives the first results.

Two sabbath days had gone by since He left them, and then the day of Pentecost came. This was one of the three great feasts of the Jewish year, when all the males were to appear before God (*Deut. xvi.* 16) ; it was called in the Old Testament the Feast of Weeks, but by the Greek-speaking Jews called Pentecost (*Gr. Pentekoste,* the fiftieth), because it was fifty

days, or seven weeks, after the Passover (*Lev. xxiii.* 15, 16; *Deut. xvi.* 9, 10). When this day had come, the disciples were all together as before in one place, and suddenly a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind filled all the house, while fiery parted tongues appeared and rested on each one. The Spirit was come to abide, as the Lord had promised, and these were the signs of His coming; for this was a new thing and therefore outward signs were given. When the Holy Spirit descended on the Lord Jesus, it was in bodily shape as a dove (*John i.* 32), but on the apostles as tongues, for they were to give testimony, and parted tongues, for they were to go to Gentiles as well as to Jews. The result was immediate: "They began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

This outward manifest sign was not for the disciples only, but for others. Because of the Feast, many Jews had come to Jerusalem from distant lands; when they heard of this wonder they came together, evidently in a public place, and were astounded that these men of Galilee could speak in all the different languages of the countries from which they came. As many as fifteen different places are enumerated, and yet all the Jews and proselytes (i.e., strangers who had adopted the Jewish faith and law), heard the apostles speaking to them in their own tongue. Here was a wonder, to make them take heed to what was said! For tongues were given at the beginning "for a sign . . . to them that believe not," as we read in 1 *Cor. xiv.* 22; and these were intended to arrest their attention and make them enquire further. But some were scornful, and said the apostles had taken too much wine.

Then Peter, boldly standing up with the eleven, began the work of testimony for which they had been fitted. He spoke first to the men of Judea and Jerusalem, and denied the unworthy charge of excess, telling them that this wonder was that of which the prophet Joel had spoken, and of which they therefore should have known. Then speaking to all the men of Israel, he reminded them of what they already knew concerning Jesus of Nazareth, how He was approved of God among them by many wondrous works, and yet they had crucified Him; but God had raised Him from the dead, as

David had foretold in Psalm *xvi.* when he there "spake of the resurrection of Christ." Of this resurrection they all were witnesses. Not only so, but God had exalted Him by His own right hand, as David had also foretold; and from thence, having received the promise of the Father "He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear"; for the One Whom they had crucified, God had made both Lord and Christ.

Here we see the beginning of that great work which the Holy Ghost had come to carry out through the apostles, and Peter was the first instrument. Men's consciences were touched, and they said to Peter and the rest, "What shall we do?" Peter told them they must repent and be baptised in the name of the One whom they had rejected, and then they too should share this wonderful blessing. They that received His word were baptised, and that day three thousand were added to the disciples. Three things were the mark of those that believed. They continued stedfastly (1) in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, (2) in the breaking of bread, (3) in the prayers, (R.V.) i.e., public and united prayer (*see chap. iv.* 23, 24). Thus began the church of God on earth, when by one Spirit all believers were baptized into one body (1 *Cor. xii.* 13); and the Lord added to them daily.

Still the Holy Spirit is with us; still the testimony is going on though apostles are no longer here; still believers are being added to the church, until the Lord shall come. Still the public marks of those who are faithful are the same: continuance in the apostles' teaching, as preserved for us in the Epistles, in breaking of bread, and in prayers. No longer is there the manifest outward unity of all believers of which we read in Acts *ii*; nevertheless still it is true of believers to-day that they "are all one in Christ Jesus" (*Gal. iii.* 28) and should seek to act accordingly, as God's word teaches.

Acts iii, iv: The Power of the Name.

In chap. *iii.* we see continued the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the people by the mouth of Peter, their attention being arrested by a miracle of healing at the Temple gate. "Signs shall follow them that believe," the Lord had said: and so it was. This first miracle after Pentecost was not only

a miracle, it was a sign of the power of the Name of Jesus. Two of the apostles, Peter and John, were going up to the temple for prayer when they saw this lame man at the Beautiful Gate—one of the gates of the outer court. They had no money to give him ; but he was bidden in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth to rise and walk, and immediately he received strength to obey. Not only so, but leaping up he entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God ; he was full of joy.

When the people around saw what had happened, they were filled with wonder and amazement ; for they knew this was the man whose custom it was to sit there begging, and that he never had walked, though over forty years old. They hurried to the men who had done this wonderful thing, and ran together in Solomon's Porch. Then Peter again, as on the day of Pentecost, began to speak to them of Jesus and His resurrection. But he did not speak in the same way as then, for it was no longer the feast day, and these were not Jews from other lands, but dwellers in Jerusalem, the very ones who had delivered up and denied the Holy and Just One and chosen a murderer instead. He boldly charges them with it. But though they had killed the Prince of Life, God had raised Him from the dead, the apostles being witnesses ; it was by His name, through faith in His name, that this man was now strong and well. He urges them to repent and be converted, that their sins may be forgiven ; when they do so God will send Jesus Christ again. He reminds them how God had shewed by all the prophets those things He had now fulfilled ; how Moses himself had foretold the coming of a Prophet greater than he (*Deut. xviii.* 15, 18, 19), and the doom that should fall on those who rejected Him ; and all the prophets from Samuel on had told of these days. Those to whom he spoke were " children of the prophets," of the same race, and to them first God having raised up His Son Jesus had sent Him for blessing, to turn them from their iniquities. Peter was thus in a special way speaking to Jews ; it was a final appeal to the nation : he does not speak here as before of " all that are afar off " (*ii.* 39).

But the unbelief of the rulers comes out in chap. *iv.*, which

continues the same subject; while Peter was speaking, men came to seize the two apostles and put them in prison till next day. For the priests and the ruler of the temple and the Sadducees (who deny the resurrection: see *Luke xx.* 27; *Acts xxiii.* 8) were angry that they taught and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. But many of those who had heard believed, of men alone as many as 5,000. Next day Peter and John were brought before the High Priest and all the great council, and questioned by what power or name they had done this. Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, declared bodly that it was by the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Whom they had crucified, Whom God had raised from the dead, proclaiming salvation in that Name alone. So that when they saw the boldness of these two unlearned and ignorant men before the great council of their nation, "they marvelled, and took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." Thus will it always be in such a case; the Lord had told His disciples beforehand how they should be helped and taught what to say (*Luke xxi.* 12-15); so it was. Their judges could say nothing against what they had done, for there was the man who was healed standing by. They had to admit among themselves that it was "indeed a notable miracle," a sign (*R.V. margin*), which they could not deny; yet with threats they commanded the apostles not to speak at all nor teach in the Name of Jesus. Thus their unbelief and hatred were plainly shewn. But Peter and John declared they must do what God had given them to do; "we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard"; and being let go, they went to their own company, with them to spread the matter before the Lord in prayer. What they asked was that they might speak the word with boldness, and that the Name of Jesus might be glorified; and the answer was immediate. The Lord granted their desire (*verses* 31, 33). Men cannot hinder when God gives the power.

This chapter shews on the one hand the unbelief of the Jews and their rejection of the apostles' testimony; and on the other hand the power of the Holy Ghost and God's presence and guidance in the midst of the disciples.

ACTS IV, V: THE LORD'S CARE OF THE CHURCH.

The church of God is viewed in scripture in two ways; as a spiritual house, a holy temple in the Lord, of which each believer is a living stone (1 *Pet. ii.* 5; *Eph. ii.* 21, 22); and as the body of Christ, of which He is Himself the Head (*Eph. i.* 22, 23; *Col. i.* 18). The Lord in Matthew xvi. had spoken of it as a thing yet to be built; on Peter's confession of Himself as Son of the living God, He said "On this rock I *will build* My church."

But in Acts we see for the first time the church, the assembly of God, an existing fact on earth. In Acts *i.* the baptism of the Spirit had not yet been given; in Acts *ii.* it *had*; and immediately the church was begun. The Lord brought the living stones together to build them into one house, not by faith alone, but by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. There was no such thing as the church till the Holy Ghost was sent down to unite believers into one body, as in 1 Cor. *xii.* 13; there was no such thing till the Lord had died, and ascended again to heaven, and sent the Holy Ghost, as He promised, to *gather together in one the children of God that were scattered* abroad. Then there was, and in the early chapters of Acts we see its beginning.

The Lord was no longer on earth, He was in heaven, but His watchful care was over His church. He had sent down the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost to form it for Himself and to dwell in the midst. Then it was that the church began. We see it as one company from *ii.* 42-46; *iv.* 23, 32. We see it grow, as the Lord added to it 3,000 at one time, 5,000 at another, and others day by day. When opposition arose He gave to Peter and John boldness to know how to answer (*iv.* 8, 13, 19). Then being let go, they went to their own company, and with one accord they lifted their voice to God; then the presence of the Spirit in their midst was shown by the shaking of the place where they were assembled, and they spake the word of God with boldness. All were of one heart and one soul, as the Lord had prayed in John *xvii.* 20, 21. With great power the apostles gave witness of the Lord's resurrection. And "great grace was upon them all," as shown in the closing verses of chapter *iv.*

In chapter *v.* comes a very solemn story. The enemy had tried opposition, now he seeks to bring evil into the church itself. But the Lord was there to meet it. Two disciples, Ananias and his wife Sapphira, desired the credit of doing as Barnabas and others had done (*iv.* 34-37) without the same self-sacrifice. They sold a possession, and brought part of the price to the apostles as if it were all. They lied, not in word but in act. They need not have given all unless they wished (*see* 2 *Cor. ix.* 7) ; the wickedness was in their deceit. The Holy Spirit by the mouth of Peter brings to light the lie, and that Satan had inspired it; and Peter says, "Thou hast not lied unto men but unto God." They had sought to deceive the Holy Ghost. Immediate judgment came upon both ; first one and then the other fell dead, for Sapphira was in agreement with her husband, and both were guilty. This solemn event shows that God cannot endure evil in His church; He must purge it out. You may say, He does not always punish so immediately. No. But in those early days when the church was growing rapidly and many coming in, it was essential for all to understand that God hates evil and hypocrisy and will not tolerate it in those who are His ; He must judge it (*see* 1 *Cor. xi.* 31). The effect is seen in verse 11 ; "Great fear came upon all the church." "And of the rest durst no man join himself to them" ; yet "*believers* were the more added to the Lord."

The rest of chapter v shows the Lord's continued care over His own. By the power of the Spirit, the evil within had been judged; next (*v.* 12) the same power is shown in healing grace by the apostles especially, not Peter only but all. And in a wonderful way the Lord's words in John *xiv.* 12 are shown to be fulfilled (*v.* 15). Then the apostles are seized and put in prison, but God interposes and sends an angel to deliver them. When sent to bring them before the council, the officers returned from the prison having found no one within ; they were in the temple teaching the people, as God had told them (*v.* 20, 25). And when brought before the council, they all answered boldly, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Obedience to God must always come first; and they declare themselves His witnesses to what He

has done, and to the Prince and Saviour He has exalted.

Then their judges desired to slay them, but God intervened by another sort of providential deliverance. He disposed Gamaliel to counsel moderation, to whom the others agreed. The apostles were set free, but not shielded from all suffering; they were not above their Master (*see John xv.* 20). They were beaten, and went away, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name"; and though forbidden of men they "ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

Acts VI: THE WORK OF THE APOSTLES AND OTHERS.

Chapter vi. introduces as it were another stage in the history; the chapter is quite short, but important. It tells of another evil that assailed the church, and how it was over-ruled for good in the wisdom and power of the Spirit; here for the first time in the history of the church we find others, not the apostles, brought forward in the Lord's service. The disciples were multiplying, and "there arose a murmuring" about that very provision for the needy of which we have read in *ii.* 45, *iv.* 35. Now murmuring is never right for the people of God (*see Exodus xvi.* 2, 8; *Num. xi.* 1, *xvi.* 2; 1 *Cor. x.* 10), and here we are not told even that they had cause; yet in the wisdom of God the opportunity is used to bring in others, chosen from among the disciples, to undertake this business and leave the apostles free for their own proper work. Up to this time it would seem that the apostles had been responsible for everything (*see ii.* 14, 42, 43, *iv.* 33, 35, 37, *v.* 12, 18, 29, 40); now they are led of God to make provision for the necessity that was arising that others should share the work.

"It is not reason," they said, "that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables." The twelve had been set apart and sent forth by the great Head of the church for the work of laying the foundation (*see Ephes. ii.* 20); the work committed to them was of the utmost importance, and theirs was a special place; but for others too the Lord had work to do. So it is still. For every believer the Lord has some work to do, and He will surely shew it to us if we seek to learn it from Himself.

Seven men were to be chosen to look after the work of daily

ministration, "men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom"; they were to be chosen by "the multitude of the disciples," whose bounty they were to dispense, and appointed by the twelve. "But we," said the apostles, "will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word"; this was the work for which they had been chosen. And we may note that prayer takes the first place; work for the Lord must be guided by Himself.

The murmurers were "Grecians" (*R. V.*, *Hellenists*), i.e. not actually Greeks, but Jews born in Greek-speaking countries, for we must remember that as yet all the believers were Jews, to whom only the gospel had as yet been preached. And it is remarkable that all the names in verse 5 are Greek names, from which it would appear that all the seven chosen were of those very Hellenists from among whom the murmuring had arisen. They were set before the apostles and appointed to their work; harmony was restored by this exercise of grace and wisdom in the power of the Spirit, and wonderful blessing followed (*verse* 7). The word of God increased, the number of the disciples multiplied greatly and a great company even from among the priests were obedient to the faith. Next we see another remarkable thing. The seven were chosen for a definite work, to set the apostles free for what was of greater importance; yet two at least of them received special gifts from the Head of the church for a work to which they were not chosen by men: Stephen and Philip. Philip was gifted as an evangelist (*chap. viii.* 5 *etc.*; *xxi.* 8); and here we see the Holy Spirit takes up Stephen in a special way. "Stephen, full of faith and power (R.V.) did great wonders and signs among the people." The Lord was beginning to work thus by others than the apostles.

Here was an unknown man, not mentioned before this chapter, not one of the twelve, not even a native-born Jew, but one of the Grecian Jewish believers, chosen by men not to preach, but for the work of daily ministration; yet he is taken up and used by the Lord as we see here. Others among the Hellenists (all the synagogues in verse 9 are such, including men of Cyrene and Alexandria) came disputing with him, but they could not resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he

spoke. And so they stirred up the people and the scribes and elders, and set up false witnesses, and caught Stephen and brought him before the council, as the apostles had been brought before. It was one not an apostle whom the Lord thus used to give the last public testimony to the chief men of Jerusalem before that scattering abroad of the church of which we read in chap. viii. 1. "God hath set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him," and He uses them as He sees fit. "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets," etc. Not all are apostles and prophets, but there is work for all to do and a service for each believer as the Lord may choose.

Stephen's testimony we shall find in chapter *vii.*

Acts vii: Stephen's Testimony: The First Christian Martyr.

Brought before the council and questioned by the high priest, Stephen answers the charges made against him; they said that he had spoken blasphemous words against Moses, and against God (*vi.* 11), against "this holy place," and the law (*vi.* 14). The charges were not unlike those made against the Lord Jesus before the same council (*Matt. xxvi.* 59-65); the disciple was not above his Master. He answers with words of truth based entirely on their own scriptures, with facts which they could not deny, yet which condemned them utterly.

The longest address recorded in Acts, Stephen's, was the last testimony given to the rulers in Jerusalem before the scattering of the disciples in chapter *viii.* 1; it was rejected by them, and the witness killed. So far as we know, Stephen had never known the Lord during His life on earth, but he knew the Lord in glory, and bore witness to Him there as "the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."

Not an apostle, but a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and well acquainted with the scriptures, Stephen is used to bring before these Jews striking facts with which they were familiar, and to show how they had reference to Him Whom they had rejected; thus he exalted the Lord Jesus, and confuted the charges of his accusers, for he had said nothing but what their own prophets had stated before. Not

alone in the temple, nor only in the promised land, not only since the law was given, had the God of glory appeared to men and received their worship. Stephen goes back to the very beginning of their nation's history, when He spoke to Abraham, the father of the chosen race, while still in far-off Mesopotamia surrounded by idolaters, on the other side of the river Euphrates (*see Joshua xxiv.* 2), and more than 400 years before the law was given.

He passes on to Joseph, despised and rejected by his brethren (like Another and greater than he), and sold by them into Egypt. Yet God was with him in that alien land, and raised up Joseph to a place of exaltation, as now He has raised up Jesus; and made him the dispenser of blessing to his brethren. Next he speaks of Moses, and takes them through his story; showing how he too was rejected and refused by his brethren, yet God sent him to be their ruler and deliverer. And by the hand of Moses He brought them out of Egypt and through the wilderness. Both Joseph and Moses are types of the Lord Jesus Christ, in their rejection and their exaltation.

And Moses was the very one who had foretold (as Peter had reminded them before, *iii.* 22) that God should raise up a prophet like unto himself; the One Whom now they had refused and rejected, as their fathers too had rejected those whom God sent. It was Moses also, in the midst of the congregation in the wilderness (*vii.* 38 *R.V. margin*), who received at Sinai " the living oracles "—the law, the word of God. Yet their fathers would not obey him nor the law, but in their hearts turned back to the gods of Egypt, and worshipped the host of heaven, as Amos wrote.

In all this time and until David's day they had had the tabernacle of witness, made according to the instructions God gave to Moses, not a fixed temple in Jerusalem such as that of which the Jews now boasted, but journeying with them in their wanderings; till at last brought in with Joshua (*verse* 45, *R.V.*) into the land from which God drove out the heathen before them. Not until Solomon's reign was the first temple built; and were they so foolish as to think that the most High God was restricted to a temple made with hands?

Solomon himself had spoken otherwise, and so had Isaiah the prophet (1 *Kings viii.* 27; *Isaiah lxvi.* 1, 2).

It was a complete summing up in a few words of their nation's history and sin, concluding with a solemn appeal to the consciences of those to whom he spoke (*verses* 51-53); like their fathers, they had been disobedient in heart and refused to hear, they had resisted the Holy Ghost, they had not kept the law in which they boasted; and now they had betrayed and murdered their Messiah, that Just One Whom God had sent. Then comes the closing scene; rejecting his message, like their fathers they slew the one who spoke to them God's word. "They stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," but not before, looking stedfastly up into heaven, he had told them of opened heavens and the Son of man at God's right hand; and with his last words, like his Master he prayed for his murderers. One was there among them who at a later day made this confession: "When the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death" (*xxii.* 20). He afterwards was the apostle Paul.

ACTS VIII: SCATTERED ABROAD; EVERYWHERE PREACHING THE WORD.

Up to this time in the book of Acts we have read of the gospel being preached in Jerusalem only. So the Lord had commanded it should be at the first (*chap. i.* 8); they were to bear witness of Him first in Jerusalem, the city where He had been crucified, the city which God had chosen, before they went further. Begin your witnessing at home, and it will not end there.

But now a change came. Jerusalem had rejected the witness of the apostles, had imprisoned and sought to kill them, had forbidden them to speak or teach in the name of Jesus (*iv.* 18, *v.* 40); the testimony of Stephen too they had refused, and him they had killed. Not content with that, on the same day a great persecution began against the church, and all the believers were driven from Jerusalem except the apostles. What was the result? "They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." That which men

meant for harm, God turned to good, to the carrying out of His purposes. Stephen was buried; Saul was bitter against the church; but the work of the gospel went on, and the glad tidings spread more and more. It has been said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," and so it proved.

Thus the preaching of the word in Judea and Samaria (*verse* 1) was not first by the apostles, who remained at Jerusalem, but by ordinary believers. The Lord can use whom He will, and those who know the truth can tell others. So it is still. "They went everywhere *preaching the word*"; and the Lord added His blessing.

But we are told specially in this chapter of the work of one man—Philip. Not Philip the apostle, for the apostles were still at Jerusalem; this was another Philip, one of the seven chosen in chapter *vi.*, mentioned next to Stephen, and like him chosen of God for a special work. Later he is called "Philip the evangelist" (*xxi.* 8). Here we find he was the first to preach in a city of Samaria, perhaps the very same city where the Lord had met the woman at the well; and the first also, unless on the day of Pentecost, to preach Jesus to one of another land.

In that Samaritan city, Philip preached Christ to them, and the people gave heed; he also did mighty works there, though not an apostle. Many were healed, and there was much joy. Better still, they believed the good tidings (R.V.) which Philip preached (*verse* 12). and were baptized, both men and women. But among those thus baptized was one whose heart was not right in the sight of God, though he professed faith when he saw the wonders Philip did. When the apostles at Jerusalem heard of the work in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to help, and when they were come, they prayed for the Samaritan believers, and they received the Holy Ghost. For God would show that the church was one, though not all in one place, and in this case, unlike that of Cornelius, the Holy Ghost was given by the laying on of hands by the apostles. Then the wickedness of Simon the sorcerer was shown; he desired to purchase with money this great gift of God, and Peter sternly rebuked him and called on him to repent.

Peter and John, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, preaching as they went in many Samaritan villages. But Philip was told by an angel to go down to a desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza, and at once he went. The Lord had other work for him. Candace's treasurer was returning from Jerusalem to his own land unsatisfied, and the Lord was mindful of him. As he read in the Old Testament scriptures from Isaiah *liii*, the Spirit told Philip to join him; and finding a willing hearer, desirous of being instructed, Philip began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus. The Ethiopian believed, and was baptized, and went on his way rejoicing. The Lord's servant was caught away, and Philip went on to preach to others.

Thus the Lord continued the building of His church with living stones gathered not in Jerusalem only, but outside it; and the work went on by means of other instruments He chose. Another was now to be chosen whom men would have thought the most unlikely: Saul the persecutor (*chap. ix.*).

Acts ix: The Call of a New Apostle; Peter's Work continues.

We saw in chapter *viii.* how those who were scattered abroad on the death of Stephen went everywhere preaching the word, and how by means of Philip the evangelist the gospel was carried first to Samaria, and then to a stranger from a far-off land. Now in chapter *ix.* we come to the conversion and call of one chosen of God to be specially the apostle of the Gentiles (*Romans xi.* 13); not one of the twelve chosen by the Lord when on earth, but called and chosen by Christ in glory, yet "not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles" (2 *Corinthians xi.* 5). He was perhaps the last person that men would expect to have been chosen; as he says of himself, "a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious," but he obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly in unbelief (1 *Timothy i.* 13).

Saul of Tarsus was consenting to Stephen's death (*viii.* 1); after it he made havoc of the church (*viii.* 3); and now (*chap ix.*) he was on his way to Damascus persecuting the believers even unto strange cities. He verily thought he

ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth (*xxvi.* 9); he was active against the disciples and thought he was doing God service (*John xvi.* 2) but the Lord met him in the way and turned his activity in the opposite direction. The story is given us three times, twice from his own lips (*chaps. ix., xxii., xxvi*). A great light from heaven suddenly shined round about him, a voice spoke to him from the glory, and he found to his utter amazement that the One Whom he could not but recognize as Lord of glory was the very Jesus whose followers he was persecuting, and that He reckoned them as part of Himself. It was Christ speaking from heaven (*Hebrews xii.* 25).

Thus from the very first Saul was chosen to be a witness of the Lord's heavenly glory, as the twelve were of His life, His death, His resurrection; and later he was to preach the gospel of His glory (2 *Corinthians iv.* 4). Convicted of sin by the voice from the glory, at once he was obedient to the One Whom he now knew to be the Lord. This was the first effect of his faith: "What shall I do, Lord?" And the Lord told him what to do. Blinded by the glory of that light, he was led by the hand into Damascus, and was there three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. What his thoughts were we cannot fully judge, but we know that he prayed (*ix.* 11). Then the Lord sent Ananias to him; not an important person, a simple disciple of whom we read nothing except what is told us here, but he was the Lord's messenger to Saul. Prepared by a vision, how his faith must have been confirmed by the coming of Ananias and the words he spoke, showing that he knew from the Lord what had happened! His sight restored, Saul was baptized, thus confessing his faith in the same way as any other believer; he was filled with the Holy Ghost, and received from the lips of Ananias (*ix.* 15 *xxii.* 14) his commission from the Lord.

Remaining for a time in Damascus, Saul straightway preached in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God (*ix.* 20, *R.V.*). The first time this had been done; not taught by the other apostles, for as yet he had seen none of them (*Galatians i.*). But it had pleased God to reveal His Son in Saul, that he might preach Him, and so he did, in such a way

that all were amazed. He went away into the desert country of Arabia, there doubtless to learn lessons from the Lord, and returned again to Damascus (*Gal. i.* 17); then the Jews desired to kill him, but he escaped through a window in a basket, being let down by the wall during the night. Then coming to Jerusalem, at first the disciples were afraid of him, until Barnabas brought him to Peter and James and declared to them how the Lord had appeared to him in the way, and how he had boldly preached Christ in Damascus. Then he was with the disciples, and spoke with the same boldness in Jerusalem, until there, too, they sought to slay him and he escaped to Tarsus, his native place.

After this we read of the prosperity and growth of the church in all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and of Peter's labours in all that region. For the call of another apostle in Saul of Tarsus, soon to be Paul, did not mean the setting aside of that which God had already done and was doing by Peter and others. There is room for the labours of all the Lord's servants, as He gives them an open door. Aeneas, a man paralysed for eight years, was restored to perfect health at Peter's word, and great numbers turned to the Lord; and at Joppa, Peter was used of God to restore to life a disciple named Tabitha, or Dorcas, much beloved because of her labours for the poor. At Joppa he tarried many days, and there a little later the Lord was to send messengers to take him to Cornelius. Thus the work of the Lord proceeded to another stage. Though Paul was the apostle of the Gentiles, it was Peter who was the first to preach to a Gentile, when Cornelius was brought in. For God would shew that His church is one, and in it there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

Acts x: Peter sent to Cornelius; Gentiles receive the Holy Ghost.

We saw in chapter *ix.* the conversion and call of the great apostle of the Gentiles; but chapter *x.* shews that Peter, not Paul, was the apostle whom God chose to send to open the door of faith to the Gentiles, and to preach first to them as he first had preached to the Jews on the day of Pentecost. For God

would shew that He was not setting aside the work begun before, nor the first apostles, but that the work was one, and His church was one.

Cornelius was a centurion in the Roman army, living at Cæsarea, but though a Gentile, he was a God-fearing man, devout, a man of prayer and of practical piety, " who prayed to God alway." These are not the fruits of the old nature, and it would appear that Cornelius was born again, with a living faith in the true God. But yet he needed to hear words whereby he might be saved (*chap. xi.* 14) ; he had not the assurance of salvation through faith in the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. That good news had not yet been preached to him. He prayed to God ; he hoped in the mercy of God ; and his prayers came up for a memorial before God.

And God sent Peter to him ; for He knew what Cornelius wanted, and the time was come for Gentiles to be brought into the church. First He sent an angel to tell Cornelius what to do, and Cornelius obeyed. In the meanwhile He sent a vision to Peter at Joppa to prepare him to go with the messengers when they came. For though the Lord had told His disciples to preach in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (*Luke xxiv.* 47 ; *Acts i.* 8), though Peter himself on the day of Pentecost had spoken of " all that are afar off," they did not yet understand that the old barriers were broken down and that God's grace was now to go out to all. Peter was alone praying when the Lord's message came to him. As he had said of all the twelve, " We will give ourselves continually to prayer," so that at noonday in Joppa he had gone up on to the housetop to pray, and then the Lord spoke to him in the remarkable vision here described (*x.* 11 to 16). For it was needful not only to shew to Peter, but to make plain to all that this new work was of God. All the early believers were Jews ; the gospel had been preached to Samaritans, and to the Ethiopian (*chap. viii.*), but only now it was going to Gentiles. As Peter thought on the vision, the three men sent by Cornelius stood at the gate, and the Spirit spoke to Peter telling him what to do, before he had seen them. Then he went down to the men, and they told him of Cornelius and the angelic message ; thus he had three-

fold confirmation of the Lord's purpose, in the visions to himself and to Cornelius and by the Spirit's guidance.

When Peter and those with him came to Cæsarea they found Cornelius waiting for them, and with him a company of friends and relations he had gathered together, that they too might hear the message from God. And they did hear it. God had showed Peter by the vision that he should not call any man common or unclean, but that in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him; and Peter was ready now to preach to the Gentiles the word of God, preaching peace by Jesus Christ, Who is Lord of *all*, not of Jews only. "That word," he says, "ye know," but they did not know it was for them, until now God had sent him to tell them. "We are witnesses" he says, not only of all that Jesus did, but of His death and resurrection. "And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He which is ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead." This includes all men, not Jews only. "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH in Him shall receive remission of sins"; Peter's eyes had been opened to see, and he spoke with power. There was the great message of salvation; forgiveness to everyone that believeth, through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ; Gentiles as well as Jews: WHOSOEVER believeth. This is present salvation, to know here and now that our sins are gone, that our redemption is accomplished by the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. It could not be known in Old Testament times, because then the work was not done, but now it is. He came to give the knowledge of salvation to His people, and by Him all that believe are justified (*Luke i.* 77; *Acts xiii.* 39).

Cornelius and his friends heard and believed the word that was spoken, and the proof is seen in *verse* 44: "the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word," as the Lord Himself had said should be the case; "This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive" (*John vii.* 39). So it was then, so it is still, for His word is true. Thus on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost as on the first believers at Pentecost, without any

laying on of hands; nothing remained but that they should be baptized in the name of the Lord, as He had commanded. For Peter and all who came with him were fully convinced that the work was of God.

Prayer and obedience brought blessing to Cornelius; prayer and obedience made Peter ready to go to him. Faith and obedience on hearing the word brought a further blessing; and thus Gentiles entered the church of God.

ACTS XI: PETER'S EXPLANATION; THE DISCIPLES FIRST CALLED CHRISTIANS AT ANTIOCH.

The apostles and others at Jerusalem heard of Peter's visit to Cornelius and what had happened there, and when he came back there were some who found fault with him. But Peter began at the beginning and told them all about it. In that time of quiet prayer at Joppa (*x.* 9) God made plain to him what he should do, and now he was able to tell the rest, explaining to them what they understood no more than he had done at first. He told them of the vision that had come to him there, to show him that God would have him go to the Gentile Cornelius (*see x.* 28), and how this was confirmed to him in various ways (*verses* 10 *to* 14); how the three men came, and how the Spirit had bidden him go with them, how to him and the six who went with him Cornelius had told his vision, and then how finally as he spoke to those Gentiles the Holy Ghost fell on them as on the Jewish believers at first. "Then remembered I," said he, "the word of the Lord" (*verse* 16; *chap. i.* 5), and he came to this conclusion: "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I that I could withstand God?" When those at Jerusalem heard this they could answer nothing, but glorified God that to the Gentiles also was granted repentance unto life.

So we see that Peter was not only guided by God as to what he should do, but able also to explain to others why he had done so, that all might be of one mind. Though a great apostle, the chief of the twelve, he did not act on that authority alone, but showed to them what God had showed to him. Then we see too how definitely God began the work of

sending the gospel to the Gentiles. Not only had the Lord called and chosen Saul of Tarsus specially for that purpose (*chap. ix.*), not only did He send Peter to Cornelius in such a way that all could understand it was of Himself, but even before that (*verses* 19, 20) He had sent others in the simplest way to begin the spreading of the good news to Gentiles. The work was His, and the workmen His, though without Him they could do nothing.

Among those scattered by the persecution (*chap. ix.*) were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, unknown men whose names even we are not told, who travelled as far as ANTIOCH, and preached not only to Grecian Jews (of whom many were already believers: *see chap. vi.*), but also for the first time to Greeks (i.e., to Gentiles); for that is the force of the word here (see R.V. and N.Tr.). The Spirit guided them, though they had no vision like Peter, and the hand of the Lord was with them, so that many turned to the Lord. News of this came to those at Jerusalem now when they had been prepared of God by hearing of Peter sent to Cornelius, and they were all of one mind. To strengthen these Gentile believers they sent Barnabas to Antioch, who when he came was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they should cleave to the Lord. Then he went to Tarsus and brought back Saul to help in the work, and together for a whole year they taught the people at Antioch.

In that Gentile city the disciples were for the first time called Christians; and from that same place Paul was later to set out on his great missionary journeys. At this time others came to it from Jerusalem beside Barnabas, making known the mind of the Lord; and because of what they heard, these Gentile disciples determined to send help to those of Judea, which they did by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. For all the church was one, and in it were both Jews and Gentiles now made one in Christ Jesus (*Galatians iii.* 28).

ACTS XII: THE POWER OF UNITED PRAYER.

Chapter *xii.* takes us back to Jerusalem. After Barnabas and Saul had been a year in Antioch, they returned again to Jerusalem with help for the needy sent by the Christians

there, and about that time a fresh persecution broke out in the city where the Lord had suffered, where the gospel was first preached. In the former persecution (*chap. viii.*) the apostles were unharmed, but now they were the first to be attacked. Herod the king (grandson of that other Herod in *Matt. ii.*), killed James the brother of John with the sword; then he shut Peter up in prison, intending that he too should shortly be slain.

It is noteworthy of those three disciples most often with the Lord when on earth, John lived longest of all the twelve; James was the first martyr among the apostles; Peter also was to suffer martyrdom, as the Lord had shown (*John xxi.*), but not at this time. Peter was kept in prison by Herod till the approaching Passover (*Easter, A.V.*) should be over; but unceasing earnest united prayer was made for him by the church, and God heard and answered those prayers, just when all seemed most hopeless. He had allowed one apostle to be slain, and to witness in martyrdom for his Lord and the heavenly portion He gives, but He delivered and preserved Peter and the rest to carry on His testimony on earth.

Peter was guarded by sixteen soldiers, four of them in turn always on duty; to human eyes his deliverance might have seemed impossible; but as he was to write to his brethren at a later day, "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of trials." (N.Tr.) He sent an angel to bring Peter out of prison, as had been done before for the twelve (*chap. v.*), and the four soldiers on guard, though Peter was chained to two of them, could not hinder it. In fact they knew nothing about it, or they would not have wondered when daylight came what had become of him (*v.* 18). Peter himself, awakened from sleep, thought it was but a vision, until he found himself out in the street, free, and the angel gone; then he realized his deliverance. Many disciples were gathered for prayer in the house of Mark's mother, for they knew it was the last night before Herod meant to bring him forth to death; but when Peter came and knocked, though Rhoda knew his voice, they could not believe their prayers were answered. Yet so it was. God had been better than their fears, and gone beyond their

little faith. We sometimes forget that while private prayer does not fail to bring blessing, united prayer is more powerful still. Do we ever neglect the prayer-meeting? It has a special promise (*Matthew xviii.* 19, 20), even when the company is small.

Peter entered the house where they had been praying, and told them all the story of how the Lord had delivered him. He sent a message to the other James, doubtless the one of whom we read in Acts *xv.* and Galatians *i.* and *ii.* and then he went away. He was not told now to go and speak in the temple, as in chapter *v.* 20. Jerusalem had now rejected the apostles and their testimony, as before the Lord Himself had been rejected, and after this chapter we find that Jerusalem is no longer the one centre of blessing; the next shows that Antioch was the starting-point of that great work among the Gentiles then begun. When Herod found that Peter had escaped he was very angry, and ordered the execution of the guards. Then He went to Cæsarea, and there soon after, when he had blasphemously accepted divine honours, he died by the visitation of God. The angel of the Lord delivered the apostle, but smote the persecutor. In spite of persecution the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul, taking Mark with them, returned to Antioch. For here was now established the first local assembly (or church) we find so called (*xi.* 26), distinct from that in Jerusalem and its neighbourhood, yet not separate but a part of the one church of God which began on the day of Pentecost; and it was from Antioch that Paul and Barnabas were soon to set forth on their first missionary journey.

In Acts *i.-xii.* we have seen the Lord's promise fulfilled in the coming of the Holy Ghost, and His witnesses sent forth, the foundation of the church, His care over it, and the work of the apostles and others with Jerusalem as the centre; we have seen the disciples scattered by persecution and everywhere preaching the word, a new apostle chosen, the gospel sent to Gentiles first by Peter, extending by others as far as Antioch, and then the apostles' testimony finally rejected in Jerusalem. In a word, we have seen the birth and growth of the church until now the time is ripe for the gospel to go out from a Gentile

city to the regions beyond. Chapter *xiii.* begins the story of that further work of the apostle Paul among the Gentiles, with which the rest of the Book is mainly occupied. The other apostles are not mentioned again except in chapter *xv.*

ACTS XIII: SAUL AND BARNABAS, SENT FORTH BY THE HOLY GHOST, GO TO CYPRUS AND ASIA MINOR.

It has been said that chapter *xiii.* begins the second volume of the Book of Acts. From this point there is an entire change; we read no longer of the work in Judea, of Peter and others of the twelve, except in chapter *xv.* Now the Spirit of God takes up for our instruction another part of the story. We find ourselves quite away from Jerusalem, the starting point of this new work being the Gentile city of Antioch.

It had pleased God to send Peter, not Paul, with the message of salvation to the Gentile Cornelius, both because to him were given the keys of the kingdom (*Matt. xvi.* 19), and so he was the first to preach both to Jews (*Acts ii.*), and to Gentiles (*Acts x.*); and because God would shew to all that the work was one, and that He had granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life (*xi.* 18). But now the time had come for Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, to begin that work for which he had been specially called. In days to come it was to be his boast that he was "a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity," and that God had given him so to preach "that all the Gentiles might hear" (1 *Tim. ii.* 7; 2 *Tim. iv.* 17; *cp.* 2 *Tim. i.* 11; *Ephes. iii.* 8). For this he had been chosen at his conversion (*Acts ix.* 15), and later at Jerusalem the Lord had again told him, "I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." Years of preparation had passed. We know that from Damascus he had gone into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus (*Gal. i.* 17, 18) before that first visit to Jerusalem three years after his conversion, when Barnabas became his friend (*ix.* 27). From Jerusalem he had gone to Tarsus, and there Barnabas went to fetch him for the work at Antioch (*xi.* 25, 26). After a year there they had together visited Jerusalem and returned again to Antioch. Now from Antioch the two were to set forth upon a mightier work, among the Gentiles in lands afar off.

In the church at Antioch were certain prophets and teachers; five of them are here named (*xiii.* 1). As they waited on the Lord, the Holy Ghost chose two of them to be separated for a special work. After fasting and prayer together, the others laid their hands on them in token of fellowship, and let them go (N.Tr.). It is not they, nor yet the twelve, who send them forth; we are expressly told here that the Holy Ghost sends them forth; not from Jerusalem but from Antioch, and so far as we know, not one of the twelve was present.

So Saul and Barnabas, "being sent forth of the Holy Ghost" (*xiii.* 4), sailed away from Seleucia, the port of Antioch, to the island of CYPRUS, the first Christian missionaries to carry the gospel across the sea. They preached the word at SALAMIS, and then went through the whole island to PAPHOS, the capital. There the Roman governor desired to hear the word of God. Elymas, a sorcerer, seeking to turn him away from the faith, was sternly rebuked by Saul and stricken with blindness; but Sergius Paulus, the governor, was convinced by the truth and became a believer.

From this time we always read of Saul by his Roman name of PAUL. Hitherto Barnabas has been named first, being probably the elder; but now Paul, led of the Spirit, takes the lead. We read of "Paul and his company." Sailing from Paphos, they crossed over to the shores of Asia Minor, and came to Perga in Pamphylia. Then John Mark, who had been with them, went back to Jerusalem. ANTIOCH in PISIDIA, where they came next, was inland and up among the hills, not like its sister Antioch in Syria near the coast. Here there were Jews, as in all the more important places, and they had a synagogue; as also at Salamis, and Iconium, and other Gentile cities. Now a synagogue is not a temple; the people of God had but one temple and that at Jerusalem, the place God had chosen, but there were many synagogues. They were places where the Jews met together to read the word of God, and for prayer. It is said that in Jerusalem were over four hundred at that time, and even Salamis had more than one (*xiii.* 5).

At Antioch, as at Salamis, they went first into the synagogue, and after the scriptures were read, Paul spoke to those assem-

bled, and preached to them the word of salvation. This was his custom always, to go first to the Jews ; he did so at Salamis, at Antioch, and later at Iconium, at Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, and also at Rome. But everywhere he went on to preach to Gentiles also. In *Acts xiii.* 16-38, we have his discourse at Antioch, the first recorded in this part of the story. He tells them of " a Saviour, Jesus," and that by Him " all that believe are justified from all things."

ACTS XIII, XIV : "WE TURN TO THE GENTILES."

When Paul was speaking at Antioch (*xiii.* 16-41), *proselytes* were present, i.e., Gentiles who had already heard of and believed in the one true God (16, 26). Addressing those who knew the Old Testament scriptures, he showed how they were fulfilled in the coming of Christ and His resurrection ; and to them first, who feared God, was the word of this salvation sent (26). The rulers at Jerusalem, though they knew Him not nor understood the scriptures, yet had fulfilled them in condemning Him. But God had raised Him again, and sent forth the twelve as His witnesses to the Jewish people (31). And " WE declare unto YOU," he says, the same glad tidings ; and now through Him Whom God had raised again from the dead, forgiveness and justification are preached to all who believe (*xiii.* 38-39), both Jews and Gentiles.

As they went out, those who had heard (*ver.* 42, R.V.) besought that they might hear more the next sabbath. Many Jews and proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who urged them to continue in the grace of God. By the next sabbath " almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God." But the Jews were angry that the Gentiles too should hear the message of life, and spoke against the word, contradicting and blaspheming. Paul boldly told these Jews that having first spoken to them the word of God, now they turned to the Gentiles as the Lord had commanded, quoting from the Old Testament to show God's purpose (47). The Gentiles were glad, and many believed ; and the word of the Lord was published throughout all that region. The Jews stirred up persecution against them, and Paul and Barnabas departed to ICONIUM.

This was a city yet more remote from the sea, eastward towards Lycaonia. Here too the Jews had a synagogue, to which Paul and Barnabas went, and so spake that many Jews, and Greeks also (here no doubt proselytes in the synagogue), believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the heathen Gentiles against them. The apostles were not daunted by this enmity; the Lord had led them to this far-off place, He was with them, and there they stayed a "long time," speaking boldly in the Lord, with blessed and manifest results, and accompanied by signs and wonders not seen in Antioch. But the city was divided; part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles: and hearing of intended violence against them they left the city, as before at Antioch, and as the Lord long before had told His witnesses to do when persecuted. They fled further eastward, into Lycaonia, to the cities of LYSTRA and DERBE; and there, and in the region round about, again "they preached the gospel" to all.

In these small towns of a far eastern Roman province, we hear of no Jewish synagogue, though there were a few Jews (*see xvi.* 1). The people were rude untaught heathen. The statue or temple of Jupiter stood before the city gate of Lystra, and there was a legend among them that Jupiter and his attendant Mercury had once visited the district in human form. Their attention was arrested by the healing of the crippled man of Lystra; at once the townspeople crowded round, crying out in the speech of their country that the gods were come down in the likeness of men, and would have done sacrifice to them. But Paul and Barnabas ran in among them, and turned them from their error, telling them that they were men like themselves, come to proclaim to them the true and living God. He spoke no doubt in Greek, which would be understood by most, as English would to-day in a Welsh country town; but he spoke to these heathen in quite a different way from his address at Antioch. There his appeal was founded on the scriptures, well known to his hearers, here he shows God's power and goodness by what they see and know about and around them, the witness of creation and His bountiful provision for all.

Persecution again followed. Paul was stoned and left for dead; but he was not dead, his work was not yet done. As the

disciples stood around him, he rose up and came again into the city; and the next day they departed undaunted to Derbe, still further east, another country town like Lystra. There they preached the gospel and taught many. We are not told so here, but Timothy was apparently converted at this time, doubtless at Lystra (*xvi.* 1. 2), that young disciple afterwards so helpful to the apostle Paul.

Derbe was the furthest limit of this first missionary journey. Now they returned again through all the cities they had visited; at Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, they established the souls of those lately converted, exhorting them to continue in the faith, warning them of trials they might expect to encounter. We too need the word of exhortation, the word to establish our hearts, and also a steadfast mind to endure tribulation for Christ's sake. They chose for them elders, and prayed with them, commending them to the Lord on Whom they believed. Then they returned to Antioch in Syria, preaching on the way at Perga, before they sailed from Attalia. It was from Antioch they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled; there to the church, they told all that God had done by them, and how He had "opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles."

Acts xv: The Council at Jerusalem.

Acts *xv.* is a most important chapter, for here we see it decided, with all the authority given by God at the first for the government of His church on earth, that the Gentile believers were not to be brought under the bondage of Jewish rites and ordinances.

When Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary journey (*xiii., xiv.*), they stayed at Antioch some time; and while they were there a serious difficulty arose. Certain men came from Judea and taught the brethren saying, "Except ye be circumcised . . . ye *cannot be saved.*" This error came not from without but from within the church, taught by believers, men bearing the name of Christ, yet it struck at the very foundations of Christianity. Not circumcision, nor any other rite, is necessary to salvation; to say so was to make Christ profit them nothing (*Gal. v.* 2), to make salvation depend

on something other than His finished work, and faith in Him.

This false teaching was opposed by Paul and Barnabas with the greatest energy (*xv.* 2, *Gal. ii.* 5) ; it tended to bring the Gentile believers into bondage, to make Christ of no effect (*Gal. v.* 4). But it was not the will of God that the matter should be settled at Antioch, nor by the authority of Paul alone, though an apostle. It became necessary for him to go to Jerusalem to lay this question before the apostles and elders there. It was determined by the assembly at Antioch that Paul and Barnabas, and others with them (of whom Titus was one), should go up ; but we know also from Paul's own words that it was " by revelation " (*Gal. ii.* 2). The step was ordered of God, and was the way of true wisdom.

Their road took them through Phenice and Samaria, where the gospel had first been preached by those scattered upon the persecution that arose about Stephen (*viii.* 4, 5 ; *xi.* 19), and the news they brought of the conversion of the Gentiles gave great joy to the brethren in those parts. Reaching Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, and they declared all that God had done with them. It was many years since Paul was last in that city ; this visit was fourteen years after that time when he went there from Damascus (*Gal. i.* 18 ; *ii.* 1), though he and Barnabas had been there on a brief visit (if indeed they entered the city) about the time that Peter was imprisoned by Herod. We learn also from Galatians that he saw the apostles privately, and set before them that gospel which he preached among the Gentiles ; and that James, Peter and John, perceiving the grace that was given to him gave to him and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship. They were in complete agreement, though their work lay apart.

But the main point in Acts *xv.* is the council, when the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter (*verse* 6) about which they had come ; it was for the decision of the wisest, those whom God had set in authority, though others also were present (*verse* 12, 22) ; and the Holy Ghost was there to guide (*verse* 28). There was liberty for discussion ; the apostles bore patiently with " much disputing." Then Peter rose up and reminded them all of two things : that God

had chosen him to preach first to the Gentiles " a good while ago " ; and that God had then given the Holy Ghost to those Gentiles as to the Jews, making no difference, but purifying their hearts by faith. Thus he shewed, as Paul in Ephesians *ii.* that " by grace are ye saved through *faith,*" and concluded, " we believe that through *the grace of the Lord Jesus we* shall be saved as *they.*"

Peter's words had great weight. All the multitude kept silence and listened to Barnabas and Paul telling not only what God had done *with* them (*verse* 4), but what He had done *by* them (*verse* 12) in miracles and wonders among the heathen, as by Peter and the rest in Jerusalem. Then James confirmed what Peter had said, shewing from the prophets that God had a purpose of blessing to Gentiles also, and urging that they should not trouble these Gentile believers. And it was decided by the whole church (*verse* 22) to send a letter, and two chief men from among themselves with Paul and Barnabas, to tell the Gentile brethren of their decision : that the apostles had given no such commandment to those who had troubled them with words, saying they must be circumcised and keep the law; and that they laid upon them no greater burden than "the necessary things" named in *verse* 29 : to avoid even the appearance of idol worship, to recognize that life belongs to God (*cp. verse* 29 *and Leviticus xvii.* 11), and to abstain from fornication, which grievous sin had been to those Gentiles a part of their former religion.

Thus was this important question settled not by Paul and Barnabas alone in Antioch with the Gentile believers, but by all the apostles assembled together with the whole church, in Jerusalem from whence the troublers had come. And the Lord allowed the whole question then to rise and be settled in the presence of all the apostles whom He Himself had set in authority, settled for all time. We have it in the writing of the apostles both here and in Paul's Epistles, and we know that these writings have divine authority (1 *Cor. xiv.* 37).

Acts xvi : The First Missionaries to Europe.

We now come (*Acts xvi.*) to the apostle Paul's second missionary journey, when the gospel was preached for the first

time in Europe, then all heathen. A little band of four came over from Troas, on the west coast of Asia Minor, surely and plainly guided by the Lord; Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke who writes the story.

After Paul and Barnabas returned from the council at Jerusalem with Judas and Silas, bringing the letter to Antioch, they continued there for a time. But soon we see Paul going out again to his special work among the heathen. He first proposed to Barnabas (*xv.* 36) that they should go again and visit the cities where they had preached, to see after the welfare of those young Christians. But Barnabas wished to take Mark with them, and Paul was unwilling to take one who had left them before just as they were entering on the work (*xiii.* 13). So they parted. Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus, and we do not hear again of their work; but we find them both mentioned in Paul's Epistles.

Paul chose Silas as his companion, and being commended by the brethren to the grace of God, he first visited and encouraged the churches in Syria and Cilicia. Then they went on to Lycaonia, coming this time from the east, first to Derbe and Lystra. There he chose Timothy to go with them, a young disciple, "well reported of" by those who knew him. The son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father, he was then circumcised, "because of the Jews who were in those quarters." Thus in the wisdom given to him Paul acted towards Timothy, henceforward to be his companion and fellow-worker among both Jews and Gentiles. We know that Titus, a Greek, was *not* circumcised; and the decrees from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this and other matters were "delivered for to keep" (*verse* 4) to the Gentile churches they were now visiting.

Verses 6-10 shew how plainly Paul and his company were directed by the Spirit. Little is told of their work in PHRYGIA and GALATIA, though the later visit (*xviii.* 23) shews that it was fruitful. But now they were to pass over to EUROPE. The *Asia* here mentioned is not the great continent we call Asia, but the Roman province of that name forming the western part of what is now known as *Asia Minor*. A time came later when "all that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord

Jesus" (*xix.* 10), but that time was not yet. Not Asia, nor Mysia, nor Bithynia, was to detain them now; forbidden to preach there, they came down to Troas, and the "we" in verse 10 shews that here Luke joined the company. At Troas the Lord guided them by a vision that appeared to Paul. They were called to MACEDONIA, the northern part of the modern kingdom of Greece; and assuredly gathering that the Lord had called them to preach the gospel there, they went. Thus they came to PHILIPPI, where the good seed was to take root and bear much fruit, as we see from the Epistle to the Philippians. There was no synagogue, but on the sabbath day they went to the Jews' usual place of prayer, and talked to the women who came together. And a woman was the first European convert, a Gentile but not an idolater; Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened, believed and was baptized, and her household too, and the missionaries became her guests.

Yet although the Lord Himself had brought them to Europe, they were not without difficulties. God used them for His own purposes of blessing. Day by day as they went to the place of prayer, a slave girl with an evil spirit cried after Paul's company that they were servants of the most high God, come to shew the way of salvation. But no evil spirit gives testimony to Jesus as Lord, and when it continued, Paul, not willing to receive such testimony, cast out the evil spirit in the name of Jesus Christ. But her masters had made a gain of the girl, and were very angry. They accused Paul and Silas before the magistrates, who commanded them to be beaten and cast into prison. Yet see what follows. Paul and Silas, with their feet fast in the stocks, were praying and singing at midnight and the prisoners were listening, when that earthquake came which led to the conversion of the heathen jailor. Saved from killing himself (for by Roman law if his prisoners escaped he was guilty of death) by Paul's assurance, he came trembling to those who could tell him the way of salvation: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" His conscience was troubled, the man was in earnest, and they could say with full assurance, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." They spoke to him and to all his household the word of the Lord, then they all believed, and were all baptized straightway. And

he shewed his changed heart by doing all in his power for those whom he had only just before been treating so cruelly.

In this simple way the gospel came to Europe. Those who brought the message were guided of the Lord by His Spirit, their work was ordered of Him, and the story is written for our encouragement and faith even now. He will surely guide those who are obedient to His word.

Acts xvii: Thessalonians and Bereans.

Paul and Silas had been "shamefully treated" at Philippi (1 *Thess. ii.* 2), but the Lord brought them through the trial; the magistrates had to own they had been unjustly treated and to come themselves and bring them out of prison. Their work at Philippi stopped, they went on to Thessalonica, three days' journey away. It would seem that Luke remained behind at Philippi (as Silas and Timothy did later at Berea), for we note that in continuing the story (*xvii.* 1) he does not say *we* but *they*, and we do not find him again in Paul's company till the apostle comes to these parts on his third journey (*xx.* 6).

Thessalonica was about one hundred miles from Philippi, but also in Macedonia, a large and flourishing seaport town still (now called *Salonica*), in Paul's time it was one of the largest cities in the world. This busy and populous place was soon to be a centre from which the gospel should sound forth to all around through the Thessalonian converts (1 *Thess. i.* 8). Yet it would seem that Paul and Silas were there only about three weeks.

At Thessalonica, though a heathen city, there was a Jewish synagogue; there had been none at Philippi. And Paul, after his usual custom, went there on the sabbath days, preaching to the Jews and showing from the scriptures (as at Antioch, *xiii.* 27-37) how the prophets had foretold that Christ should suffer, and that He should rise again from the dead; and "that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." Some of them believed even from among the Jews, but from the Gentiles a great multitude; we see from the Epistles to the Thessalonians that the Christians of Thessalonica were mainly converts from idolatry (1 *Thess. i.* 9), and we may note that in

those Epistles the Old Testament scriptures are not once quoted. It was evidently not only on the sabbath days, nor only to the Jews, that Paul and Silas made known the good news. Very soon the Jews became jealous, and as before at Iconium (*xiv.*), they stirred up the people against them, and made an attack on the house of Jason, where Paul and Silas had been lodging. Not finding them, they dragged Jason and certain brethren before the city rulers and made accusation against them. Persecution fell on the young converts (1 *Thess. ii.* 14), and the brethren sent away Paul and Silas, who were in the greatest danger, by night to BEREA, further south, and about sixty miles away.

Here also was a synagogue, and unwearied and undaunted, the missionaries began their work again. And the Jews here, we read, were more noble than those in Thessalonica ; they readily received the word, they searched the scriptures to see whether these things were so, and many Bereans believed, both Jews and Gentiles, before persecution was stirred up here also by Jews coming from Thessalonica. Upon this some of the Berean Christians took Paul by sea to ATHENS, Silas and Timotheus remaining at Berea for a time. And at a later day (*xx.* 4) we find a Berean mentioned by name among the companions of Paul.

Again Paul had soon to leave the young converts, as before at Philippi, but his work was " far hence among the Gentiles," and he must go on ; with a heart gladdened at the abundant fruit in Thessalonica and Berea, though we know he was sad at leaving them. We learn a good deal more about the work in the former place from letters he wrote to the Thessalonians from Corinth not very long after. He speaks of his manner of life and preaching among them (1 *Thess. i.* 5, 9; *ii.* 2-5, 8-12, *etc.*); he had desired to return again (*ii.* 17, 18), and because he could not, had sent Timothy (*iii.* 2). It was a joy to him to think of them, and to remember their work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope, how they had received the word with joy and become examples to others, and how from them the word of God had sounded out to the country round (*i.* 8). They had received it as it was in truth, the word of God (*ii.* 13) He wrote when Timothy had returned to him (*iii.* 6 ; *Acts xviii.* 5), and

was comforted at hearing the news he brought of their faith and love and steadfastness; as when with them he had himself taught them how they ought to walk and to please God, waiting for the coming again of the Lord Jesus, of which he speaks in every chapter.

And what lessons have come down to us from those young Christians of a far-off day! The Thessalonians, after that brief visit of Paul and Silas, had "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven"; the Bereans "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily." May we also, as they, *serve and wait, receive the word* as the Lord gives it by His servants, and *search the scriptures* diligently to prove and hold fast what we hear.

ACTS XVII (*cont.*): PAUL ALONE AT ATHENS.

From Berea Paul had gone to the sea, and thus to ATHENS, not in Macedonia, but in that part of Greece called Attica, part of the province of Achaia. Once the most renowned of all cities in the heathen world, Athens was still in Paul's day the most learned city, and the intellectual capital of the world.

Here Paul was alone, for Silas and Timothy had been left at Berea. Whether they did join him at Athens, or were so delayed as not to come till he had gone on to Corinth (*see xviii.* 5), we do not know; they are not mentioned here. We do know that Paul was "left at Athens alone" (1 *Thess. iii.* 1-2), while Timothy went back to Thessalonica, but whether he was sent from Athens or from Berea we are not told. Paul was alone in that great heathen city, so full of idols; always before, at Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and later at Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, he had had like-minded companions, at first Barnabas, and later Silas, Luke, and Timothy; now he had no one. But he was not therefore either idle or silent. The Lord was with him and strengthened him.

"His spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city full of idols." There was a Jewish synagogue, as in many other heathen cities, and here he addressed the Jews and other devout persons, but we do not hear much about them. In the face of the overwhelming tide of idolatry (for Athens more than any

other city was in actual fact "full of idols"), Paul's fullest energy was put forth in making known to them better things. He disputed "in the market daily with them that met with him," and "preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection." He met not only idolaters but philosophers, for Athens was a centre also of heathen philosophy; the great Socrates was an Athenian, Plato and Aristotle too had taught there. Many great Athenians had no faith in the gods with which the city was crowded, and indeed the character of these gods was such as only to encourage the greatest wickedness. The philosophers whom Paul met were EPICUREANS, who made light of the gods but had no faith in anything better; practically atheists, they lived only for sensual pleasures: and STOICS, who had a philosophy of pride which made them teach indifference to pleasure or pain, to seek a stern virtue and exalt themselves; but they recognized no Creator, and believed in no immortality.

Their curiosity aroused by what they heard, they desired to hear more of what Paul had to say, for all the Athenians "spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing," and this gave him the opportunity of which he took such advantage in the wonderful address we find here (*verses* 22-31).

AREOPAGUS was a rocky height in the centre of Athens, on which was the temple of Mars, and also an open-air court of justice with seats hewn out in the rock, on a platform reached by steps from the AGORA, or market place. Here they brought Paul, as a place suitable and conveniently near. Towering above them as they stood on Mars' Hill, was the still higher Acropolis, its great platform of rock wholly given up to temples, shrines, and altars, the height crowned by a colossal statue of Minerva which could be seen from the sea five miles away.

Here, among such surroundings, this address was given. Paul spoke to these proud and learned Athenians, with tokens of idolatry around them on every hand, in much the same way as he had done to the ignorant people of Lystra and Derbe (*xiv.*). Speaking first of their reverence for religion (*ver.* 22, R.V. marg.), he took occasion by the altar TO THE UNKNOWN GOD to tell them of that One Whom without knowing they yet sought to worship. He spoke of God as Creator of all things,

Giver and Author of life, Lord and Ruler of all mankind. He, the Almighty, " dwelleth not in temples made with hands," like the shrines around them. All men should seek after God, and He is not far from every one of us ; being His offspring, as He is the Author of life, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like any created thing, or the work of men's hands. God had overlooked the times of past ignorance, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because of that appointed day when He will judge the world in righteousness by the risen Lord Jesus.

Thus Paul reached the climax of his subject, Jesus and the resurrection, of which he had already spoken in the market-place. At this point apparently his proud hearers refused to listen further ; the address was abruptly concluded. When he spoke of the resurrection, some mocked ; and others said, we will hear thee again. So Paul went out from among them. It would seem that he stayed very little longer in Athens ; we do not know that he ever went there again, and there is no epistle to Athens. But even in Athens there were some who believed, and two are mentioned by name : "Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them." Even in such a place as Athens, " the Lord knoweth them that are His " ; Dionysius and Damaris and the rest were not forgotten of Him.

Acts xviii, 1-21 : From Athens to Corinth ; back to Antioch.

From Athens Paul went to Corinth. The two cities were very different places. Athens was famed for its shrines and temples, its schools of philosophy, its learning. Corinth was a great seaport on the Isthmus between the Ionian and Aegean Seas, busy, wealthy, and pleasure-loving, a city renowned even among heathen cities for its wickedness. Yet such are the ways of God, that at Athens Paul stayed but a short time, with but little apparent result to that remarkable address on Mars Hill, when he stood alone in the power of the Spirit, and spoke of God and His ways before all that men esteemed great and wise ; while at Corinth he made the longest stay in one place of which we have yet heard, and found a fruitful field of labour.

The Lord had "much people" there. What some of those converts had been, we see from 1 Cor. *i.* 26, *vi.* 11; but "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and . . . the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; . . . that no flesh should glory in His presence."

At Corinth Paul found friends in Aquila and Priscilla, lately exiled from their home in Rome by a decree of the Emperor Claudius. We do not know for certain whether they were already Christians, but we do know that after this time they became "helpers in the Lord" not only to Paul but to "all the churches of the Gentiles" (*Rom. xvi.* 3-5). With them Paul lived and worked because they were of the same trade; the great apostle worked with his own hands to provide for his necessities, as we are reminded elsewhere (*Acts xx.* 34, 35; 2 *Cor. xi.* 9; 1 *Thess. ii.* 9). But this daily toil was only a means to an end. Every sabbath he went to the synagogue and spoke of the things that were on his heart to the Jews and devout Gentiles who came there; and at his work he had opportunity to speak of the same things to Aquila and Priscilla and any who came in. Soon Silas and Timothy came to him from Macedonia. Both had been left at Berea, and we know that Timothy had since been at Thessalonica. It would seem to be about this time that Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians (1 *Thess. iii.* 6), not from Athens, as some have thought. Cheered by their coming, Paul's spirit was stirred, and he testified yet more earnestly to the Jews that Jesus was indeed the Christ, but when they opposed and blasphemed, he turned from them to the Gentiles, as he had done in other cities.

Now he no longer preached in the synagogue, but in the house of Justus close by, convenient for both Jews and Greeks who desired to hear the word. Much blessing followed. The chief ruler of the synagogue believed with all his house, and many among the Gentiles believed and were baptized. Then the Lord appeared to Paul in a vision, giving him the assurance of His presence; and a promise that he should be kept safe, commanding him to speak boldly and not keep silence and cheering him with the words, "I have much people in

this city." The effect of the Lord's gracious encouragement was seen in his fearless testimony. "Much people" came forth to the Lord. We know the names of a good many Corinthian Christians: Crispus and Justus here mentioned, the household of Stephanas, of whom perhaps Epænetus was one (1 *Cor. xvi.* 15; *Rom. xvi.* 5), Gaius, later Paul's host (*Rom. xvi.* 23), Erastus, Fortunatus and others. The Epistles show that they were a numerous company. Paul continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God. Doubtless he visited other places in the neighbourhood, for we read (*Rom. xvi.* 1) of "the church at Cenchrea," which was not far away, and of believers "in all Achaia" (2 *Cor. i.* 1); Corinth was the metropolis of Achaia. From its position between two seas, Corinth was well fittted to be a centre from which the good news should spread. Its merchandise went all over the world.

The Lord's providential care over His servant was evident when Gallio came to be ruler over Achaia, and the Jews made accusation against Paul. Gallio saw it was no question of crime or wickedness, and being indifferent to religious questions he refused to interfere. Then the Jews were set upon by the Greeks, who took Sosthenes, the successor of Crispus and beat him publicly. Paul was unmolested, and stayed in Corinth yet a good while. When he did leave it was not because of persecution, but because the time had come to return to Syria. And when at length he said farewell to the brethren and left Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla went with him as far as EPHESUS, where he left them. Here in the capital of the Roman province of Asia Paul reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue, and because he could not then stay longer he promised to return to them again, "if God will." Sailing from Ephesus he landed at Cæsarea, went "up," i.e., to Jerusalem as he had planned, where he saluted the church, and then returned to Antioch whence he had set forth with Silas on that memorable journey when they first visited Europe. Not only has the inspired record of that journey been preserved for our learning, showing where and how the Lord led His servants, but we still have also the letters Paul wrote to believers at Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth, full for us as for them of instruction and comfort.

ACTS XVIII, 22 TO XIX, 7: APOLLOS AND THE TWELVE MEN AT EPHESUS.

We read that Paul " spent some time " at Antioch after he returned to Syria, when he had been up to Jerusalem (*xviii.* 22). His work had been connected with Antioch ever since he first went there with Barnabas and stayed a year (*xi.* 25, 26). From Antioch he had started on his two great missionary journeys (*xiii.* 1-3 ; *xv.* 40), and returned there again, this time from his labours in those great cities of Europe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth. Now he was to set forth on his third journey, and after this time we do not hear of Antioch again.

Leaving Antioch then he went first to Galatia and Phrygia, where he had been before going to Europe (*xvi.* 6). There had been much fruit from that former visit, and he went over the country " in order," i.e., where there were already assemblies of disciples. For Galatia was not a town but a district ; we read of the " churches of Galatia " (1 *Cor. xvi.* 1). He went to visit and establish all these disciples, teaching them more of the truth, when on his way to keep his promise of returning to EPHESUS (*xviii.* 21), which lay beyond them.

While he was journeying, other things happened at Ephesus which prepared the way for his visit. Another faithful servant now comes before us, later to be much esteemed by Paul and the Corinthians. APOLLOS was a learned Alexandrian Jew, mighty in the Old Testament scriptures, fervent in spirit, instructed in the way of the Lord, and he diligently taught that which he knew. But as yet he knew " only the baptism of John." This man came to Ephesus and began to speak boldly in the synagogue. Aquila and Priscilla heard him. They saw his earnestness, his knowledge of the scriptures, his devotion to the Lord, and they did not despise him because, not knowing all they knew, he yet sought to teach. " They took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly," all they had been privileged to learn from the apostle Paul. Though learned, Apollos was willing to be taught ; thus they were encouraged to help him. He had enough knowledge of the Lord to value all they could shew him from the scriptures. To him that " hath shall more be given." God always gives

more light and instruction to those who truly seek to know and do His will. So it was then. Apollos had learned from John the Baptist of One who should come fulfilling all the Old Testament prophecies; no doubt he recognized the Lord as Messiah. Now he learned of His wonderful death, His resurrection, His ascension, of His finished work and all that it means; not only life to the believer, but justification, joy and peace in believing, and all that Paul wrote later in his Epistles to the Romans and others. Thus well taught himself, Apollos passed on into Achaia, whence Paul had lately come; and there "he helped them much which had believed through grace," and "mightily convinced the Jews," publicly "shewing from the scriptures that Jesus is the Christ."

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul arrived at Ephesus; and there he found twelve other men who, like Apollos, were John's disciples and knew no more. They had not had the teaching of Apollos or of his teachers, or they would have known more. But Paul knew them as disciples, though not well instructed; for persons may be believers, yet ignorant of much blessing which faith in the gospel brings. So with these men. They believed in Jesus as the Messiah that was to come, but did not know much about Him, nor what His work has done for those who believe; they knew of promise, but not of fulfilment. Though born of God, they had not received the Holy Spirit. Paul saw they were unsatisfied, found out what was the lack, and brought them into the full knowledge of the gospel. So there are those now who believe God's word, believe in the Lord Jesus as Messiah, as Saviour, but do not enter into what His work has accomplished, do not know a full salvation through faith in Him. They need "the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation" (*Ephes. i.* 13), like Cornelius and like these twelve. Then the Holy Spirit is given. These men were baptized with Christian baptism, Paul laid his hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. Not that the Holy Ghost was always given with the laying on of hands, quite otherwise, as we see in Acts *x.* 44; but on this occasion, as also *viii.* 14-17, God in His wisdom chose that it should be so.

Thus we see how the Lord will surely give more light to those who have faith and a real desire to know and do His will.

" He which hath begun a good work in you " will go on to shew you more of Himself. So it was with the disciples in Galatia and Phrygia, so with Apollos, and so with the twelve at Ephesus.

Acts xix : Three years at Ephesus.

When Paul had come back to Ephesus, fulfilling his promise made to the Jews there when on his way from Corinth (*Acts xviii.* 21), for three months he continued going to the synagogue, and there he spake boldly with the Jews disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when after that time, though some believed, others were hardened, and publicly spoke against those things which Paul preached, he separated the believers from those who believed not ; and from this time he spoke no longer in the synagogue but daily in the *school* or place of instruction belonging to a man called Tyrannus. The preaching of the word had by this time brought to light which of the Jews would receive the truth and which reject it ; and now the only thing to do was to turn from these despisers of the word to the Gentiles.

EPHESUS was, excepting Rome itself, the greatest and most important of all the cities in which Paul preached, and he continued there a longer time than anywhere else. It had been said that it was more Greek than Antioch, more Oriental than Corinth, more populous than Athens, more wealthy than Thessalonica ; and from its position, near to the sea and at the meeting point of great roads, it has been called the Gate of the East. Its temple to Artemis (or Diana) was one of the wonders of the world ; but now little or nothing of temple or city remains. At that time the capital of the Roman province of Asia, it became a great centre from which the good news spread. Paul wrote of it that " a great door and effectual " was opened unto him there, though there were "many adversaries."

The preaching and teaching daily in the school of Tyrannus continued for two years, so that, we are told, " all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." Ephesus was a place to which men would readily come from all over the province ; and also it may well be that during the three years of his sojourn there (*xx.* 31) Paul visited

other cities in the province, and that at this time there were founded also the others of those "seven churches in Asia" to which John was directed to write in Revelation *ii.*, *iii.* Paul speaks of "the churches of Asia" in 1 Cor. *xvi.* 19; and Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea were all within the province. Ephesus was the first and greatest of the seven; and it was to the saints at Ephesus (*Eph. i.* 1) that Paul afterwards wrote that wonderful Epistle in which are made known the mysteries which were revealed to him. Of his sufferings during this time little is said here, but we read something of them in 1 Cor. *xv.* 32, *xvi.* 9; 2 Cor. *i.* 8-10, and also later in this Book (*xx.* 19).

At this time too, God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul, as before at Iconium and Lystra, but yet more wonderful (*verse* 12). Ephesus was a city superstitious above all others, where magical arts were much practised, and God would have His own mighty power shewn out by contrast in this honour put upon Paul's testimony. So also He would bring about the discomfiture of those impostors who endeavoured to use the name of the Lord Jesus as a sort of charm, without any faith or knowledge of Him, as we see in verses 13-16; when, far from their exorcism being successful, the evil spirit disowned any knowledge of *them*, and they were overcome and wounded by the man in whom the evil spirit was. Thus was Ephesus a most highly favoured spot, to have Paul there so long as preacher, teacher and interpreter of God's word, and also these special wonders to confirm to all his hearers the new teaching. When what had happened to these vagabond exorcists became known to the dwellers in Ephesus, fear fell on them all, both Jews and Greeks, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. We find also that this occurrence acted with special power on those who believed, but apparently had still retained some faith in these magical arts; they "came and confessed and shewed their deeds," and they went further, for they brought their magical books together, and "burned them before all," valuable though they were, worth, it is estimated, about £2,000 of our money. "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed," acting with special power on those who believed, who thus were shewn their error in going

on with that which was contrary to it. Believers in the Lord Jesus should have nothing to do with magical arts of any kind whatever. Nothing can stand before the word of God, where it is fully received by faith into the heart; and still it accomplishes the gracious purposes of Him who sends it forth.

ACTS XIX, 21 TO XX, 15: APOSTOLIC LABOURS.

The time had almost come for Paul to leave Ephesus and go further in the Lord's work. It was his purpose to pass through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, and then on to Rome (*xix.* 21). So he sent Timotheus and Erastus to Macedonia, but himself stayed behind in Asia for a time; as we know from 1 Cor. *xvi.* he purposed to stay at Ephesus till Pentecost. But his plans at this time were not carried out. God directed otherwise. While still at Ephesus, he wrote his first Epistle to the Corinthians.

Just at that time there arose no small stir in Ephesus about "the way," as the new teaching was called. Demetrius and other silversmiths, who made shrines for the heathen goddess specially worshipped at Ephesus, feared to lose their trade through the preaching of Paul that those are no gods which are made with hands. So they stirred up a tumult and the whole city was filled with confusion. They caught two of Paul's companions, men of Macedonia, and rushed with them into the great amphitheatre where the Ephesian games were held. Paul would have gone in among the raging people to the help of his friends, but the disciples hindered him, and the Asiarchs also (chief magistrates who presided over the games) sent to urge him not to venture. This was God's way of preserving His servant, and Paul submitted. For two hours the tumult continued, the people crying out in praise of their goddess. Then the town clerk gained a hearing, and having quieted them he dismissed the assembly. But Paul's work at Ephesus was done and God was sending him elsewhere. The uproar having ceased, he called the disciples and bade them farewell, and then departed for Macedonia. How he wrote later of this deliverance we see in 2 Cor. *i.* 8-10.

Those verses (*xx.* 1-3) which speak of the work which next occupied him give few details, but we learn from other scrip-

tures that on his way to Europe he passed through Troas (2 *Cor. ii.* 12, 13) where he expected to find Titus, who had been sent with the First Epistle to the Corinthians written from Ephesus. Being disappointed in this, he went on from thence to Macedonia, where he was comforted by the coming of Titus and the news brought from Corinth (2 *Cor. vii.* 5-7). Then he wrote to the Corinthians a second Epistle, probably from Philippi. And not much later he wrote from Corinth the Epistle to the Romans. These things help us to realize how much is included in those verses, "When he had gone over those parts"—Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea where he had laboured on his former visit (*xvi.* 11—*xvii.* 15)—"and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece," i.e., the southern province, of which Corinth was the capital; and stayed there three months. Thus he visited, taught and established in the faith those converted where he had laboured before. And not only so, but while busy about his work of oral instruction, he found time to write to those at a distance those inspired Epistles, which are still preserved for us, to the Corinthians, the Romans, and perhaps also the Galatians. And we too need the same ministry of both oral and written instruction: not only to hear the word of God, but also to read what is written, both in the scripture itself, and those writings which may help us, so that we may be established in the truth.

And God ordered his way. A plot of the Jews was avoided by returning to Syria not from Corinth but through Macedonia again. He had seven companions in his labours and his travels at this time: a Berean, two Thessalonians, Gaius from Derbe and Timothy from Lystra, and two Ephesians; and the "us" of verse 5 shews that now Luke also joined him again. The others going before waited for them at Troas, but Paul and Luke stayed at Philippi till "after the days of unleavened bread." Then joining them at Troas and staying seven days, they were with the disciples when they came together to break bread on the first day of the week. Here it is shewn that on that day, the resurrection day, it was the settled habit of the believers to come together for that purpose; no longer the sabbath, as with the Jews, but the Lord's Day is now the day

of assembling together for worship, the day of days for every Christian. Afterwards, as Paul preached to those assembled in that upper chamber, a young man named Eutychus was overcome with sleep, fell from the window and was taken up dead. But the power of the Lord was present to heal, and his life was restored. That occasion must have been long remembered by all who were present, the earnest discourse, the painful occurrence, the wonderful restoration, and the last words of the great apostle whom perhaps they were never to see again; for his work in the East was almost done. When he came up again, he talked with them " a long while, even till break of day," and " so he departed." Next to Assos, thence to Miletus, Phenicia, Tyre, and Jerusalem, whence he was indeed to go to Rome, but as a prisoner in chains. The Lord's ways are not not our ways, and He is wiser than we. It was thus Paul's ardent desire was fulfilled, and thus fettered he was to do there a special work for the Lord, undaunted and rejoicing (*Phil. i.* 12-18).

ACTS XX: PAUL'S FAREWELL TO THE ELDERS OF EPHESUS.

Acts xx. shews us Paul on that journey to Jerusalem which he had purposed while still at Ephesus (*xix.* 21). As we know from his Epistle to the Romans, written from Corinth, he was carrying contributions from the assemblies in Macedonia and Achaia to the poor saints at Jerusalem (*Rom. xv.* 26), after which it was his desire to visit Rome and then go into Spain (*Rom. i.* 10; *xv.* 24, 28); for he felt that his work in the East was done (*verses* 19-23). But we do not know that he ever did go to Spain.

Leaving Philippi with Luke (*Acts xx.* 6) he visited Troas and then went on foot to Assos, where he rejoined his companions on board ship, and they sailed by Mitylene, Chios, Samos and Trogyllium to Miletus. If you look at a map you will see that he thus passed by the greater port of Ephesus, the capital of Asia, where he had spent so long a time (*xix.*), and verse 16 tells us why. He was in haste to be at Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost.

But the saints at Ephesus needed his last wise counsels, and from Miletus, where evidently the vessel made some stay, he

sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church to come to him there. It was only thirty or forty miles away. And here we have his words at this time to those chosen of the Holy Ghost (*verse* 28) to rule and care for the assembly called sometimes elders, sometimes overseers or bishops (*see* 1 *Tim. iii. v.; Titus i.;* 1 *Peter v.; Acts xxi.*, etc., etc.), as in this verse. First he reminds them of his own service among them, now past, and his example; this was not to exalt himself, but to help others, who needed example as well as precept that they might grow in the ways of Christ. It is not learning or gift he puts before them but "serving the Lord with all humility of mind." He had kept back nothing profitable, but in public and private had taught them all, testifying to both Jews and Greeks the two essential things—repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Where faith is real, there is self-judgment and confession of sin, and that is repentance.

Then the apostle speaks of the prospect before himself; all is uncertain save one thing, that bonds and afflictions await him. He feels bound in his spirit to go to Jerusalem but knows not what shall befall him there; he went forward with his eyes open to coming trouble. Yet God was in it all, for he was to write from his prison in Rome those very Epistles which give the fullest light on heavenly things, for the instruction and comfort of God's people not only then but ever since. And now his one desire was to finish his course with joy, and to complete his service in testifying the gospel of the grace of God wherever he might be (2 *Tim. iv.* 17). Then we have his personal farewell to the Ephesians, for he knows he will see them no more; he calls them to witness that he has declared to them "all the counsel of God"—all His purpose.

Thus leaving them for the last time the apostle charges the elders to take up the responsibility of caring for the flock and to take heed both to themselves and to all the flock, that so they might tend and shepherd the church of God, purchased at such a mighty cost; the Holy Ghost had given them this task. Two classes of evil men should arise to threaten it, "grievous wolves" from without, indicating violence, and "men speaking perverse things" from among themselves, who would with subtlety seek to draw away the disciples. And so he warns

them solemnly to watch, and to remember his past warnings.

Their resource amid these dangers is two-fold ; they will no longer have the apostle with them but he commends them " to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up." That was their unfailing resource, whatever the difficulties, that the assembly might be kept in peace and preserved from evil, and still it is ours to-day. We need the word to give us courage and to guide us ; we need God Himself to be our strength and power. The word of His grace remains to us still, to direct us in every need, to build us up in our most holy faith ; and God is ever faithful; the Lord Jesus is the same yesterday, and to-day and for ever, and He gives us strength by His Spirit that dwelleth in us. Then comes the parting. Again the apostle points them to his own example, to shew them how that so labouring they ought to support the weak, remembering how the Lord Jesus said, " It is more blessed to give than to receive." And then he kneeled down and prayed with them all before they bade each other farewell, the Ephesians sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.

ACTS XIII TO XX : THE APOSTLE OF THE GENTILES (see *Rom. xi*, 13).

The apostle Paul's farewell at Miletus to the elders of Ephesus closes the history of his public ministry in the East, so far as we have any record in the scriptures. But for his visits to disciples at Tyre and Cæsarea on his way to Jerusalem and his welcome by the elders at Jerusalem, we do not hear of him after this time except as a prisoner. The last eight chapters of the *Acts* tell this history, and close with his two years' imprisonment at Rome. From that prison he was to write to the Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians those letters we can read to-day, being taught and inspired by the Holy Spirit thus to make known for the church of God in all times the wonderful truths then revealed to him. He also wrote to his friend Philemon. Verse 22 of that Epistle, and also Phil. *i*. 26 ; *ii*. 24, seem to shew that he expected to be set at liberty; from the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, it appears that this was so, and that the last of those letters, 2 Tim., was written during

a later imprisonment. But except through those Epistles, scripture tells us no more of his history after this time.

Our study of the book of Acts has shewn us that from chapter *xiii.* the story is occupied entirely (except in *chap. xv.*) with the work of Paul and those who worked with him among the Gentiles. Called of God to be an apostle (*Rom. i.* 1 ; 1 *Cor. i.* 1 ; *Acts ix.* 1-16), and to go to the Gentiles, he had preached first in Damascus (*ix.* 19-20) and then gone into Arabia (*Gal. i.* 17-18) before going up to Jerusalem (*Acts ix.* 26-27), when Barnabas became his friend, and thence had gone to his home in Tarsus, when the Jews in Jerusalem sought to slay him. From Tarsus Barnabas had fetched him to help in the work at Antioch (*xi.* 25-26), and there they had laboured together (except for a brief visit to Jerusalem, *xi.* 30 ; *xii.* 25), till sent forth by the Holy Ghost on the *first missionary journey* which led them to Cyprus, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium and the cities of Lycaonia. After the council at Jerusalem (*xv.*) and a further stay at Antioch (*xv.* 35), Paul had set forth with Silas on the *second journey*, when after visiting the disciples in Syria and Cilicia, in Derbe, Lystra and Iconium (where Timothy joined them), they went through Phrygia and Galatia, and then, led by a vision, and joined by Luke, they crossed over into Macedonia to carry the gospel to Europe. There at Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth Paul and his companions preached and taught the word of God, and left disciples behind them, sometimes few, sometimes many (*xviii.* 8, 10) : and calling at Ephesus on his way back to Syria, Paul promised to return there again.

Then after visiting Jerusalem and spending some time at Antioch (*xviii.* 22, 23), he set forth on the *third great journey* when again he visited Galatia and Phrygia, and then as promised came to Ephesus for that three years' stay which had such fruitful results (*xix.* 10, 20 ; *xx.* 31). From Ephesus he went on to revisit the cities of Macedonia and Greece, where he had been on his last journey, and then with seven fellow-workers (*xx.* 4), all the fruit of his labours among the Gentiles and joined again by Luke, he had come to Troas and started on his last journey to Jerusalem. Thus he could say: " From Jerusalem, round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached

the gospel of Christ." His first journey had taken him to the cities of Asia Minor, his second to Europe, his third to both Asia and Europe. Thus his work in the East was done (*Rom. xvi.* 23), his labours among the Gentiles were ended, so far as scripture informs us. Now he hoped to go West. He had already written six of the Epistles we have in the New Testament.

Such were the labours of the great apostle of the Gentiles up to the time when, "after many years" (*xxiv.* 17), he came again to Jerusalem; thence he was to go as a prisoner to bear witness to his Lord also at Rome, and to be brought before Cæsar (*Acts xxiii.* 11 ; *Phil. i.* 13). He could say of his work, "I laboured more abundantly than they all," but he added, " Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." He could say, " To me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." He could say, " I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." That was his glory and boast in the work the Lord had given him to do. As we read the apostle's wonderful story in the Acts, and his burning words in the Epistles he wrote, may we learn to follow Paul, as he followed Christ.

Acts xxi: Made Prisoner at Jerusalem.

We have now come to that part of the Book of Acts which tells of Paul as a prisoner, no longer free to labour in the gospel among the Gentiles everywhere, but fettered and confined. Yet still God was with him, accomplishing His purpose.

We are told many details of his journey from Miletus to Jerusalem, showing God's interest in all that concerned His servant. Paul's ship passed Patmos and other small islands, and came to the island of Coos, and then to Patara, after passing Rhodes. Here they found another ship going at once to Phenicia, so they went aboard and set sail. We remember he was " *hasting* to be at Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost." Now no longer coasting along the shore, but sailing the open sea across to Tyre, they could go at good speed, passing Cyprus in the distance, where Paul had first gone with Barnabas (*Acts xiii*). At Tyre the ship unloaded her cargo,

which enabled them to find out disciples there and spend seven days with them. Here, as before (*xx.* 23), Paul was warned of the Spirit not to go to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he went on.

They ended their voyage at Ptolemais (now called Acre, on the other side of the bay to the North of Carmel), and had one day with the brethren there, then going on by land to Cæsarea, where they stayed in the house of Philip the evangelist, of whom we read last in *viii.* 40. Here Agabus, the prophet, foretold what should be done to Paul in Jerusalem. This strengthened the warnings he already had; yet still he went on. It would seem the apostle did not understand that the Lord meant him not to go to Jerusalem, but looked upon the warnings only as a preparation for what he was to go through. He "would not be persuaded," in spite of all his friends could say, and so they went on to Jerusalem.

There they were gladly received and welcomed; and the next day, coming together with all the elders at the house of James, Paul told them of the work of God among the Gentiles since last they met. There was much to tell—the visits to Galatia and Phrygia (*xviii.* 23), the long stay at Ephesus and the mighty work of God while there (*xix.*), the revisiting of those European cities where he had laboured before (*xx.* 1-3), all these were since his last visit to Jerusalem. And they glorified God when they heard thus of God's work among those afar off, to which he had been called.

But other thoughts were in the minds of some, and they had a suggestion to make. By this time there were in Jerusalem many thousands of Jewish believers, and they were "all zealous of the law." Paul's love for his own people had led him to come at this time to Jerusalem, but his special mission was to Gentiles, and some of the Jewish believers were suspicious of him and what they had heard of his teaching. The elders therefore proposed that he should show himself obedient to the law of Moses by joining with four of these Jewish believers in fulfilling a vow at the temple. We often do not realize that for a good while these early Jewish Christians continued with the temple service and the observance of ordinances, though believers in the Lord Jesus; indeed, some time after this they needed the Epistle to the Hebrews specially to be written to

show them that all these things are done away in Christ. Paul was tolerant of these ways in them (*see* 1 *Cor. ix.* 20), though he had more liberty, and he agreed to do as they wished. It was not his own judgment; he knew how to please the Lord without fear of what others thought, but he yielded to their wishes. Their expedient was wholly in vain ; it ended only in his being thrown into the power of his enemies (see verses 27-34), and becoming a prisoner in Roman hands.

We may feel that the apostle was mistaken in thus yielding to the Jewish Christians, and even in going to Jerusalem at this time ; it does but remind us that only One was ever perfect—He Who left us an example that we should follow His steps. We know from other scriptures (*see Gal. ii.* 11), that the ***conduct*** of even the apostles might not always be free from failure, though their *teaching* was safeguarded from error ; the Epistles they wrote were by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and their commandments to be received as the commandments of the Lord (1 *Cor. xiv.* 37 ; 2 *Pet. iii.* 2 ; 1 *John iv.* 6).

Paul was a prisoner ; nevertheless, God was over all, and His hand was in it, ordering all with perfect wisdom. He had lessons for His servant to learn, and work for him to do even thus ; for in this way the testimony was to be carried before rulers and kings, and even before Cæsar himself.

ACTS XXI (*cont.*): HOW PAUL WAS TAKEN BY THE ROMANS.

In the latter part of chapter xxi. we see the result of the apostle's yielding to the elders' wish that he should show himself obedient to the law of Moses by joining with four Jewish believers in fulfilling a vow. When the seven days of purification were almost ended (*verse* 27) Jews from Asia (for it was the feast of Pentecost, when Jews from all parts came to Jerusalem), perhaps some of the very Jews who had opposed him at Ephesus (*xix.* 9), saw him in the temple and stirred up the people against him. They accused him of polluting the temple by bringing a Gentile into it—Trophimus the Ephesian, whom they had seen with him in the city. This was strictly forbidden to any Gentile, and though the charge was untrue, such a tumult was raised that Paul's life was in danger, until

the Roman captain came with soldiers and took him into custody. He was a prisoner in Roman hands, and thus he was to remain for more than four years at the least.

We shall understand this chapter better if we think for a few moments of the construction of the Temple. There was a great outer court, called the Court of the Gentiles, and within this area, rather nearer to the N.W. corner, was another enclosure fenced off by a stone balustrade on which were inscriptions giving warning that no Gentile might go beyond them on pain of death. It was also raised above the outer court, from which fourteen steps led up to strong gates of brass leading to the first court within the enclosure, the *Court of the Women*. Beyond that court was the *Court of Israel*, reached again by steps, and the *Court of the Priests*; and beyond that again, and raised above all, was the holy House itself, divided like the Tabernacle and like Solomon's Temple into two parts. Here no one might enter but the priests; but any Israelite might go as far as the *Court of Israel*, except the women, who were limited to the first court within the enclosure. That was the great place of concourse, where many of our Lord's discourses were given; and when Paul was turned out of the Temple (*verse* 30) it means that he was expelled from that court into the Court of the Gentiles and the gates of brass shut behind him.

To the N. of the temple area was the tower of Antonia, called here the Castle (*verse* 34), where most of the Roman garrison seem to have been stationed at this time. Somewhat in shape like the Tower of London, one of its turrets was so placed that from it they could see what was happening in the temple courts. Stairs led from it down into the Court of the Gentiles, outside the temple proper, and when the chief captain heard of the uproar and came with centurions and soldiers to rescue Paul from his assailants, it was up this stair that he was taken, and from it, with the chief captain's permission, he addressed the people.

Thus did God make use of these Romans to preserve His servant from imminent death; for His purposes were to be carried out, and nothing could hinder it. As Paul was carried up the stairs, the multitude followed after, crying, "Away

with him," as in the same city, a multitude had cried some thirty years before of One greater than Paul—the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. But Paul, even as his Master, greatly desired the blessing of his Jewish brethren; he could not believe they would be unmoved when they heard what he had to say, and so, as he was being led away, he asked leave to speak to the chief captain, and begged of him, "I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people." Leave being given, he stood there on the stairs looking down upon the people, and when there was made a great silence, he spoke to them in their own Hebrew tongue; for it was his great desire that by all means he might gain some (1 *Cor. ix.* 20, 22). He yearned after his Jewish brethren; his heart's desire and prayer to God for them was, that they might be saved (*Rom. x.* 1). In every city where he had gone in his travels, he had preached first in the synagogue, where there was one; and now in Jerusalem he wished to tell them the same blessed news, that some at least might be won for the Lord Jesus.

When they heard that he spoke in the Hebrew tongue, they kept the more silence, and he went on to tell them his own story, of his early life and training in that city, of his persecuting zeal against the "way" that now he proclaimed, and of his wonderful conversion. In the next chapter we shall see what he said.

ACTS XXII: PAUL'S MESSAGE REJECTED AT JERUSALEM.

The story of the apostle Paul's conversion is told three times over in the book of Acts, in chapters ix, xxii, and xxvi. Though the same facts are related, these accounts are not exactly the same; because of the differing circumstances there is a difference in the particular facts presented and in the manner of presenting them. Here it is a part of his defence before those of his own nation, his own account as given to hostile Jews; he speaks in their own Hebrew tongue, and in a manner to arrest their attention and disarm their prejudices. He speaks first of his own upbringing and instruction in that very city, and of his persecuting days, well known to some of his hearers; and this he thought would dispose them to listen, since once he had been as bitter as they against the Lord

Jesus, and the way which now he taught (*verse* 4). He spoke from personal experience similar to their own.

This account of his conversion tells some things not noted in chapter *ix*. It was noonday when that transcendent light from heaven shone upon him ; no shadowy vision of the night ; the men with him heard not the words spoken to him ; he could not see " for the glory of that light " ; when at Damascus Ananias came to him, he was " a devout man according to the law " ; he spoke to him of " the God of our fathers " (a name well known to Paul's hearers), and told him it was He Who had chosen him to know His will, and to see the Just One, and to hear His voice, and to be His witness to all men of what he had seen and heard. For Saul's testimony began with the sight of the Lord in glory Who thus made Himself known to the persecutor on the Damascus road, and it was of Him that he now spoke to the Jews. It would seem he could not believe that they would not receive his testimony.

And when he had told them of this commission given him from the God of their fathers, he told them also of another vision, in the Temple on his return to Jerusalem, of which we read nowhere else. Then the Lord spoke to him and told him to go quickly out of Jerusalem ; for they would not receive his testimony ; and when Paul pleaded that the very fact of his persecuting zeal in the past made him a fit messenger to the Jews now opposed, he was told by the Lord what was to be his special mission : " Depart ; for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." Up to that point they listened ; but then was seen how little they were touched by Paul's care to avoid giving offence, and how true was the Lord's word " they will not receive thy testimony." As soon as they heard of blessing to Gentiles also, they shouted in haughty pride, " Away with such a fellow from the earth : for it is not fit that he should live." The Lord knew their hearts better than Paul ; his commission was " unto the Gentiles," and his work among those to whom he was sent. He was the apostle of the Gentiles, and to them he was to go. The Jews in Jerusalem rejected the message of Paul as they had rejected his Master.

A hard and bitter trial it must have been to him, loving his people as he did ; but well as he knew their feelings, it

would seem he was not prepared for their utter rejection of grace. Refusing the message themselves, they yet were enraged that God's grace should go out to Gentiles. "They cried out and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air," and there was such a tumult that the chief captain commanded him to be brought at once into the castle. Not understanding the language in which Paul had spoken, he did not know why they cried so against him, and to find out he "bade that he should be examined by scourging," i.e. by torture. But he put himself in the wrong by so doing, for Paul was a Roman citizen; and when this was made known, as before at Philippi, the chief captain "was afraid," and the bonds were unloosed. Thus did the Lord deliver His servant from torture at this time, though still a prisoner. The hand of the Lord was upon him for good, even then. And though He had not sent him to Jerusalem, in the very trials that came upon him he was to learn more of the Lord's ways and the Lord's mind, and to become better fitted for the work which still lay before him.

ACTS XXIII: "SO MUST THOU BEAR WITNESS ALSO AT ROME."

We have three striking pictures in this chapter: first, Paul alone before the great Jewish council, where they would not listen to his defence; then Paul alone in the night with the Lord, who speaks to him words of encouragement and cheer; and then, on the next night, Paul being taken by a strong body of Roman soldiers away from the danger that threatened him in Jerusalem; and we see the Lord's care over His servant.

We read at the end of chapter *xxii.* that the chief captain did not know certainly why the Jews were so enraged against Paul. That he might find out, he commanded their council to be called together, and the next day he brought Paul down and set him before them. It seems likely from *xxvi.* 10 that Paul had himself once been a member of this council (called the *Sanhedrin*), and he addresses them as equals: "Brethren," he says, not "Brethren and fathers" as in *xxii.* 1. But though many doubtless had known him well in early days, they were all against him now, and would not hear him speak. Unjustly struck, he rebuked the one who commanded it, not recognizing

the High Priest, and though his rebuke was just, we feel that Paul did not here show that calmness and meekness which his Master had shown before an unjust judge. Then he appealed to the Pharisees against the Sadducees, as being called in question upon the resurrection, which the Pharisees confessed and the Sadducees denied; but this led only to such dissension that the chief captain feared Paul would be pulled in pieces and sent the soldiers to take him away back to the Castle.

But that night in his prison the Lord came to him. Paul was alone, cast down and discouraged perhaps, for he must have felt that his visit to Jerusalem had accomplished nothing. He had come there without the Lord's direction, in spite of repeated warnings and being plainly told that he should not go (*xxi.* 4); on earlier occasions he had heeded the Spirit's warnings (*xvi.* 6, 7). And he had found nothing but trouble. He had been set upon in the temple by his own people, and only delivered from death at their hands by the Roman captain. Permitted to speak to them, his defence, and his testimony were rejected (*xxii.* 22) and his death desired. Brought before the council, again his life was endangered, till rescued by the soldiers. Three times in two days they had sought to kill him; his testimony was in vain; no friend was with him, and he was a prisoner.

Then in the darkness the Lord appeared to him. Paul had had visions before; he had seen the Lord on the Damascus road (*ix.*), and in the temple at Jerusalem (*xxii.* 17-21); at Corinth the Lord had spoken to him in a vision (*xviii.* 9), and as we read in 2 Cor. *xii.* he had a very wonderful vision fourteen years before, when afterwards the Lord said to him "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." But never had his need been greater than now. And in his sore and bitter trial that night the Lord stood by him to encourage and comfort him: "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." The Lord recognized his faithful testimony, though it had been rejected, and the Lord was sending him to Rome, where he had so desired to go. The Lord had taken up his case, no one could harm or hinder him; and the Lord was going to use him further. He

must go to Rome as a prisoner, but he was going with a fuller sense of his true calling because of what he had learned at Jerusalem. Was he not the apostle of the Gentiles? That was his proper sphere.

And so after this we find him calm and untroubled. The Jews plotted against him. More than forty of them bound themselves by an oath to kill him, but God could defeat their plans, though there was no miraculous deliverance. In God's providence the plot became known to Paul's nephew, who was able to come and tell his uncle, and Paul knew what means to use. He desired a centurion to take the young man to the chief captain, and all was ordered for his deliverance without effort of his own, for God is over all.

The chief captain heard the young man in private, his heart no doubt disposed to it by the Lord, and directed him to tell no one what he had informed him; and the same night he sent Paul under a strong escort of soldiers to Cæsarea, with a letter to the governor. For he was responsible for the safe keeping of his prisoner and took care to guard him well. That night they came as far as Antipatris, and the next day Paul arrived at Cæsarea, where he was to remain over two years. This was the first stage on his journey to Rome, there to appear before Cæsar; and thence he was to write to the Philippians that the things which had happened to him had fallen out "unto the furtherance of the gospel." And in that waiting time at Cæsarea he had the Lord's words to cheer his heart: "As thou hast testified of Me at Jerusalem, so must thou also bear witness at Rome."

ACTS XXIV: PAUL BEFORE FELIX; TWO YEARS AT CÆSAREA.

So Paul came safely to Cæsarea, brought by the horsemen into whose charge he had been given by Lysias the chief captain, and was delivered by them to Felix the governor (*xxiii.* 31-35). This was the first stage on the journey to Rome which he had looked forward to taking in such different circumstances. Paul had been at Cæsarea several times before, on his way from or to Jerusalem (*ix.* 30, *xviii.* 22, *xxi.* 8-16); the last occasion was little more than a week earlier, when he had stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, and Agabus

the prophet had given warning of what lay before him in Jerusalem. How little he thought then he would soon return there as a prisoner!

Five days passed, a little time of quiet after the confusion and turmoil at Jerusalem, and then the high priest and some of the elders, with a paid orator called Tertullus, came down to Cæsarea to make accusation against him before Felix. Tertullus was the spokesman, and with insulting words accused him of three things: stirring up sedition, being "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes," and profaning the temple. The Jews also agreed to these false charges, saying that these things were so.

Paul was calm and untroubled. He could boldly say, "The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do"; he knew the Lord was with him. He waited quietly till the governor gave him the sign to speak, and then answered cheerfully with truth and dignity, not using servile flattery like Tertullus. Felix had been a judge among the Jews for some years; he knew their customs; he could easily find out the truth of what Paul said, for only twelve days had gone by since he went up to Jerusalem, not for the reasons alleged against him, but "to worship." Paul declared, "neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me," but confessed that "after the Way which they call a sect" (R.V.) so he worshipped the God of his fathers. He believed the scriptures, both law and prophets, and looked for resurrection, both of just and unjust, which the Pharisees among his accusers admitted; and for this reason he was accustomed to act as stated in verse 16. He told briefly how after an absence of several years he had gone to Jerusalem taking alms and offerings, and how some Jews from Asia who saw him in the temple had made charges against him, "who ought to have been here before thee," he said to Felix, to prove their charges. In their absence he challenged those who were present to say what evil doing they had found in him. His conscience was clear.

Felix had sufficient knowledge of "the Way" to understand what had passed, and that Paul spoke the truth. He could have decided at once to liberate Paul, but like another unjust

judge (*Mark xv.* 15), he wished to please the people; and he put off his decision till Lysias should come. But what he really thought was shown by his indulgent treatment of the prisoner (*verse* 23), and here we see also God's care over His servant in thus inclining the heart of the governor. Paul's friends might come to him; and no doubt Philip and the other disciples in Cæsarea (*xxi.* 8, 16) would make good use of this permission to visit him and do all they could for him. But there in Cæsarea he had to stay for two whole years (*verse* 27).

During that time he had opportunities to testify of the Lord. On one occasion Felix sent for Paul, and with his wife Drusilla, "heard him concerning the faith in Christ." Felix was a bad man, nor was Drusilla a good woman, and as God's faithful servant spoke before them of "righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come" (R.V. margin), Felix trembled; his conscience made him afraid. But he put off his repentance till "a convenient season"; he was avaricious and hoped for a bribe from Paul; and though he sent for him again, and heard him often, the heart of Felix was unchanged; when he was succeeded by Festus, he went away leaving Paul still a prisoner.

That is all we know about those two years in Cæsarea. Paul makes no mention of them in his later writings; nothing more is recorded here. Men might think them wasted years, compared with his time of active work; but Paul knew, and we know, that "all things work together for good to them that love God"—not to Paul alone, but to others who have profited by his later work. In that time of quiet seclusion and enforced leisure there was great opportunity for prayer and meditation, and to learn fresh lessons from the Lord; and perhaps even then the Lord was revealing to His servant those hidden things of which he was afterwards to write for the enlightenment and encouragement of the whole church of God.

ACTS XXV: BEFORE FESTUS; PAUL APPEALS TO CÆSAR.

After Paul had been two years at Cæsarea, Felix was removed from being governor and Festus came in his place; but Paul remained still a prisoner. Felix was summoned to Rome, and wishing to gain favour among the Jews because of certain accusations against himself, he left Paul bound.

The high priest and the chief Jews at Jerusalem had not forgotten their enmity against Paul, and still sought his life. They thought the coming of a new governor was a good opportunity for their purpose, and when Festus went up to Jerusalem, a few days after he arrived in the province, they tried to persuade him to send Paul again to Jerusalem, planning that he should be killed on the way. Whether Festus knew of their plot we are not told; but God knew, and His care was over His servant. Festus refused. Though Jerusalem was the chief city of Palestine, Cæsarea was the seat of Roman rule, and Paul being already in custody there, he would not have him brought back. If they had an accusation against Paul, they must go to Cæsarea. Thus their plot failed.

Festus went back, and they too came down to Cæsarea; their action led in God's providence to a quite unexpected result. They made many complaints against Paul, which they could not prove, their accusations being similar to those made before, as we see from his answer, i.e., that he had despised the law, profaned the temple, and spoken against Cæsar. He answered emphatically that in none of these ways had he offended at all. Paul was alone before his accusers; but One stood by him to strengthen him, as on another occasion (2 *Tim. iv.* 17). And the Lord's words to His disciples were proved true, that when brought before kings and rulers for His sake it should turn for a testimony (*Luke xxi.* 12, 13); He told them not to meditate before what to answer; and so He helped His servant now. Festus, like others who love the praise of men more than the praise of God, allowed his wish to please them to turn him out of the way of justice; he proposed that Paul should do what he had before refused the Jews: go up to Jerusalem there to be judged. Paul maintained that he had done no wrong, as Festus knew; and appealed, as a Roman citizen, to his right to be judged by Cæsar. By Roman law any Roman citizen (unless a criminal taken in the act) might appeal to Cæsar when undergoing trial; Paul made use of this undoubted right. We can hardly fail to see here the guidance of God; Paul had already been told by the Lord that he must bear witness at Rome; and this was an appeal Festus could not refuse. He consulted with his council,

and then declared that as Paul had appealed to Cæsar, to Cæsar he should go. This meant that he must be sent to Rome; not going there in the way he had purposed, but as a prisoner. Yet there he was to bear witness before the emperor himself.

By this means also a striking opportunity came while still at Cæsarea for the fulfilment of the Lord's word at his conversion (*Acts ix.* 15). King Agrippa came to visit Festus, with his sister Bernice. This was Herod Agrippa II, son of that Herod who killed James the brother of John with the sword (*xii.* 1), and great-grandson of Herod the Great, in whose days the Lord Jesus was born (*Matt. ii.* 1). The Herods were Jewish kings under the Romans, but not of true Israelitish descent; Herod the Great was the son of an Idumean. But Agrippa was well acquainted with all that concerned Jewish law. Festus therefore related to him Paul's case and his difficulty. Probably it was not the first time Agrippa had heard of Paul, for he said, "I also was wishing to hear the man myself." (R.V. *margin.*)

Thus came Paul's opportunity to bear witness for his Master. It was not a private audience, as with Felix and Drusilla, but public, when with great pomp and splendour Agrippa and Bernice, with Festus, the chief captains, and principal men of the city assembled next day in the audience chamber, and Paul was brought before them. Then Festus stated his difficulty; that the Jews accused Paul of being guilty of death, that he found in him nothing worthy of death, that Paul had appealed to Cæsar and was to be sent to Rome, but that he was in doubt what to report to the Emperor. So he desired this examination before the king, whom he knew to be well versed in all Jewish questions. Agrippa gave permission to Paul to speak for himself; and with all boldness and simplicity he spoke before that glittering assembly in words that we cannot doubt were guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit. We shall find them in chapter *xxvi.*

Acts xxvi: Paul's Testimony Before Agrippa.

And so in Acts *xxvi.* we find Paul's words before the brilliant company of which we read, *xxv.* 23. This testimony before King Agrippa is his last spoken address recorded in scripture.

Permitted by Agrippa to speak for himself, Paul's object was not so much his own defence as to tell of his Master, to make known his message before those great ones of the earth ; and thus for the third time in Acts we get the story of his conversion, told now with the purpose of bringing home the truth to this assembly of Gentiles, not as in chapter *xxii.* to Jews. This difference of design accounts for several peculiarities in the manner of its presentation. We must read all three accounts to get the full story.

He speaks first of his satisfaction in having to answer before one so expert as Agrippa in all customs and questions among Jews, and begs a patient hearing. Then passing over the false accusations, he speaks of his early manner of life, known to all Jews who knew him from the beginning, and declares that it was in fact for " the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers " that he was now accused of the Jews. Yet it was that to which the twelve tribes looked forward. He preached resurrection. Why should Jews, of all men, think it incredible that God should raise the dead ? Their own scriptures witnessed that He had done so in the past, and would do so again.

Then he speaks of his persecuting days, when he, too, was in opposition to Jesus of Nazareth ; as he does also in several of his Epistles. He thought it his duty (*verse* 9), and we know that he obtained mercy because he " did it ignorantly in unbelief " (1 *Tim. i.* 13) ; but he shows that conscience alone is not a safe and sufficient guide. Then he comes to the wonderful story of his conversion, showing how the Lord Himself arrested him on that journey to Damascus, and giving the very words in which He spoke to him from heaven (*verses* 15-18) ; and how he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. It is notable that he speaks at length of his persecuting days, more fully yet of his conversion ; but his work, his whole service since his conversion, is given in very few words—one verse—as showing the causes of the Jews' enmity (20, 21). His mighty labours among the Gentiles, of which we have read something in chapters *xiii. to xix.* are included in *four words*— " then to the Gentiles." Paul's object was not to magnify himself, but to speak of his Master and witness for Him, " forgetting those things which are behind," that he had done.

In verses 22, 23 we have the heart of his subject, the climax of his address. Having obtained help of God, he had continued to that day, steadfastly witnessing to small and great, as the Lord had told him (*verse* 16). And what was his message? None other than " those things which the prophets and Moses did say should come "—those things which he had shown from the scriptures at Thessalonica (*xvii.* 2, 3)—those things which the Lord had shown from the same scriptures to His disciples (*Luke xxiv.* 46, 47)—those scriptures which Agrippa himself knew and believed (*verse* 27). What were those things?

That Christ should suffer:
That He should rise from the dead the third day:
That He should show light unto the people (i.e. Israel) and to the Gentiles.

Those great facts of the gospel of which he had written to the Corinthians (1 *Cor. xv.* 3, 4) he now set forth plainly before Agrippa and this Gentile company. What was the result? We do not know; " the day shall declare it."

Festus broke in with a loud voice upon Paul's words, declaring he was mad; Paul answered courteously that he was not mad, appealing to the king's knowledge of that which had happened, and to his belief in the prophets. Agrippa was embarrassed by this direct appeal, and tried to turn it off—" in a little thou persuadest me to become a Christian " (N.Tr.) he said; and we have Paul's noble answer in verse 29, his desire, that not only Agrippa but all who heard him were, both in little and in much, altogether such as he, except his bonds.

The court rose, and we hear after this nothing more of Felix and Agrippa; but they agreed that the prisoner had done nothing worthy of death or bonds, that he might have been set at liberty had he not appealed to Cæsar. They little knew it was God's purpose that thus he should go to Rome. Their names disappear from the sacred page. But Paul's words and Paul's testimony have stood through all the centuries; the gospel which he preached is still the power of God unto salvation, that gospel " which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, by which also ye are saved," if you are a believer to-day. And " ye are witnesses of these things."

ACTS XXVII: PAUL'S JOURNEY TO ROME; THE SHIPWRECK.

Paul was now to set out, though as a prisoner, on that journey to Rome to which he had so long looked forward (*xix.* 21; *Rom. i.* 13, *xv.* 23). He was once more on the way to his own special work among the Gentiles. He knew from the Lord's own words (*xxiii.* 11) that at Rome also he was to bear witness to his Master, and he was not cast down. He sailed from Cæsarea, with other state prisoners, in charge of a centurion named Julius. His friend Luke, who wrote the story (*verse* 1), was with him, and also Aristarchus of Thessalonica, who had before (*xix.* 29, *xx.* 4) been Paul's fellow traveller, and was afterwards his fellow prisoner (*Coloss. iv.* 10).

Touching next day at Sidon, Paul had leave to visit the believers there (*verse* 3); they had passed by Tyre, where he had been with the brethren when going up to Jerusalem (*xxi.* 4, 5). Leaving Sidon, they sailed north of Cyprus, along the south coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia till they came to Myra. The "ship of Adramyttium" in which they had started was a coasting vessel, calling at ports on the south shore of the Roman province of Asia (*verse* 2). But at Myra the prisoners were transferred by the centurion to "a ship of Alexandria" (that famous seaport and seat of learning in Northern Egypt, from which Apollos came), sailing for Italy. And thus began that adventurous voyage which is here so graphically described.

Difficulties arose; the wind was against them, and they made slow progress, so that coasting along the south of Crete, by the time they reached Fair Havens the season was so advanced as to be dangerous for sailing in that sea (*verse* 9). The apostle was an experienced traveller; he had already been shipwrecked three times (2 *Cor. xi.* 25); and his wise counsel was to winter in that haven, as he gave warning of the dangers before them. But the centurion listened rather to the master and owner of the ship, and they decided to try and reach the better harbour of Phenice, or Phœnix (R.V.), also in Crete, sailing close in shore.

But soon there beat down from Crete a tempestuous wind which the ship could not face, and they were driven out of their course. Under shelter of the little island Clauda they secured

the boat, and took what measures they could for the safety of the ship, *undergirding* it, that is, passing a cable round and round the hull to keep the planks from starting, a common precaution in those days. All the details show, as sailors of all ages have attested, the absolute accuracy of the inspired word in this vivid description of the storm and the wreck.

Day by day the tempest continued; till having done all they could, and when for many days they had seen neither sun nor stars by which to steer, they at last lost all hope. Then the apostle stood forth before them all in that hour of danger and declared to them that every one should be saved. He reminded them of his former warning, which if they had heeded they would have been spared much loss; probably this was to give them more confidence. And he told them of the Lord's message to him that night assuring him of safety for all. "Wherefore," he said, "be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even so as it hath been spoken unto me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island." Thus we see the boldness of the Lord's servant in the midst of all the fears and perils of a terrible storm at sea. His faith in God made him fearless and confident, a tower of strength to all on board. As he said later to the Philippians, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"; but God still had work for him to do (*verse* 24). And without fear himself, he could cheer and encourage the others.

All came to pass as he had said. After being fourteen days driven by the storm, the sailors "deemed they drew near" land; probably they heard the great breakers on the north shore of Malta. Soundings showed that their surmise was correct; they anchored by the stern, and wished for day. Again Paul's counsel and forethought were of service, when the sailors sought to flee; and as day was breaking he cheered and encouraged them all by his words and example to take food, and be prepared, assuring them again that they should be kept safe. And so it proved. They cast off the anchors and left them in the sea (R.V.), and with good seamanship the sailors ran the ship aground. The centurion prevented the cruel purpose of the soldiers to kill the prisoners, and commanded that they who could swim ashore should do so, and the rest

clung to boards and wreckage from the ship. "And so it came to pass that they all escaped safe to land." Thus did God preserve from death His servant and all with him; and Paul the prisoner was of more account on that voyage than those who were in authority. Truly he could say, as in Phil. *iv.* "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content"; and "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

ACTS XXVIII: AT MALTA; ARRIVAL AT ROME.

Now we see the apostle Paul drawing near the end of that journey to Rome to which he had so long looked forward. When at Ephesus (*xix.* 21) he had purposed, after passing through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem and then to Rome. During that visit to Greece after leaving Ephesus (*xx.* 1-3) he had written to the Roman believers, probably from Corinth, that letter still preserved to us in which he speaks of his desire to visit them (*Rom. i.* 10-15). He wished to impart to them some spiritual gift, that they might be established, and that he and they might be comforted by their mutual faith. He had often purposed it, but had been hindered hitherto. He was then about to go to Jerusalem (*Rom. xv.* 25-28) and after that hoped to come to them at Rome, having had a great desire for many years to do so (*verses* 23, 24). He did go from Jerusalem to Rome, as we know, but as a prisoner, and after being detained thus at Cæsarea for two years on the way. Acts *xxviii.* tells of his arrival there.

All through the last eight chapters of Acts, which tell of Paul as a prisoner, we see God's providential care over His servant (*see xxi.* 31, 32; *xxiii.* 10, 15-27; *xxv.* 3, 4; *xxvii.*) and not least at the close. From the shipwreck "they escaped all safe to land," being cast upon the island of Melita, now called Malta. The next words, "When *we* were escaped, then we knew that the island was called Melita" (R.V.) remind us that Luke and Aristarchus were still Paul's companions. The men of Malta are here spoken of as *barbarians*, i.e., neither Greek nor Roman, but speaking a foreign tongue, the word signifying *foreigner* or *alien* (*see Rom.* i. 14; 1 *Cor. xiv.* 11).

The barbarous people, Luke says, "showed us no little

kindness," their hearts being so disposed by Him Who is over all; "they kindled a fire and received us every one." The apostle helped the rest in gathering sticks for the fire, when a viper came out and fastened on his hand. This so impressed the people that they concluded he was a murderer, whom Nemesis, their goddess of vengeance, would not allow to escape; but when watching him they saw no harm follow, they changed their minds, and like the people of Lystra, said that he was a god. Another circumstance also made them think highly of Paul; the father of their governor Publius, who had courteously received the prisoners, was very ill. Paul prayed and laid his hands on him, and he was healed. Many others, too, with different diseases, came and were healed. Thus three months passed away in Malta, with much blessing to the people of the island; and though we do not hear of public preaching, we cannot doubt that Paul and his friends would not fail to make known the gospel to those heathen. When they left, the people honoured them with many honours, and loaded them with such things as were necessary, they having lost all in the wreck.

The winter being past, they left Malta for Rome in another ship of Alexandria which had safely wintered in the isle, and came first to Syracuse, in Sicily, about eighty miles away, where they landed and stayed three days. Then by tacking, the wind being adverse, they came to Rhegium, on the SW. extremity of the mainland of Italy. After one day there the south wind blew, just the wind they needed, and they came the next day to Puteoli, on the Bay of Naples, a distance of 180 miles. Thus the hand of God made this voyage as prosperous and speedy as the earlier one had been disastrous. At Puteoli they found Christian brethren who desired them to stay seven days, which Paul and his friends therefore did, the centurion courteously permitting it. What a cheer that visit must have been! Then they went on towards Rome, a further distance of 140 miles. And as they went towards that imperial city, the metropolis of the world in his day, Paul's heart was further cheered at being met by two companies of brethren from Rome, those whom he had so long desired to see. The first met him at Appii Forum, about forty miles from Rome, the

next at Tres Tabernae (N.Tr.) or Three Taverns, nearly ten miles nearer the city. They had come as far as they could, for from Appii Forum there were two ways to Rome, and they could not tell which way the centurion might choose.

When Paul saw them "he thanked God and took courage." He had known the Lord's good hand upon him during the voyage and shipwreck, and His power shown at Malta, but now doubtless his heart would sink at approaching as a prisoner to Rome. In weakness the Lord shows how sufficient is His grace, and here He sends these brethren to cheer His beloved servant by their presence and affection. And so, cheered and encouraged by those whom he was so greatly to help, the apostle goes forward to that imprisonment which lay before him, when though suffered to dwell by himself, but shackled continually by a chain to "a soldier that kept him," his bonds in Christ should be "manifest in all the palace, and in all other places" (*Phil. i.* 13); those bonds from which he could write to the Philippians, "To me to live is Christ." "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

ACTS XXVIII (*cont.*): THE APOSTLE PAUL IN ROME.

We have now come to the last picture in the book of Acts, which shows us the apostle Paul in Rome. "When we came to Rome," says Luke, the writer, "the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him." As on the journey by the centurion, so now by the authorities in Rome Paul was specially favoured, for the hand of God was over His servant for good. He had friends in Rome, as we may see by the many greetings in the last chapter of that Epistle to the Romans he had written a few years before. Among these friends were Aquila and Priscilla (*Rom. xvi.* 3); if still in Rome, they may have been among those who met him on the way; some think that the dwelling "by himself" (*verse* 16), before he had "his own hired house" (*verse* 30) may have been at first in their home, as before he had dwelt with them at Corinth (*Acts xviii.* 3).

However that may be, it was "with a soldier that kept him," chained by the arm night and day to this man; he was "the prisoner of the Lord," as he wrote from thence to those at Ephesus. Yet not so as to hinder the going forth of the truth even in Rome itself. For there, in the great metropolis of the world at that day, the Lord had work for him as a prisoner. Now was fulfilled his expressed desire to preach the gospel to those at Rome also (*Rom. i.* 15), and his first message was to his own people, the Jews, though he was the apostle of the Gentiles. There were Christians in Rome, of both Jewish and Gentile origin; and there were many Jews there too, to whom Paul was to make a last appeal before we see them finally set aside by their own rejection of the gospel. As before in other places the Jews had rejected the testimony (*Acts xiii.* 45-47; *xiv.* 2, 19; *xvii.* 5; *xviii.* 5, 6; *xix.* 9, etc.), so it was now at the end of the history in Rome also.

After three days he called the chief of them together and explained his position, and how without cause the Jews at Jerusalem had delivered him to the Romans, so that he was constrained to appeal to Cæsar; not that he desired to accuse his nation. But he wished them to know that it was for the Hope of Israel, for Christ, the Messiah, he was now a prisoner, bound with a chain. They replied that they had heard nothing against him, but desired to hear what he thought, for that "this sect . . . everywhere it is spoken against." So a day being appointed, many came to him into his lodging, and all the day long, from morning till evening, he expounded to them out of the law and the prophets, as the Lord Himself had done (*Luke xxiv.* 27), the things concerning Jesus, and the kingdom of God. Thus the Lord gave him an opportunity to testify of Himself to the people whom he loved so well (*Rom. x.* 1).

But though some believed the things he spoke, others disbelieved, and they went away disagreeing among themselves, after Paul had pronounced on them that solemn sentence from the prophet Isaiah, which the Lord Jesus had before declared should come upon them because of their rejection of Him. We find it quoted also in Matt. *xiii.* 14, 15; John *xii.* 40. "Well spake the Holy Ghost," said Paul; they were responsible to believe the Holy Spirit's testimony by Paul, they

rejected the message, and so they were themselves rejected. But they were to know that now " the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and they will hear it."

Thus ends the apostolic history, and the historical part of the New Testament, telling in the Book of Acts of the birth and growth of the church of God ; with the apostle dwelling " two whole years in his own hired house " at Rome, still a prisoner, chained to a soldier, but otherwise treated indulgently. He was allowed to receive all that came to him, and boldly to preach and to teach those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, " no man forbidding him." Nor was this all his work while in Rome, for then also he wrote those wonderful later Epistles; and in them we must read to know more of the apostle and his companions at this time. The inspired story ends here. All we know of him after this is from his own letters, also inspired of God, to which the Book of Acts leads us on.

THE EPISTLES OF PAUL. (An extract). " It is probable that among the epistles of Paul that to the Thessalonians was the first written. The date of the Epistle to the Galatians is less certain, but it was written after several years of labour ; the two to the Corinthians, and that to the Romans at Ephesus, in Macedonia, and at Corinth respectively, during his journey round the Archipelago after his long sojourn at Ephesus (*see Acts xix.* ; *xx.* 1-3) ; those to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians during his captivity. I reserve the others, Hebrews included, for the study of those Epistles."

PAUL'S COMPANIONS WHEN IN ROME.

Who were Paul's companions when he was a prisoner in Rome ? The Book of Acts tells us only that he dwelt by himself with a soldier that kept him, bound with a chain ; and that he dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, receiving all that came to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him (*Acts xxviii.* 30-31). But the Lord did not leave His dear servant quite alone during this time of captivity as we may learn from the letters he wrote while he was a prisoner ; for in them he mentions several friends who were with him.

One of these friends was LUKE, the " beloved physician " (*Coloss. iv.* 14), his " fellowlabourer " (*Philemon* 24). Luke was the writer of the Book of Acts, as we see by comparing Acts i. 1 with Luke i. 1-4 ; he was also the companion of Paul on many of his travels, as is shewn by the little words " we " and " us " in the story. Luke was with him when he went the first time to Philippi ; when he sailed away from Philippi on a later journey (*Acts xx.* 6), and all through the last journey to Jerusalem ; and Luke came with him to Rome as well as Aristarchus (*Acts xxvii.* 2). They were still there when he wrote to the Colossians, and to Philemon.

ARISTARCHUS was a Thessalonian, who had also been his companion in travel (*Acts xix.* 29 ; *xx.* 4). Paul calls him his " fellow labourer " (*Philemon* 24) and his " fellow prisoner" (*Coloss. iv.* 10). EPAPHRAS, too, was a " fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus " (*Philem.* 23) ; he was a Colossian, a servant of Christ, from whom the Christians at Colosse had first heard the gospel (*Coloss. iv.* 12 ; *i.* 5–7). From him Paul had heard of those Colossian Christians he had never seen, and so he wrote to them (*Coloss. i.* 8, 9 ; *ii.* 1), and prayed for them, and in his letter he told them that Epaphras was always praying for them, that they might " stand perfect and complete in all the will of God " (*Coloss. iv.* 12).

TYCHICUS was with Paul when he wrote to the Colossians and to the Ephesians, and was sent by him with those letters that he might tell them of Paul's affairs, and might comfort their hearts. Twice over Paul speaks of him as " a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord " (*Ephes. vi.* 21 ; *Coloss. iv.* 7, 8). He was " of Asia," like Trophimus (*Acts xx.* 4), probably an Ephesian.

EPAPHRODITUS was a messenger sent by the Philippians to carry their gifts to Paul (*Phil. ii.* 25 ; *iv.* 18) when a prisoner in Rome, and is called by him, " my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier . . . and he that ministered to my wants." He had been very ill while at Rome, but was restored to health, and sent back to the Philippians by Paul (*ii.* 25-30).

TIMOTHY, too, was with Paul at Rome when he wrote to the Philippians, the Colossians, and to Philemon ; he must have joined him while Luke and Aristarchus were still there.

He had been his companion and messenger since the time when Paul brought him from Lystra on his second missionary journey (*Acts xvi.* 1-3 ; 1 *Thess. iii.* 2), and was called by the apostle his "own son in the faith"; his "beloved son" (1 *Tim. i.* 2; 1 *Cor. iv.* 17).

Besides these six dear friends there was " MARCUS, sister's son to Barnabas " (*Coloss. iv.* 10 ; *Philem.* 24), that same John Mark mentioned several times in Acts, who had turned back from the work on which he set out with Paul and Barnabas (*Acts xv.* 38), but who afterwards became " profitable . . . for the ministry." There was ONESIMUS, a runaway slave, converted in Rome and sent back to his master (*Philem.* 10-19), but called by Paul " my son Onesimus," and " a faithful and beloved brother." He was a Colossian (*Coloss. iv.* 9). There was DEMAS (*Philem.* 24), then a " fellow labourer," but whose sad story is that he afterwards forsook the apostle (2 *Tim. iv.* 10); and there was JUSTUS (*Coloss. iv.* 11), who, like Marcus, was a Jewish Christian. Beside all these there were friends in Rome who might visit him, many of them already known and loved (*see Rom. xvi.*).

So we see how God, Who " comforteth those who are cast down," comforted and cheered His servant in that imprisonment by the presence and ministry of Christian friends. What a cheer that was to the apostle we may see by his words to Timothy written during a later imprisonment, when he wrote of one who " oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain " (2 *Tim. i.* 16). We know, too, that when all were absent from him, there was one Friend ever with him, as in that later time when he wrote " all men forsook me . . . notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me " (2 *Tim. iv.* 16, 17). As when in Corinth the Lord had said to him, " I am with thee," so it was still ; for He is " the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever " and "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." He never fails any that trust in Him, and always He has a special care over any of His people who are lonely or sorrowful. Thus it was that Paul could write, even though a prisoner, such words of cheer as we find in the Epistles written from Rome.

THE LETTERS WRITTEN FROM ROME.

The letters the apostle Paul wrote when a prisoner in Rome were the Epistles to the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, and to Philemon ; in all of these he speaks of his bonds, or of himself as the prisoner of the Lord. He had before this written to the Thessalonians, the Corinthians, the Galatians, the Romans, six letters in all ; and later he was to write also to Timothy and Titus ; and also to the Hebrews ; one or more of these may have been written at Rome. We do well to remember that all these and the other New Testament Epistles are inspired of God, written " not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth " (1 *Cor. ii.* 13).

How much do you know of the contents of these four Epistles written from Rome, or of the people to whom they were written? The letter to the Christians at EPHESUS was written to people who knew the apostle well. He had dwelt in their city for more than two years (*Acts xix.* 10 ; *xx.* 31) and so spake and taught there that " all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus " ; for Ephesus was the chief city of that province. The letter he wrote to them is perhaps the most wonderful of all his Epistles. The truths there told out which God had not made known in other ages to the sons of men, as now revealed through His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, are for all the children of God. The apostle prayed for those to whom he wrote, that God would give them wisdom and open the eyes of their understanding to know what He had done for them (*Eph. i.* 16-23) ; and that He would strengthen them with might by His Spirit in the inner man to comprehend the love of Christ, and what He would do in them (*chap. iii.* 16-21). We need the very same.

The PHILIPPIAN Christians had known the apostle Paul longer than any in Europe, for Philippi was the first European city where he preached the gospel ; there Lydia was converted, and the jailer, and their households (*Acts xvi.*). It was also the last European city he visited, when he " sailed away from Philippi " on that journey to Jerusalem which ended in his going to Rome as a prisoner. They loved him well, and had sent once and again to help him in his need, both to Thessalonica

and to Rome (*Phil. iv.*). His letter to them is full of his experience of Christ, i.e., of all that Christ is to the Christian; he could say, " to me to live is Christ " (*i.* 21), he set before them Christ as their Example (*ii.* 5-9), their Object (*iii.* 8-10), their strength and power (*iv.* 13). He prayed for them ; he instructed them how to pray. He desired them to learn by his absence to rely more than ever upon God.

The COLOSSIANS had not seen the apostle, like the others (*Col. ii.* 1). He had heard of them from Epaphras, who had made known to them the gospel, he prayed earnestly for them (*i.* 9), and he wrote to instruct them, for they were in danger of being led away by error. As to the Ephesians, he wrote to them also of the mystery (or secret) which had been " hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest." But to the Ephesians he spoke more of " the church which is His body," and to the Colossians of Him Who is the church's Head (*i.* 18 ; *ii.* 19). In both Epistles he spoke much also of their walk and conduct : they should " walk worthy " of their vocation, " walk in love," " walk circumspectly," " walk worthy of the Lord," " walk in wisdom " ; whole chapters are filled with practical instructions.

The little Epistle to PHILEMON speaks for itself. The writer had confidence in Philemon, he says, " that thou wilt also do more than I say," as he had in the Philippians that they would obey not as in his presence only, but much more in his absence (*Philip. ii.* 12). We are thus reminded of his words to the Corinthians, that "the things which I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord " (1 *Cor. xiv.* 37), and realize that all these practical instructions, as well as the spiritual blessings, are for us also.

These Epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, as well as all the others, were not written for their sakes alone, but for us also, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead. They are profitable for us, like the other scriptures (2 *Timothy iii.* 16), and though there may be in them " some things hard to be understood " (2 *Peter iii.* 16), we should study them for ourselves and seek that the Lord may open our understanding. I wonder how much you know of the Epistle to the Philippians, and if you know by heart, for in-

stance, any part of such chapters as Phil. *ii.* and *iv.*? To store the mind with such words as these from the Book of God will help us to "meditate therein day and night," as Joshua was told to do with the Book he had, and so to "grow thereby."

The Book of Acts has given us the story of the first believers from the time of the Lord's ascension, of the early church from the day of Pentecost, up to the time when Paul reached Rome; it tells us what God wrought by His servants in those early days. It forms a link between the Gospels and the Epistles, to which it leads us on. We need both.